

FIRST AND CENTER

Pastor's Blog

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I love to go to the movies, always have. I think films give us different perspectives on the world and human nature as we keep trying to understand both. I saw two films last week in the theatre (my preferred way to see, when I can rationalize the ridiculous cost, but that's another story), which helped illuminate so many things about our lives these days.



First was *The Shape of Water*. My soul has rarely been touched by a film as much as it was by this one. The two main characters push aside every Hollywood stereotype of leading woman and man: she is deaf, an orphan, and a cleaning woman, while he is a sea monster. Yeah, I know, you non-sci-fi fans are now running for the doors. Don't. This film exemplifies more about love and evil and the quickness of our society to "otherize" than most other films past or present. It owes something to King Kong, but goes considerably deeper. Sally Hawkins, Octavia Spencer, Michael Shannon, Richard Jenkins, and the phenomenal Doug Jones (who plays the creature) truly inhabit their characters. Neither Hawkins nor Jones, the main characters, speak throughout the entire film, and yet they communicate profoundly. There is a speech far into the film about decency, and the lack thereof, and the faking thereof, which is worth the price of admission. A film for our time as we demonize those we do not understand and allow our government to get away with doing so on a daily basis.

The second film was *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*. When I first read about this film, I didn't feel compelled to see it. Grieving mother seeks revenge on police force she perceives as doing nothing to solve her daughter's rape and murder. But then, there's Frances McDormand, whom I would see in almost anything. In this time in which we live, when revenge and resorting to violence to solve disputes have become normal for us, this film explores the cost to a small town, and to several individuals and their families. The relationships here are complicated, and just when you think they are stereotypes, they show human complexity at its most, well, complex! Which is much truer to life than the typical shoot-'em-up. Sam Rockwell and Woody Harrelson turn in performances of great nuance as two of the policemen. And, in a rare experience for American films with primarily white casts, the African American characters in the film are not the bad guys, but themselves nuanced and true to small town southern midwestern realities; racism is clear, as is the pain of it. This film, however, belongs to McDormand, who delves deeply into pain and anger and the desire for revenge and even love. The end of the film has a lovely, ambiguous, redemptive scene I hoped for, but did not expect.

As does *Shape of Water*. I'll take hope anywhere I can get it these days.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Pastor