

**2025 04 06 – *I'm Still Here***

**Scripture: Isaiah 43:16-21** (*The Inclusive Bible*)  
**Psalm 126** (*VU p. 850*)

Today is the last Sunday of the Season of Lent and therefore we will be exploring the final movie in this year's Lenten Movie Series. The film is called *I'm Still Here* and it is a political drama set in Rio de Janeiro in 1971. At that time the people of Brazil were living under the power of a military dictatorship that had begun back in the mid-1960's. Today's movie is the true story of the Paiva (Pieva) family.

The father, Rubens Paiva, was a congressman for the Labour Party before the military coup, but is now running his own engineering business. He makes a good living and his family lives in a beach-side home in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. His wife, Eunice Paiva, is a stay-at-home Mom who specializes in baking cheese souffles. With the help of a full-time housekeeper and cook, Eunice cares for their five children who from range in age from about 10 to 18.

Their lives change dramatically in January 1971, when Rubens is removed from their home by a group of armed men. The family has no idea what has happened to him until Eunice and Eliana, one of their teenage daughters, are also taken away. They are both questioned by the military. Eliana is released after one day, but Eunice is interrogated for twelve harrowing days. When Eunice is finally released, she sees her husband's car in the parking lot and realizes he was probably forced to drive to the same military building. They still

don't know what has happened to Rubens, but Eunice finds a lawyer and they use legal means to fight for information about his whereabouts.

Eventually a friend, who is also a journalist, gives her the news that Rubens is dead, killed by the military. Eunice also finds out from Ruben's friends that he had been helping to connect political exiles in Chile with their families still living in Brazil. It seems their letters were the reason for his torture and death. The government has not admitted publicly that he is dead. Instead they are using the media to spread the lie that Rubens escaped and is living in exile. Eunice is unable to tell anyone the truth without putting her friend's lives at risk. So she grieves alone while pretending that her husband is still alive.

Today's scripture readings also come from a time of violence, military rule, and exile. The ancient prophet in the book of Isaiah is speaking to the Israelite people in exile in Babylon. They have been gone from their beloved Jerusalem for over 50 years. A generation has passed and most of the Israelites in Babylon are too young to have ever seen their holy city. But still they yearn for home. The prophet is assuring them that their God, YHWH, is making a road in the desert, just as YHWH once provided a road through the sea for their ancestors. He is assuring the Israelites that despite their current exile, they will soon be home.

We have all experienced different types of exile, different kinds of death and darkness in our lives. Like Eunice, many of us have lost people dear to us: friends, parents, spouses, sisters, brothers and even children. We have experienced loss in other forms including: homes, jobs, relationships, health,

wealth and freedom. Even today, many of us are grieving the loss of a good neighbour to the south, the loss of a sense of safety and security, the loss of easy travel back and forth across a very long border. We are watching as people of colour are being forcibly removed from the United States, some for no reason, apparently with no way to get them back.

What are we to do when death and loss occur in our lives? What are we to do when it seems like everything is lost, when our lives are turned upside-down?

Eunice Paiva did what she had to do. She considered her five children and chose to live for them. All of her husband's bank accounts were inaccessible without his signature and she was unable to tell the bank he was dead. So she sold some land where they had planned to build their dream home, leased their beachfront house, let go of her housekeeper and moved her family to Sao Paulo. There they would have the help of her parents and siblings while Eunice went back to school to become a lawyer.

So what do we do? We take the steps necessary to continue living. The Israelites in Babylon did what they could to keep their culture while attempting to build lives and businesses in a foreign land. They wept for what they had lost while creating new lives for their families. They buried their elders and welcomed their children while living in exile.

Eventually many of them did return to Jerusalem, but even then, there was much to grieve. Psalm 126 begins with praise to God, with laughter and joy because of

their return to Zion, to the city of Jerusalem. But what they found was a city and a temple destroyed in their absence. And so they turned once again to their God praying that their fortunes would be restored, that

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping, carrying seed for sowing,

Shall come home with songs of joy, bringing their sheaves.

Like the Israelites, over 2500 years ago, like Eunice Paiva just 54 years ago, even as we weep, we must carry the seeds for sowing. Even in times of pain and sorrow we continue to sow the seeds of hope. We do this because we believe in the possibility of new life after death. We do this because we know that “In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree.” Every seed that we plant, every prayer that we pray, every song that we sing, every child that we educate, every petition that we sign, every protest that we attend, are all steps towards God’s reign of peace and justice. The harvest of joy is not possible unless the seeds are sown.

Eunice Paiva continued to plant the seeds of hope throughout her life. She led campaigns to open archives on the victims of the military regime, becoming a symbol of the fight against the dictatorship. In her law career, Eunice worked for the rights of indigenous people in Brazil, documenting and bringing actions to end the violence and illegal land expropriation happening in the Amazon. Eunice Paiva chose to live a life of perseverance and hope. She worked for truth and

justice while also supporting her family and allowing them to thrive and to prosper in what would eventually become a free and democratic Brazil.

In the film there are only hints of Eunice's Roman Catholic upbringing: the nuns at her children's school and a couple of shots of the famous Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio De Janeiro. But from other sources, it is clear that Eunice attended mass every Sunday and that her faith was a big part of her life. Like the Israelites she trusted in the loving power of the Holy Mystery and used that power to inspire her own courage, compassion, integrity and hope.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eunice\\_Paiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eunice_Paiva)

May we all turn to the Power of the Holy Spirit and find what we need to sow in tears so that we also may reap with shouts of joy.

May it be so. Amen.