

Anne and I saw a marvellous film last Monday night. *Lars and the Real Girl* is a story about loneliness, community, redemption, honesty and compassion. The story has a very quirky premise and one wonders how it could possibly work as a film. And yet it does. Without giving away the story, although knowing it would not diminish the experience, the Canadian film maker has shown us how a story can be told that transcends the obvious and takes the audience on a journey of humour, sadness, love and hope.

The film, set in wintry Northern Ontario, answers the question which is so often tritely put, "What would Jesus do?" The answer is quite simple, regardless of who you are, Jesus would accept you unconditionally. But it is not just a theological statement; it has to be lived out in the lives of people and within the life of a community. It is in fact, that spirit of unconditional acceptance in the lives of people in this film that makes the statement true and real.

One wonders at times why there is such a judgmental and critical spirit in our religion and our Christian lives? We can be so critical, of both ourselves, and of those around us. We tend to pass over the words of Jesus "do not judge lest you be judged" and "why do you see the speck in your brother's or sister's eye, but you won't see the log in your own eye?" When we read the strong words of Matthew chapters five to seven, which includes the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, all the references are to you and your life, to me and my life, not what your neighbour should, or should not do.

The journalist and writer G. K. Chesterton once said "It is not that Christianity has failed, it's that it has never really been tried." Perhaps that is because for centuries we have seen Christian faith as a set of beliefs that we give intellectual ascent to, rather than a way of transformation. We have more often been concerned about what people believed or did not believe, and failed to understand that the heart of Christian faith is the heart, and primarily **my** heart. It is much easier to criticise those around me for failing to meet the mark than it is to embrace them in their imperfections and release them from my criticism.

We know that is not just a matter of being nice and kind to people that brings about change and transformation, it begins as the film *Lars and the Real Girl* shows, by embracing my own imperfections and recognizing the fundamental value of another human being which starts with those closest to us. Someone once said, "I love humanity, it's people I don't care for." But really it is all about people and we meet people in communities. Perhaps that is where Christian faith most strongly expresses its truth and will flourish when communities embrace each other in unconditional love and acceptance.