



## Walking the Way: Watching the Screen

Most of us love watching films. Could we sometimes make more of our viewing by taking opportunities to seek out ideas that affirm or challenge Christian perspectives?

In a scene from the Oscar-winning film *Lincoln*, the President is waiting with soldiers and politicians for news of a decisive Civil War battle. Those present are tense, knowing that the news about to come through could change the course of the war, and of history. Lincoln smiles to himself and begins to speak, but his secretary of war shouts: 'No! No, you're, you're going to tell a story. I don't believe that I can bear to listen to another one of your stories right now.' And with that, he walks out.

Jesus is renowned for his stories. Like any good teacher, he knew that stories had the ability to shock, amuse, upset, thrill, uncover prejudices, reveal truths, and engage listeners in a way that straightforward teaching often cannot.

In the UK today, around 3.2 million people go to the cinema every week to see films that do the same. Many of these stories support or subvert certain worldviews. Some may convey a message that seems contrary to Christ's teachings, others offer suggestions about the human condition or the nature of God, sharing fresh revelations or invitations to discussion.

So let's watch and listen, discuss and debate; sharing our time, a story and a bag of popcorn or two as we seek out God's good news at the cinema.

### Activity

During Lent, arrange a church trip to the cinema or hold a 'movie night' at your home or in the church hall. Immediately after the film, or in the coming week, discuss the film with one another, considering the following questions:

- x What was your response to the film? What did you like/dislike about it?
- x Which character(s) did you identify with and why?
  
- x What did the story have to say about human nature?
- x Did the film uphold or challenge your view of the world?
- x What, if anything, did the story say about God?
- x Do you think the story supported or subverted gospel teaching?
- x What message did you take from the film?
- x Was there any 'good news' in the film? If so, when?
- x How might you continue to use stories told through film to enhance the ministry and mission of your church?

You could also use film as part of an intentional outreach program. During the six Sundays of Lent, encourage church group visits to the cinema. If you are a minister, why not preach on the themes brought up in six films nominated at the Baftas/Oscars?



x At the beginning of the film, Tom receives a phone call that turns his life upside down. Have

- x Judas sings to Jesus: 'All your followers are blind ... too much heaven on their minds'. Do you think this could be a fair criticism of Jesus' followers and/or religious zealots through the ages?
- x In a scene from the musical, Jesus sings in the garden of Gethsemane: 'I wanna know ... why should I die? You're far too keen on where and how and not so hot on why.' Do you think Jesus knew why he was heading toward the cross?
- x What was your response to the film's ending?
- x Where is good news to be found in the film?

*Calvary* (15):

Storyline: When a good-natured priest is threatened during a confession, he finds he must battle the dark forces closing in around him.

- x Do you think Father James should have told the Bishop/the police who had threatened him and/or tried to stop it? Why/why not?
- x In his Gethsemane moment, Father James abandons his priest's clothing and is seen about to escape on the plane to Dublin. Why do you think he didn't go?
- x Do you think the film gave a positive, critical or balanced view of the priesthood/the Christian faith?
- x 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' Why do you think this quote, from influential theologian St Augustine, was shown at the beginning of the film?
- x At one point, Father James says to Teresa: 'In situations like this one, people are shocked. The randomness of it. They curse God...they lose their faith in some cases.' She responds: 'They lose their faith? It must have not been much of a faith to begin with if it is so easy for them to lose it.' What do you think about this exchange? Has anything caused you to question or even lose your faith in the past? If you, what helped you to strengthen/find it?
- x What parallels/contrasts were there with the biblical telling of Holy Week? Did this retelling cause you to reflect on any parts of the passion in a new way?
- x 'The film offers no redemption.' Do you agree with The Christian Post's analysis of the film? Where, if anywhere, is good news to be found in the film?

### 3: Classic All Age Films

#### *Finding Nemo (U)*

Storyline: After his young son is captured in the Great Barrier Reef and taken to Sydney, a timid clownfish sets out on a journey to bring him home.

x The Lorax left the Order with the word 'unless' to encourage him to reflect on his teaching and consider his own actions. What word or phrase might we want to pass on to the next generation as a challenge or call to live well?

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- x If you are a Welsh speaker, what difference did it make watching a film in Welsh?
- x In one scene, a vicar says: 'If you are on God's side, join now to keep Great Britain great and mighty.' Do you think that clergy/the Church should ever speak for/against participating in conflict?
- x The [Belief and Action exhibition](#) by Wales for Peace explores why some conscientious objectors chose to take the difficult path of resisting conscription in the First World War. One of the questions it asks is 'how can we support soldiers but not war'? What is your response to this?
- x Some conservative Christians in America voted for Donald Trump because they thought

ride. You gotta plant both your feet on the ground and start livin' life.' In what ways, if any, do you relate to Matt's words to Ryan here?

- x 'Thank you,' are Ryan's last words as she stands and looks up to the sky. What is your response to this ending?
- x What do you think this film might have to say about prayer, suffering or death?
- x In his film review for the Guardian, Giles Fraser wrote: 'It's the most beautifully religious thing I have seen in ages ... Religion is something that is now being done better elsewhere, on the telly and in the cinema.'  
Do you agree/disagree with his comments? How might this influence the way we 'do' church, evangelism, etc?
- x Where is good news to be found in the film?

### *A Monster Calls* (12)

Storyline: A boy seeks the help of a tree monster to cope with his single mother's terminal illness.

- x Conor's family do not share with him the truth of his Mum's condition, telling him: 'Everything will be fine'. Do you think children should be shielded from certain topics? How easy do you find talking about death?
- x What was your response to the Monster's stories? Do they have a clear meaning? How are they similar/different to Jesus' parables?
- x In the film, stories and art allow Conor and his mum to explore truths about life and meaning. Is there an art/medium/hobby that allows you to do the same?
- x Who/what do you think the Monster represents? In his review, Stacey Tuttle, of The Shepherd Project a Christian parachurch organisation-





- x One character prays: 'I know I'm not supposed to ask for specifics, Lord ... but I want this to be the best year ever. And between you and me ... I think I agree I totally deserve it.' Do you think that God's response to our prayers is dependent upon our actions?
  
- x The Christian Jewels try to perform an exorcism in their attempts to save Mary's soul, claiming that she is backsliding into the flames of hell. What has informed your beliefs about hell, whatever they may be?
  
- x