



Movie review

One Week

Writer/ Director: Michael McGowan, Starring: Joshua Jackson (Ben Tyler), Liane Balaban (Samantha Pierce), Narrator: Campbell Scott, 94 minutes, 2008

BY DOUG HODGKINSON

One Week is a “Canadian Road Movie,” which at the level of travelogue will bring waves of nostalgia for anyone who has travelled the Trans-Canada west from Toronto to the West Coast. However, since “Road Movies” are essentially romantic tales and stories of spiritual pilgrimage, the movie serves a deeper purpose than simply a nostalgic travelogue.

The movie opens with the narrator posing the question for viewers, “What would you do if you found out you had only one day ... or one week or ... one month to live?”

Ben is in his physician’s office receiving the news that he has an aggressive stage 4-cancer that needs aggressive treatment. He also has papers

to mark for his high school students and a wedding to plan with his fiancée, Samantha, who is an actuary. Everyone around him is pretty anxious about the news and wants him to get into treatment **RIGHT AWAY!** He does what any self absorbed person would do; bargains for a couple of days away to sort things out, buys an old Norton motorcycle and sets off on a trip across Canada in search of an adventure (because his life to that point had been so planned, unspontaneous, rational and uncreative).

It is a universal story with a Canadian twist. There’s the sights: the Big Nickel, the Wawa Goose, the world’s largest tepee, Terry Fox monument, wheat fields, and the Stanley Cup in a deserted hockey rink in Arbourgh, Manitoba. Tim Horton’s functions as a series of shrines on the pilgrimage, where each rolled up rim provides new signs and directions on the journey. We are given a series

of sly, self-mocking winks. A childhood story of searching for “Grumps” is the metaphor for the elusiveness of his life’s quest. You are supposed to be able to recognize “Grumps” when you see them but because you sort of doubt that such mythical figures are actually there you don’t expect to find them. It turns out this is the mythos of his search for love in the relationship with Samantha. “How do you know if it’s love?” he asks a stranger along the way. “If you have to ask, it isn’t,” comes the mystical response. And it turns out that it isn’t.

At one point in their preparation for marriage they are asked by a clergyman, “What are your beliefs?” Ben is stuck and appears to have none. He tries hard to look around a find some but they don’t seem to stick, in much the same way his search for the answer to the question, “How do you know if it’s love?” doesn’t turn up an answer.

In the literature on pilgrimage it is suggested that there are four parts in the pilgrimage process. There is first a **call** (a longing, an intuition, a restlessness) and we venture out in response; a spiritual awakening occurs.

We set out but some **crisis or disorientation** occurs and often leads to spiritual chaos. “Can God be trusted? Will I be faithful? Can I even trust the journey?”

At some point we discover a **boon**, a treasure in a field, a pearl of great price that brings transformation. Finally, we **arrive home** again with a reorientation. We understand life from a slightly different angle.

For Ben, the boon arrives in the form of a whale breached off the coast of Tofino, which he takes to be an indisputable sighting of a Grump and a sign to return home. He had long believed, after the rejection of his first publishing attempt, that all



creativity was crushed out of him. Now, he writes the book that becomes this story: a transcendent experience for one who was presumed to have no beliefs.

Mercifully we are saved from the tempting sentimentality of a “triumph of the human will” story. Instead this is a very touching but ironic-comic story in which we are invited, without emotional pressure or exhortation, to find our own level of response to the question, “What would you do if you found you had only...” □



You wanted to know

Why do we call the week before Easter “Holy Week”?

BY PETER DAVISON

Q: Why do we call the week before Easter “Holy Week”?

A: Let me begin with a comment on sacred time and sacred space. These are designated, not to deny the sacredness of all creation, or to create a dichotomy between sacred and secular, but quite the opposite. Holy times and places are meant to remind us that all life is sacred. Our culture has, of course, become increasingly secular, and tends to limit religion to the personal, by which is really meant “private.” A good example has been the federal government’s

withdrawal of funding to Kairos (the Canadian ecumenical aid and development coalition) for voicing criticism about the oil sands impact on the environment, while Revenue Canada periodically threatens churches with cancellation of their charitable status if they speak out on matters of public policy. Governments of all stripes seem increasingly anxious to stifle all their critics. This doesn’t mean we should be advocating a theocratic state, but that churches and other institutions should not be punished for “speaking truth to power.”

Now to answer your question more directly, it has often been said that we are an Easter

people, which is another way of saying that the heart of Christian faith is expressed in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. With the secularization of Christmas, and society’s attempt to portray it as the most important Christian observance, we often forget that the Incarnation (in which the humility of God is dramatically portrayed) is really a foreshadowing of God’s acceptance of the humiliation of the cross, and the divine refusal to allow death (with all its attendant fears) rule our lives.

This is why the week from Palm Sunday to Easter is for us the holiest time of the year. It is the week that takes us from the triumphal entry into

Jerusalem, through the Last Supper and Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane, to his cruel death and burial, and to his transformed appearance to his disciples which inspires them to come out of hiding and launch a totally new movement. It is the week which enables us to face our own greatest fears and pains, and to transcend our own egos to find “the Self-beyond-self,” and the fullness of life which is God’s wish for all humankind. For the early church, Lent was originally this intense focus on dying and rising with Christ, leading to baptism at the Easter Vigil and communion in the Eucharist at the dawn of Easter Day. If you can, try to



participate in all the Holy Week services — especially Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil and Easter Day. This central drama of our faith can, if we let it, be transformative. May it be so for you, and for all of us, who need to confront the powers that threaten our hard-won freedoms. □