

Sleep-in Saturdays

by Heidi Martin

It's strange. When I think back to the season of winter during my freshman year of college, I do not remember many mornings or afternoons or sleeping in on Saturdays. In my mind, the winter of 2003 is perpetually Monday night and I am huddled in front of a desktop computer trying to wring any sense of meaning from a used science textbook and any morsel of heat from the drafty dormitory walls. It is during those evenings that I began to understand that one might be surrounded by people—on a college campus, for example—and feel very alone. I am not the only one who understands this. In fact, I believe “loneliness in community” is a theme that most Americans understand all too well.

The Soloist and *Sister Act* could not be any more different. *The Soloist*, directed by Joe Wright, stars Robert Downey Jr. and Jamie Foxx in a biographical story of a musical genius turned homeless after developing schizophrenia. Released in April 2009, the movie received mixed reviews. *Sister Act*, on the other hand, was accepted enthusiastically when it first came out in 1992 and continues to appeal to the public today. This classic comedy was directed by Emile Ardolino and stars Whoopi Goldberg as a Reno lounge singer who covers as a nun to hide from her vengeful mafia boyfriend. Despite these noticeable differences, both movies share the same truths about loneliness.

The first truth is what we are currently addressing in this issue of *timbrel*; though an individual is surrounded by people and success, she may still be lonely. In *The Soloist*, Steve Lopez is a professional columnist for the “L.A. Times.” In *Sister Act*, Deloris Van Carter has a career as a lounge singer with hopes of moving up in the world. What these characters do not reveal in print or on stage is the hollowness in their hearts. Lopez has failed as a husband and father and Van Carter feels second-rate. Wealth and success do not fill the empty loneliness in their lives.

What good can these characters do? Well, they simply try to “do good,” which brings us to the second truth about loneliness; good deeds do not dismantle loneliness, but relationships do. As a result of Lopez’ newspaper series on the homeless Juilliard drop-out, Nathaniel Ayers, the mayor gives \$50 million toward the needs of homeless

people in L.A. In the meantime, Lopez receives a Media Award and also acquires an apartment and music lessons for Ayers. Despite these good deeds, things go awry between the two men in a frightening scene of anger. In despair, Lopez confesses to his ex-wife, "I resign. I resign from everything." Her response is like gold, "You can't fix L.A. You're never going to cure Nathaniel. Just be his friend and show up."

In less dramatic scenes, Van Carter tries her best to fit in with the disciplined lifestyle of her new Sisters. She pulls weeds, prays and fasts—though against her will—and yet she openly confesses that the convent is her nightmare come true. When she joins the choir—again, against her will—she teaches the ragamuffin group a lesson that helps them harmonize as well as we Mennonites do. She tells them to listen to each other. Van Carter seems to hear her own advice and begins building relationships with Mary Robert, Mary Patrick and all the other "Mary's" in the choir, finally feeling that her life has purpose.

In developing friendships, nothing changes and everything does and this is the third truth of loneliness. Van Carter is still dressed in the formless clothing of a nun and hiding from a threatening boyfriend, but she is no longer fearful. Ayers still lives in poverty but he finds joy in a new friendship and, for Lopez, the world is no longer so desolate or bleak.

Perhaps these winter days are dragging by for you and the sunshine is blocked by clouds or darkness. I encourage you to reach out to someone else, to build a relationship whether for a season or for a lifetime. Start moving from the perpetual Monday night toward sleep-in Saturday.

The Soloist displays realistic, and sometimes graphic, scenes of the homeless lifestyle in L.A. This movie, rated PG-13, is not for children or the faint of heart. ❖

Stirrings