

FAITH AND FILM: I – “THE HUNDRED FOOT JOURNEY”

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World Communion Sunday

Acts 10:34-43

John 17:20-23

If you’ve ever wondered why I have gray hair, it could be for any number of reasons. It could be because in just a few days, I’ll turn 62. It could be because I grew up with four brothers, and a sister, of course! It could be because when I was younger and it started turning gray, I waited too long to start to color it, and then just figured, why bother? But the real reason I’m gray is that I’ve been a Philadelphia sports fan all my life – and goodness knows, that will turn anybody gray. We are long suffering – we Philadelphia sports fans. Championships, for us, are few and far between.

Now of course, we’re in football season, and as it happens, because of my schedule here at church, I’ve only been able to watch part of just one game live this year. The past two weeks, I’ve missed the whole thing and DVR’d the games. Last Sunday, I was here until just about three helping with the recording of new greeting videos, and every once in a while I would glance at my smartphone to check on the scores – and it didn’t take me very long to realize that something more than just plays on the field was going on.

Unless you’ve had your head under a rock this week, you know what I’m talking about – the various things that were going on or not going on during the playing of the National Anthem before games. Since that time, media – social and otherwise – have been lit up with reactions – strong reactions, both pro and con. And truth be told, it’s been pretty ugly. Some pretty ugly things have been said. Some pretty drastic actions have been threatened. The whole thing is evidence of our deeply divided society these days.

When I read Jesus’ prayer for unity in today’s Gospel lesson, and Luke’s word in Acts about Jesus preaching peace, and then think of all that’s happened this week, I think Jesus must be weeping. And here’s why: I don’t think Jesus expected or even wanted everyone to believe everything the same as everyone else. God made us individuals, unique individuals, with unique brains and unique gifts and unique talents – and our variety, our diversity makes us all the more precious. So I don’t think we’re meant to agree with each other on everything.

But I do think Jesus’ prayer was that we would seek to live in unity in the midst of and in spite of our differences. It’s hard to see evidence of that happening right now. I wonder how many people who have a strong opinion on what those football players did last week have taken the time and made the effort to have a

conversation with someone who saw it the other way? And I mean a conversation, not an argument or debate, but a conversation where they actually listened to the other point of view, and then explained their own, calmly and rationally?

So many times in life, we have no idea what other people are really like, or what they are going through. We don't know their stories. Far too often, we have preconceived notions and we go with them. Which brings me to this morning's movie clip.

The movie I've chosen for today is a lovely movie from a few years ago entitled "The Hundred Foot Journey." It stars Helen Mirren for one, and a talented cast of lesser known, but wonderful actors. Well, in the movie Helen plays a restaurateur, Madame Mallory, who runs a very, very upscale French restaurant, to which everyone who is anyone regularly visits. It's THE place to eat in this town. Very chic, very snooty, very expensive, and very highly rated in the Michelin guide.

So life is going along very well for Madame and her restaurant, and then, one day, a family from India comes along and buys the property directly across the street from her fancy restaurant. They build an ornate Middle Eastern façade for the restaurant, complete with neon lights, they play their native music really loudly, and the smell of their pungent spices filled the air.

"Madame," is, suffice it to say, not at all happy. She goes over and tries to discourage them from building. When that doesn't work, she tries to find code violations and alerts the town officials. When that doesn't work, she finds out some of their recipes and then goes to the town market, and buys out all of the ingredients they need for their food. At every turn, she did whatever she could to stop them – because she looked down on them and was suspicious of them and their culture. With her every word and action, it was like she was trying to build a wall to keep them out.

But then, something happened. One of the sons of the Indian family, named Hassan, who was a chef, met one of Madame's chefs, and they struck up a friendship. They talked to each other and got to know each other and realized how much they had in common. And because of that, one day Hassan and Madame found themselves in the same kitchen and something incredible happened – which you'll see in a moment.

Before I show you the clip, you're going to notice that in the scene Hassan's hands are bandaged. They are bandaged because Madame's anger and enmity for the Indian family spread to her staff, and one of the men on her staff tried to burn down the new restaurant, and Hassan was burned badly in the fire.

So now he comes to talk with Madame and here's what happens.

(Film clip showing Hassan making an omelet with Madame, and Madame tasting the final product.)

It was what Hassan and Madame Mallory had in common that brought them together. In so many ways they were so very different, but when it came to food they spoke the same language, and shared the same love. And once they came to understand that, everything changed. Both restaurants thrived and the families became friends.

Dear friends, we and all of God's people are very different, but we have so much in common as well. I think Christ calls us in his prayer for unity to take the time and make the effort to learn about those things we have in common, to talk with one another, to especially listen to each other, and try to understand one another. We don't have to agree on everything, but I am sure he wants us to be civil and loving and respectful of one another.

World Communion Sunday is a celebration of our oneness in Christ. There are billions of Christians around the world – male and female, people of every color and hue, all different denominations worshipping in all different sorts of ways – but we have one thing in common – and that is Jesus Christ, as Lord of our lives. And today, all of us gather at the table to remember his sacrifice for us and our salvation.

As we come to the meal today, may we remember his prayer for unity, and seek to, in all ways, be people who try to bridge divides instead of create them with our words and actions. May we move beyond our preconceived thoughts and notions, and talk to those who are different from us, and better yet, listen to them. It may be one of the most loving things we can do in these days of such division – and it surely is what Jesus would have us do. May it be so.

Amen.