

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor. (Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Taonga, October 2005. Reprinted with their permission.)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a movie to tempt the sweet of tooth. What could be more enticing than a chocolate factory? And so the movie (based on the book by Roald Dahl) opens with the sweetest of offers, five lucky tickets to five lucky children to spend an entire day in a chocolate factory.

And this is not just any chocolate factory. This is Willie Wonka's famed factory, from which flows icecream that never melts and chewing gum that never loses flavour.

A worldwide buying frenzy is unleashed. Five lucky winners find five lucky tickets. Yet as the doors of the factory swing open, the sweetness of chocolate will become a set of scales on which human behaviour will be weighed.

The factory is sweeter than any chocoholic daydream. Chocolate pours down a waterfall to become a river of sweetness flowing through a gorgeously coloured garden. All the leaves and flowers are sweet delight. And did I forget to mention a fudge mountain?

But for four of the children, such sweetness and light serves only to expose their sourness. The casting is brilliant. The acting of Johnny Depp as Willie Wonka is as flawless as his teeth. Four children and four parents face the consequences of their greed and ambition. The movie offers a sweet toothed moral; "Actions, of parents and children, have consequences."

This leaves Charlie Bucket. And Charlie acts with all the sweetness of that mythical chocolate factory. Charlie will share his chocolate bars. Charlie will consider selling his lucky ticket to raise money for his poor family. Charlie will not leave his family, even for all the chocolate in the world. Any adult should glance at the children and grandchildren beside them in the movie theatre, praying for them to grow as sweet as Charlie.

But this movie is more than candy floss. Suck off the chocolate moral coating and you find plenty more to chew on.

Charlie is a boy made poor by the processes of industrialization. His grandfather has suffered the consequences of systemic industrial espionage. His father is made redundant, his job at the toothpaste factory preformed by a machine. The film, set in winter, offers a chilling insight and biting critique into the human experience of industrialization.

At times the movie loses plausibility. Contemporary viewers remain wary of trusting their children to any stranger offering sweets. And what about that 10 pound note, used to purchase one chocolate bar and no change given.

But the lingering taste is reminiscent of portions of the Christian gospel. Blessed are you who share your chocolate in poverty. Blessed are you when other children persecute you. Blessed indeed are you, who like Charlie, are made poor by the processes of industrialization. Blessed are you who find the dysfunction of your youth redeemed by the new community. Blessed are you, because yours is a place in a family of love.

Such is the Sermon on the Mount according to Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

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