



First Lesson: Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

Sermon: Lights, Cinema, Scripture: My Beautiful Broken Brain

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are in our final week of our Netflix Summer Movie Series; Lights, Cinema, Scripture and this week we are going to shift gears from where we have been for some weeks now and look at the documentary “My Beautiful Broken Brain.”**

And before diving into our scriptures and film, I have to first off take a moment of privilege to celebrate all of you who have been watching virtually online for a moment.

For the past few weeks we have had some tough conversations surrounding race, injustice and inequity and I just have to say that not only have you all have been attentive, but you have been open-minded, compassionate, empathetic and affirming during this difficult process of self-examination and awareness.

**So I give thanks** for this community, who consistently rises up to the challenge of exploring what it means for us to be a reconciling ministry.

**I give thanks** for all of us being able to stick it out through some of these films/movies that had some very difficult content both visually and thematically.

We have together planted some potential seeds for love, equity and inclusion for all and so I celebrate you for being bold enough, to step out of your comfort zones perhaps and engage with me over these past few weeks.

**So looking at our film today along with our gospel scripture; one thing that should become more familiar to some of us if not most of us; is this kingdom of heaven**

**series within Matthew 13; mainly because our weekly lectionary scriptures have spent some time exploring this concept over the past few weeks.**

And so if I could place myself in Jesus shoes for a moment, why I believe that Jesus has spent so much time teaching parable after parable to his disciples and listeners of what the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God (which I see as synonymous) is like; is because I believe if you and I can grasp hold of this concept; you and I may have just come closer to cracking the mystery of what life may be all about.

You see for those of us who have lived long enough, the question will inevitably arise in our thoughts and perhaps even be vocalized at some point in our lives and that is ; “Lord why am I here? Or “Lord what is my life purpose?”

If you think about it, there was an immediate quest for purpose, as soon as you and I were born out of our mother’s womb.

Where perhaps a relative may have tried to suggest whose eyes we may have or whose personality we may have taken after.

And for those who have been adopted, this quest is still very much innate if not more so; a quest for who we are, where we have come from and what makes up our genealogy.

And then once you and I were old enough to begin school, it would be the teachers and school officials and perhaps even our peers that may help us to discover more about ourselves; our strengths, our growing edges;

We begin to discover whether we are gifted in math or science or theater or sports.

And then our journey takes us past elementary, and middle school and high school;

Some of us then went on to college, some of us picked up a trade; and it is through these transitions, **perhaps** we may have discovered more about ourselves; both good and bad....

**Perhaps at this stage**, life’s challenges may have begun to present itself in ways that began to inform our worldview and life perspective.

And then from there, **perhaps we grew** into becoming parents, partners, spouses or remained single;

**Perhaps we** encountered grief, loss, health crises and personal setbacks;

**Perhaps we have** acquired promotions, demotions, advanced degrees and/or job transitions....

**Perhaps we have** become grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles or parents for the first time;

Regardless where our journey takes us; one thing I am certain is the common human experience for most of us is this question of “am I doing this right?”

Am I doing what I am supposed to be doing in life, in love, with my career?

Am I living fully into my life purpose?

And so the way our gospel speaks to me today is Jesus giving you and I a glimpse of how to be certain that we are living our life purpose;

**For we are living out our life purpose** , once we begin living for the kingdom.

**We are living out our life purpose** once our prayers shift from it being our will be done to thy will being done.

**We are living out our life purpose** once we begin to understand that every skill we may acquire; that every lesson we may learn, is all so that we can pour it all back into the kingdom.

And where the church comes into play, is that our role is to **plant seeds for kingdom living and building.**

You see in researching the background of all of these parables that are listed in our gospel today, I have learned that the vast majority of commentators from the earliest of times have interpreted these parables as also relating to the growth of the church.

The parables speak of the church, that would flourish throughout the earth, in spite of its very small beginnings.

And as the familiar hymn goes; The church is not a building;

the church is not a steeple;

the church is not a resting place;

the church is a people.

So we are the church;

And we are the ones called to plant these seeds that will grow the kingdom of God.

**So the question becomes how then do we begin to align ourselves with this line of thinking?**

That life may be greater than having a family and a career even though those are some things that we may value.

And this is when I turn to our film; *My Beautiful Broken Brain.*

And let me just let you in on a little household conversation between my husband Steve and I as we watched this film.

The short end of the story is Steve didn't really like the documentary.

I on the other hand was fascinated by it.

So I invite you to post your thoughts on the documentary yourself if you feel so lead;

But the reason why I was drawn in immediately to Lotje's story, was because her journey into the complexity and vulnerability of her brain following a stroke; caused me first off to think about my daughter who had a brain tumor at the age of 4; and although she is healed; she had to make many adaptations very similar to Lotje.

Because after Lotje regained her consciousness, she was forced to experience a new existence of distorted reality, where words had no meaning and her senses had completely changed.

So the film took us on a journey of how she had to learn everything her brain had unlearned.

In the end, I got the impression that Lotje learned to be grateful for her brain; broken (as she called it) and all.

Lotje in her journey accepted her reality that not only was her brain "broken," but by towards the end of the film, we see her transform into this acceptance that her brokenness was beautiful.

**So getting back to the question of what is it going to take for our minds to begin to embrace this idea of kingdom living and building;**

In many ways it is going to take a similar journey where although a stroke or traumatic brain injury is not anything I would wish upon anyone; I do believe that we can learn a lot about what it means to explore new perspectives and ways of seeing the world as Lotje was forced to do.

And where I see the good news within our community is that I have witnessed this mind shift already occurring within our Netflix Summer Movie Series.

**For there was a reason** why the Holy Spirit would not allow me to select Hallmark films with Hallmark endings.

**There was a reason** why the Holy Spirit pointed me to films that brought up themes of war, violence, racial injustice, inequity and more....

Films where although most of us did not want to possibly finish them because it was just too awful to witness or even imagine, I am convinced now through Lotje's story, that it was necessary

for us to see those films, so that the seeds for kingdom living could be effectively planted...

Because you see my aha moment is that not everyone's kingdom experience is the same.

**Some of us have** experienced a reasonable amount of joy in our lives while others have not.

**Some of us have** experienced a certain level of privilege because of perhaps our race, gender, education, socioeconomic backgrounds; while others have not.

**Some of our kingdoms** consist of poverty, isolation, scarcity and dehumanization....

**Some of us** are able to move freely throughout the kingdom while others are restricted to only certain parts; parts that are unfortunately not metaphorically flowing with milk and honey. The latest example of not everyone being able to move freely in the kingdom:

There is a planned demonstration at a Pennsylvania police department after a video surfaced online showing police arresting a Black man inside a Walmart after he paid for a bike. 37-year-old Stanley Gracius was arrested, tazed, and hog-tied by two police officers inside the Wyomissing Walmart on Monday.

**Furthermore I have noticed that there is this human tendency for many of us to assume that other people's upbringings and lives is not too different from our own.**

For some of us; to fathom anything different from our own worldview is something that we wouldn't even consider—something we couldn't even imagine.

So similar to Lotje's journey, **for many of us to be able to** walk in the shoes of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor;

**For many of us to** be able to walk in the shoes of our LGBTQ community and our Native American communities and more;

**For many of us to be** able to walk in the shoes of the refugee or the incarcerated;

**For many of us to be** able to walk in the shoes of what it basically means to be the other; would take an extensive process for many of us to unlearn what we have learned and known to be true all of our lives.

It will take an uncomfortable process similar to Lotje; to begin to envision a world that may even challenge the perspective we once had.

In many ways, this is what the pandemic crisis is causing us to

do right now.

Furthermore the reason why I celebrated you at the beginning of this sermon is because watching these films and engaging in tough topics on a Sunday morning is another way that you and I have stepped in the shoes of Lotje;

It wasn't easy;

It was downright uncomfortable;

But the prayer is that in this difficult process; you and I may have taken a step closer to understand what it means to live for the kingdom.

Because the idea is that once you and I have considered that the kingdom is currently not the same for everyone;

The prayer is that **we will become** so unsettled by this reality;

**We will become** so outraged by this reality;

That **we will then begin** to do something about these kingdom disparities.

**We will begin** to assess our life journey and all of the skills and tools and knowledge we have acquired along the way; and begin to explore how we might begin to use those gifts to ensure that we all are experiencing the same kingdom benefits. And I stopped by to say that our community is living this vision out right now....

For not only have I observed that you all are hungry for knowledge and more ways to transform the kingdom experience so that all may be able to live freely in the kingdom; what I love about the First community is that the intentionality to build the kingdom is evident through your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness;

And this applies to the present community and some of the members who have gone on to be with the Lord; your witness is still very much alive and active and for this and more I give thanks.

So this is not a message of condemnation; this is a message of exhortation;

This is a message to celebrate the hard work we have already done and to encourage us to keep on planting.

Because **the more we are out** in the kingdom;

**The more we keep** pushing ourselves to see the entire kingdom;

**The more we keep stretching** ourselves to see beyond the kingdom that we may be familiar with so that we may plant more seeds of love, inclusion and equity for all—**this is when**

**we have** truly lived our life purpose;  
**This is when we** are able to embody the sentiment of our  
psalmist in our first lesson and give thanks;  
**Give thanks to the Lord** for God's wondrous works;  
**Give thanks to God's marvelous works**, and the justice God  
declared;  
For we are all the offsprings of Abraham; the children of Jacob;  
We are all allotted inheritance from the One who created us  
all.....Praise the Lord!

Peace and Love!

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

