

Sermon Series: God at the Cinema "Parasite" - August 8 2021
Text: Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Matthew 25:31-40 Rev. Steve Clifton
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Our Bibles in the Protestant tradition hold 66 books. There are 31,105 verses in our scriptural canon. Some verses get a lot of attention. An example; there are 5, maybe 6 verses in our Bibles that may speak to issues of sexual orientation. I would add that those 5 verses are misused and do not say what it's often claimed that they say. But those 5 verses, out 31,105 verses get a whole lot of attention. These verses represent .02 % of the scriptural narrative but they get so much focus from some in the Christian tradition.

Other verses of Scripture may get too little attention. Of the 31,103 Bible verses there are 2,350 verses, 15% of the Bible, which are concerned with money and possessions and how we use them. There are more than 2000 verses which speak about social justice for the poor. There are three hundred verses in our Bibles that focus on God's particular concern for the poor and the vulnerable.

Let`s sample a few of these many verses

- We read today: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your sisters and brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land." Deuteronomy 15:11
- In describing the God of Israel, in 1 Samuel it reads: "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor." (1 Samuel 2:8)
- Job lifts up a sign of a righteous person: "Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?" Job 30:25
- The Psalms call for justice for the poor in 23 of the 150 psalms. An example: Psalm 41 - Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him
- The wisdom of Proverbs calls for justice for the poor 17 times in its few pages: "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." Proverbs 14:31
- Care for the poor is a recurring theme in the books of the prophets, as in Isaiah 58: "If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

And Jesus in defining his mission uses these words from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." Isaiah 61:11

Over the summer months we have been reflecting on movies, titles that you have suggested to us. We have looked at an eclectic bunch of films so far: *Nomad land*, *Chariots of fire*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Mary Poppins*. Today we look at the movie *Parasite*.

Parasite is an acclaimed movie. Made in Korea this film won many awards including Oscars for best picture, best director, best foreign film and best screenplay.

The movie's title makes it sound like a horror movie but its writer director Bong Joon-ho describes the film as "*a comedy without clowns, a tragedy without villains*". The movie also delivers a profound social commentary.

The story begins like this: Kim Ki-woo and his family live on the edge of poverty. They fold pizza boxes for a delivery company to make some cash, steal their wi-fi from the coffee shop nearby, and leave the windows open when the neighborhood is being fumigated to deal with their own infestations.

Kim's life changes when a wealthy school friend offers to recommend him as an English tutor for a girl he's been working with... Kim changes his name to Kevin and begins tutoring but Kevin has a much deeper plan. He's going to get his whole family into this wealthy house. He quickly convinces the mother of the house that her son needs an art tutor, which allows Kevin's sister to enter the picture. Before long, mom and dad are in the house too, Dad as driver and Mom as housekeeper and it seems like everything is going perfectly for the Kim family. The rich family seems to be happy too. And then *everything* changes. There are incredible twists in the plot that I dare not reveal in case you have yet to see this film,

The film is rich in imagery. There are contrasting window views between the homes of the rich and poor, there is an upstairs downstairs comparison of wealth. You climb up to wealth and descend down into poverty in *Parasite*. The film doesn't offer solutions to problems but powerfully shows unbridgeable gaps in equity, it contrasts wealth and poverty, and shows the impossibility of the poor getting ahead, in spite of their intelligence, enterprise and determination. How can one escape their poverty in world so stacked against the poor? *Parasite* raises questions. *Parasite* shows us a world of great inequity.

The world of Jesus held great inequity. The Empire needed roads and armies. It was expensive to rule a vast part of the world. So the Empire empowered tax collectors who were to tax everyone and then above that they were to make their profit from whatever they could get above the empires take. Governors and administrators made their wealth from taxation too; government officials took a posting in the provinces in order to make their fortune.

Heavy taxation led to wealth for a very few and to poverty and displacement for perhaps 9 out of 10 people in Jesus world. Jesus so identifies with the poor in his time that he says in Matthew that how we respond to those in need is the measure of how we respond to him.

And inequity is very much part of our world now

- One in 7 people in Canada lives below the poverty line.
- Nearly [15%](#) of people with disabilities live in poverty.
- Nearly 15% of elderly single individuals live in poverty.
- [40%](#) of Indigenous children in Canada live in poverty,
- and 60% of Indigenous children on reserves live in poverty.

The top 20% of households in Canada own about 67% of the nation`s wealth and the bottom 20% of households in Canada own less than 1%.

And globally the numbers are staggering; currently 26 people globally own the same portion of the world`s wealth as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity: 26 people have as much wealth as the bottom 4 billion people.

Canada`s top 20 billionaires got richer during COVID-19, gaining an average of \$2 billion each while millions of Canadians lost their jobs and struggled with the economic consequences of the pandemic, according to a report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Globally billionaires have seen their wealth grow in these covid times by a collective 1.8 trillion dollars. Amazon`s Jeff Bezos has added \$86 billion dollars to his worth in the pandemic, making him the first person to have a worth above 200 billion dollars. So... he went to space.

Parasite helps us to us feel the burden of great social inequality, it helps us to contemplate in a visceral way the unbreachable gaps between rich and poor as seen in the two families in the film, rich and poor coming together...

And as followers of Jesus the film may lead us to contemplate the scriptural concern for economic and social justice. Parasite may help us to wrestle with Jesus call to see him in the hungry, the naked, the thirsty...the poor among us.