

“What is the most resilient parasite? A bacteria? A virus? An intestinal worm? An idea. Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it’s almost impossible to eradicate. An idea that is fully formed, fully understood – that sticks.”

Dom Cobb, the character played by Leonardo DiCaprio, lays out the premise for the movie Inception, a nominee for best picture in this year’s academy awards. One simple idea that could change everything – first Mr. Cobb describes it as a parasite. That’s the first notion we have to get our heads around. An idea is a lot of things, but in the movie, an idea is first described as a parasite. And then because ideas can lead to economic activity, ideas have value. That’s the second notion movie watchers need to wrap their heads around. In fact this second notion is what drives the plot of the movie. Ideas, creative ideas that can change everything, have so much value that they can be stolen, while still in the idea stage...in dreams. Stealing an idea is called extraction, and Dom Cobb is the best idea extractor.

An architect by profession, Cobb has learned how to lure people into dream states so he can steal their ideas while still in their formation, and sell them. As an architect, Cobb is able to design the dreams as complex mazes, or labyrinths, to keep out those who would protect the victim’s idea that he is about to steal. Now I know this is a stretch, it is after all science fiction, but the idea is really interesting.

But Inception is the exact opposite. Inception is inserting into someone’s mind an idea that will eventually come to pass. They say that inspiration, true inspiration – a truly original idea comes on its own. But inception plants an idea, an idea that could change everything, into someone’s brain. In order for Cobb to return to his home and his children, having fled the country on wrongful charges of the murder of his wife, he is hired to plant an idea into the son of a powerful man.

The powerful man is dying. To the world he has presented a steely exterior keeping anyone who would actually care for him at a distance, including his only son. The issue is the will, prepared by the lawyer who stands to get everything upon his client’s death. The son has come to believe that his father is disappointed in him. But Cobb’s job is take this son into a deep dream to plant a different idea and where he will discover a different will.

So Cobb assembles a team who will enter dream states to plant the idea. A specialist in pharmaceuticals that affect brain chemistry and sleep patterns is the key ingredient to

the team. He will be charged with taking people into the first dream. And while they are dreaming, he will be charged with taking the same people into another dream. And while they are dreaming, the same man takes them into still another dream. Dreams, within dreams, within dreams, where the team meets, and the different idea is inserted into the son; an idea that will seem like his own when he wakes from these layers of dreams. If Cobb gets this right, he will be able to return to his home and his children, no questions asked.

The old man whose dying; the son who thinks he's been his father's greatest disappointment; both will be given the chance to receive a simple idea that could change the outcome of everything, including finding the dying man's new will in a bedside vault. What happens when we face death? It seems to be the question for both the son, and for the father. In his real world, the son has a pretty clear sense of what will happen. He will be cut out of his father's will, he will be lost forever to the inheritance of his father...and I don't mean just money.

I remember when I got a call from my brother in law, at 3 o'clock one Saturday morning. He was weeping...and needed to talk. He was in Toronto, dealing with the experience of cleaning out his mother's house after she died. He had to make all the arrangements. He had to do all the dirty work. He had to attend his mother's funeral, without his wife, because his mother made it clear that his wife was never the girl for him. They'd been married for 25 years, but she was all wrong. So wrong, in fact, that shortly before her death, she changed her will, and left him nothing ... nothing of her love, nothing of her support, nothing of her inheritance. What money she had was the remnant of his father's estate...so by default, he didn't receive his father's inheritance either. Sobbing he said "I feel completely disowned...orphaned."

The son thinks he is his father's greatest disappointment because he didn't become like his father. His father's only disappointment is that the son tried. Hear that again. The son thinks he is his father's greatest disappointment because he didn't become like his father. His father's only disappointment is that the son tried. There's the idea to be planted.

What happens when we face death? It is the question facing first century Christians. It's the question that faces us in our own death, our own dying. It's the question that faces us whenever conflict, disappointment, fear, anxiety touch our lives. Think of separation, think of job loss, think of addictions that we watch. Sometimes, facing these things feels like we're going to die, it's so painful. Sometimes we even think we want to take our own lives. What happens when we face death?

Before taking us on his version of what went down during Holy Week, the writer of John's gospel takes us into the very heart of a family dealing with this very question. What happens when death comes?

John's version of the events of holy week, events that had occurred some 70 years earlier, is just ahead of us. But for today, he plants the idea in our heads, in answer to the question: What does happen when "death" comes?

We've all known people who seem dead to us. They are lost in addictions to drugs, to alcohol, to jobs. No amount of talking, pleading, or bargaining on our part, changes their ongoing behaviour, they just seem dead to their own lives.

We all know people who die long before they stop breathing. They enjoy their ill health. They thrive on the prescriptions and the doctors' appointments and the attention. Life is defined by sickness.

Some of us may know the pain of separation:

- separation from family - we may be the black sheep.
- separation from ourselves in mental illness.
- separation from those we love

Some of us are walking zombies, dead to the creative energy that flows around us...we simply can't see it. Entombed. Buried...given up for dead. Rotten with the stench of our own forgotten hopes and dreams. What happens when death comes?

Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha enjoys a fairly privileged life. We know this because of what happens in the story, when they say he died. People came, the Jews especially, to mourn. (the Jews is biblical code for leaders in the faith community, rabbis, chief priests, Pharisees). We also know that Lazarus lived a privileged life, because he is laid in a tomb. Tombs were reserved for people of position, rank, power. Ordinary joes' like you and I, were placed in common graves. Lazarus was privileged...and yet he died...he was dead...a sickness came over him...

Friends we have to remember this is the gospel of John. The writer of John's gospel wrote in metaphor and hyperbole...speaking in layers of meaning. Lazarus is dead...a privileged man, whose sickness got to him. Hyperbole and metaphor. Take nothing at face value in the gospel of John. And here's the idea that's inserted into the faithful community that answers a question, what happens when we "die." Christ, the living one we follow, whose own resurrection we do not understand, commands Lazarus, commands those who are dead, to "come out."

Then the gospel writer has the gall to look at the community, who has a hand in what has happened, “unbind him, and let him go.”

Friends let’s slow down and think this through. The kinds of deaths I described earlier don’t come to people on their own. Each of us, the community around those who are disenfranchised, broken, lost....each of us has a role in the death they endure. Jesus says to us equally “unbind him, let him go.”

What happens when death comes? It’s the question both the young son and the father in the movie seem to ask. It’s the question we ask when we see people who are no longer alive to their own lives. It’s the question we ask even when we eventually die.

The idea planted, inserted into the heart of the gospel community? Resurrection, new life, transformation. As simple as compost for the earth, as complex as a living Spirit empowering the Christian community. If there is any place in all the world where people can come and be unbound from the shackles the rest of the world places on them – it is here. We say it in our words of welcome. We offer it in the peace of Christ. We extend it when we leave this place transformed and empowered. Christ is alive here...and says to anyone seeking new life, “come out of your tomb.” And Christ looks upon those of us who are part of the complicit community and says, “unbind him.” What an interesting idea. May it be inserted in this Christ community that we might be for others a transformation and new life. Amen.