



First Lesson: Psalm 139: 1-12

Gospel: Matthew 13: 24-30

Sermon: "Lights, Camera, Scripture: 13th Amendment"

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are continuing in our Lights, Cinema Scripture Netflix Summer Movie Series and this week our sermon will film focus on Ava Duvernay's documentary entitled "13th," and we will examine how our scriptures may speak to it.**

So beginning with the our documentary for starters; The film raised some important information for us to consider.

And so for those of us who may need a refresher on what the 13th amendment if our constitution states, it says "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, ***except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted***, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

And so why this particular documentary was made was because Ava wanted to bring to our attention that the drafters of our constitution, left themselves a large, very exploitable loophole in the guise of an easily missed clause in its definition.

According to Duvernay and others, That clause, which converts slavery from a legal business model to an equally legal method of punishment for criminals, is the subject of the Netflix documentary "13th."

So in laypersons terms, Ava is making some unapologetic, unflinching claims in this documentary; that the criminal judicial system is **not equal**.

The American system of incarceration, specifically how the prison industrial complex affects people of color **is not equal**.

Alarming statistics that reveal that One out of four African-American males will serve prison time at one point or another in their lives....let's us know **that things are not equal**.

Higher sentences given for crack vs. cocaine possession and plea bargains accepted by innocent people too terrified to go to trial lets us know **that things are not equal**.

So this is the foundational premise for this film; a film that begins a cycle that DuVernay examines in each of its evolving iterations; where

when one method of subservience-based terror falls out of favor, another takes its place.

From lynching, to Jim Crow; to the government's War on Drugs, to the Three Strikes and mandatory sentencing laws and the current cash-for-prisoners model that generates millions for private bail and incarceration firms and more;

The more you and I watch, the horror of it all becomes blatantly clear; that things **are just not equal.**

**And how our gospel would address implicitly this inequity as I see it, is within this parable that Jesus presents to his Disciples.**

A parable that is speaking new meaning and new life to me in light of this documentary;

Where if inquiring minds of today had the opportunity to ask Jesus personally, why is there this inequity in the judicial system; I imagine that Jesus response would be similar to what it was to his disciples in our gospel, who had similar inequity concerns.

For our parable as I see it raises a real issue if I could put it into my own words;

Where a complaint is being raised from perhaps the oppressed, who wants to know why every time good seed is laid down, the enemy wants to come and sow weeds among the wheat, and mess things up?

And I don't know about you church but I feel this question in my spirit! For in todays times I find myself asking those same questions.

Like for instance; Why if the coronavirus can be flattened with specific precautions being adhered to, **I want to know why** everyone can't bring themselves to doing the right thing and doing the social distancing guidelines fully, so that we all can overcome this crisis once and for all; Why...

I want to know why in matters of obvious injustice and marginalization and inequity; why there are some who don't want things to be equitable?

I want to know how anyone could be comfortable knowing that while some flourish, some perish;

While some has excess, some has no access....

I want to know why these incidents of blatant bias and injustice surrounds all of us; is right before us; is embedded unapologetically in our laws and it seems so impossible to just remove them once and for all....

In spite of petitions to overcome it; in spite of voices crying out to abolish it; it takes so long if ever to set things back from wrong to right;

**When it seems all it should take** is some white out or a delete button to remove the hateful rhetoric;

**When it seems all it should take** is a quick press of the backspace key to eradicate the injustice of it all...

Our parable tells us (as I put it into my own words) that no, no....

“even though there are weeds in this kingdom of heaven you are trying to tend to and cultivate, the weeds must stay there.”

The weeds must stay there; for in gathering the weeds you would

uproot the wheat along with them.

So verse **30 says**, *Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.*”

**So the question then becomes this; what then is Jesus trying to tell us?**

And this is when I reflect back to the film, because an injustice is being raised in this film;

And what is being implied in this film as I see it, is that the prison system for the Black and brown individual has become the loophole for slavery.

The film reveals a theme of prison as a factory; churning out the free labor that the 13th Amendment supposedly dismantled when it abolished slavery.

This is the claim of the director.

And although I agree with her conclusion and believe that this documentary was very informative and educational for all of us;

Our gospel at verse 30 in particular, gives me a measure of hope that I did not necessarily get from the film.

**For the film left me** feeling frustrated.

**The film left me** feeling angry.

**The film** in many ways left me feeling discouraged; mainly because I had more questions than answers in the end....

But verse 30 of our gospel I say again; gives me a measure of hope.

Because **when Jesus reveals in the parable to just leave the weeds there;**

**When Jesus tells us in the parable that the grain and the weeds will just grow together until harvest time;**

This is when I see that everything will come to fruition **at harvest time;**

That the captives will be set free **at harvest time;**

That the One who sees all and knows all and tackled both physical and spiritual death and evil will prevail **at harvest time**....

And this church is why if you noticed the music of today's worship has come from the era when black voices singing “soon and very soon; and bye and bye; not to mention you will experience more music coming from the stories of black and brown voices throughout the remainder of this worship service; voices that have been imprisoned physically, but their souls have been always liberated because their theology and Christian faith and witness, lets them know **about harvest time**....

**Harvest time**...where the first shall be last and the last shall be first....

**Harvest time**....where Jesus proclaimed liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind

**Harvest time**...where the kingdom of Earth and the kingdom in heaven is fully achieved because the grains of righteousness, love and justice has taken its place...

**Jesus tells the disciples, don't worry about the enemy....**

I see it....

I see what is going on....

I see all of the weeds....

I see it trying to take over the grains of love and justice....

But don't worry about the weeds....

Just keep planting....

**Keep planting** seeds of love....

**Keep planting** seeds of justice....

**Keep planting** seeds of reform....

Just keep planting....don't stop....

Because **come Harvest Time**.....

**The kingdom of heaven** will be like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. **32** Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

**Come Harvest time**.....“**The kingdom of heaven** will be like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

**Come Harvest time**...your seed; our seeds.... will produce a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

... **come Harvest time**..... **the Kingdom of heaven** will rise and become greater...

Come harvest time, **the Kingdom of heaven will become** stronger... it will be glorious.....

For **The kingdom of heaven** is and will continue to be unstoppable....so we must not stop.

So **keep planting**.....even though there are still some weeds...

**Keep planting**, like the late congressman John Robert Lewis; one of the organizers for the 1963 March on Washington; God bless his soul; where there was a mug shot in his younger days after marching for civil rights and he was smiling....and he said I smiled because I was on the right side of history ...

**Keep planting** like all those who have planted before us; planting seeds of justice and equity for all.....

For just in case you missed it, I stopped by to declare that we are on the right side of history....

**So keep planting because Harvest time is coming** .... don't stop... we mustn't stop.... until thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.

Let the Church say Amen!

Peace and Love!

Kirstie J. Engel  
First UMC Lincoln  
[www.firstumclincoln.org](http://www.firstumclincoln.org)  
402-466-1906

