

# IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

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February 25, 2018

Lent 3

[Genesis 17:3-7,15-17](#)

[Mark 8:34-37](#)

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(prayer)

As some of you know... one of my favorite past times is *movie watching*.

I will watch anything, from pretty much any genre.

I am equally at home with:

- a shoot 'em up action movie, or
- romantic comedy, or
- historical drama, or
- art house flick, or
- the latest offering in the [Marvel Cinematic Universe](#).

Even a silly or outright horrible movie is a welcomed opportunity to share sacastic comments with my spouse.

I have seen all (but one) of this year's Oscar 'best picture' movies so far. The plan is to go see "[Call Me By Your Name](#)" at The Princess this afternoon and I'll be nine for nine.

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If you're a movie fan too, I'd be happy to talk you later about my favorite nominated movie, if you like.

I'll give you a hint: (stir with spoon) "[now... sink into the floor... SINK](#)"

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I really do enjoy a movie that makes me think about themes deeper than the surface plot.

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I see that the church is organizing another *inspiring, thoughtful* movie night. Everyone is invited to come watch "[The Ultimate Legacy](#)" on Saturday, 10th. It is the story of a entitled, selfish young man who must reform his life in order to receive his grandmother's inheritance.

It looks like the kind of movie that will make you think.

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I have a different movie in mind today.

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As I was looking at the scripture readings for today, I found myself thinking of Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film adaptation of P.D. James' novel, [Children of Men](#).

Set in England in 2027, the human race is living with the reality of 18 years of infertility. The movie opens with the news story that the world's youngest human has died; Diego Richardo was stabbed (in Buenos Aires) after refusing to sign an autograph: *Baby Diego* was 18 years, 4 months, 20 days, 16 hours and 8 minutes old.

Early on in the movie, we get to see a propaganda [video](#) with scenes of embattled and burning world cities: *Paris, Moscow, Washington, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Brussels, Hong Kong, Berlin, Jakarta, New York, Stockholm, Rome, Shanghai, Caracas, Copenhagen, Mexico City, Amsterdam, Atlanta, Geneva, Marseille, Lisbon, Seoul, Singapre, San Diego, Napels, Boston, Antwerp ... The World Has Collapsed.... Only Britain Soldiers On!*

England has responded to the crisis with policies of isolation; it has basically become a police state. Refugees are rounded up and put into coastal towns that have been transformed into walled off concentration camps. As a bus with caged windows passes, *Jasper* (played by Michael Caine) says "Illegal immigrants: taking 'em to Bexhill. Poor 'fugees. After escaping the worst atrocities and finally making it to England, our government hunts 'em down like cockroaches."

The context for this dystopian story is that of a sorry-picture-of-a-world that has lost hope in the future. With the harsh reality that humanity's era is ending, selfish individualism and short term hoarding rules daily life.

There is violence and depression everywhere... as people wait for their existence to fade away, one life at a time.

Personal agendas outweigh simple compassion.

The only relevant question was: *How can I benefit myself in this moment?*

The world of *Children of Men* is a world without hope.

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The King James Bible translates Proverbs 29:18 as "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Now, this particular passage is speaking specifically about the consequences of losing sight of the revelations of God as expressed in the Torah; the New Revised Standard Version translation is: "*Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint.*"

And yet, there is a broader message that comes through when we take this proverb beyond its original context.

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*

Without a sense of where we are going,  
life becomes meaningless.

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***Hope in the future  
allows people to endure  
the challenges of today.***

It is the knowledge that tomorrow is 'another day', that can motivate us through to the next morning.

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My heart has been aching all week for the family of Ryan Shtuka, who has not been seen since he left a party on the short walk home in the ski village of Sun Peaks, BC over a week ago.

Even as each day ends with no knowledge of where he is, the hope that *he will be found the next day* is getting people through the dark, lonely nights. His mother's Facebook post have been nothing short of inspiring.

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We take the best lessons of the days-gone-by to influence (as best we can) the days to come.

*Hope* is believing that each new moment can be an improvement on the moment passed.

The vision that gives us life is that we learn from our experiences (both successful and regrettable) so that the world to come is a better place.

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To put it another way...

Each person - at some level - wants their life to matter after they are gone.

We are pulled along by the lure of legacy.

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And so it makes sense why the covenant offered by God to Abram and Sarai was so attractive...

*"You will be made the ancestors of a multitude of nations.*

*Abram, from now on, you will be known as Abraham: the father-of-many.*

*And Sarai, you will be called Sarah: the Princess, because kings will come from you."*

If you know the broader Sarah-Abraham story, you know that this was nothing short of a miracle. Abram and Sarai were unable to have children.

The couple were already senior citizens when they (and Abram's father and brothers and their families) left Ur near the Persian Gulf to make the uncertain journey to land that God promised would be given to their descendents. At 75 and 66 years old, respectively, Sarai and Abram, naturally, presumed that the family tree would grow from branches other than their own.

A chapter earlier from what we heard this morning, we can read about the couple's plan to side-step the inconvenience of Sarai's barrenness. With Sarai's blessing, at the age of 86, Abram fathered a child (Ishmael) with Hagar, his wife's maid-servant.

Another 13 years have passed when we get to today's reading. If we had read a bit further in chapter 17, we'd have heard God specifically promise that Sarah - herself - would bear a son, to be named Isaac (Gen17:19). "Isaac" means *laughter*. When Abraham first heard God's promise, he ***laughed***, and said to himself, *'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'* (Gen17:17)

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A promise that points to the future can change things.

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I absolutely love Thursday mornings here at the church when the Mainly Music program is running. The sounds of singing and dancing children is one of the most hopeful things I know.

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The presence of children can have the effect of bringing out the best in adults. We know we are being watched. We are careful about the language we use and the example we are setting.

Okay, it's not all fun and games.

But, the big picture is:

*when our context is intergenerational, we are more mindful of the lasting impact we are having on each other.*

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As I listened at the Edmonton gathering of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2016, I learned that one of the worst legacies of the Canadian Residential School system was the removal of children from community life.

Adults practice different social skills when children are not around. In some of our indigenous communities, people are still living with the lasting impact of engrained societal changes over multiple generations without children.

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Those of us with more miles behind the cart than in front are sometimes assumed to be wise because of those years... and it is generally true that wisdom is what results when knowledge is

tempered over time, but... there is also profound wisdom found in the experiences and understanding of the young.

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After the [school shooting](#) in a Newtown Connecticut school 5 years ago failed to move gun attitudes in the United States, I have (from my perch here in the *great white north*) held out little hope that change would ever happen. I mean, if 20 slaughtered six year olds couldn't do it, what ever would?

And then the students of Florida's [Marjory Stoneman Douglas](#) High School came out of their closets with voices of clarity and wisdom that seems beyond their years.

Something feels different this time.

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Politicians see a motivated, emerging electorate in a swing state. A few elected officials are having to remind themselves that they had better *authentically* hear what these voices are saying.

Gun Manufacture Lobbists are seeing their corporate partners getting nervous about the company they keep.

And... conspiracy theorists have had to get really creative this time.

Even *this* cynic is beginning to hope a little bit again.

The lure of legacy is beginning to pull again.

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In the decades that followed Jesus' days of teaching and healing, new generations of disciples carried on his legacy.

That first set of followers - who were part of that ministry and knew its truth and value - made sure it was kept alive, even after Jesus was executed.

Only days after Jesus carried his own cross up to Golgotha, they were convinced that Jesus was alive in their midst in a mysterious, but real way (more about that on Easter).

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Death was not the final word... Mary, Peter, Solome, Cleopas and the others made sure of that.

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Life as a disciple of Jesus Christ was not necessarily an easy path to be on. By the early 70s of the first century (some 40 years after the women were told that the tomb was empty because Jesus was raised), the author of the gospel of Mark, spoke directly to the challenges of discipleship using Jesus' voice: *to become my followers, deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me.*

As the new generation of disciples read those words, the obvious reference to Good Friday could not be missed. But they also knew that they were *Easter People*... the cross was not the end of the story.

The message behind today's reading from Mark is that to be a full follower of Jesus means being ***in for the long haul.***

It is not enough to bring the best legacies of the past into this present moment, but to be intentional about creating the legacies that will endure beyond our moment in time.

Without vision, the people perish.

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How do we want our story to be told?

Will our story be told?

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The gospel of John lays out Jesus' hope for his own legacy: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* (Jn13:34-35)

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Jesus-like compassion is the path to our legacy. *Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.* (Mk10:14)

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I will end with two proverbs as food for thought.

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***It takes a villiage to raise a child.***

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***We do not inherit the world from our parents,  
we borrow it from our children.***

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How do we want our story to be told?

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Let us pray:

God, you made promises to our ancestors in faith and we are still living into those promises today. We pray that today's ministry continues to honour the legacies passed on to us and the vision that pulls us forward.

Amen.

#161MV "I Have Called You By Your Name"