

Manglehorn (2014)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 37 min.

Our content ratings (1-10); Violence 1; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath. This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-4

David Gordon Green does for Al Pacino what he also did for Nicolas Cage in *Joe*—provides an actor in decline an opportunity to return to his former glory. Mr. Pacino has over-acted in so many films the past few years that it is both a joy and a wonder that the director has managed to dial him back a few notches so that there is air to breathe for the other actors—and this includes the delightful Holly Hunter in a role that deserved to be filled out more in an otherwise good script.

Angelo J. Manglehorn is the locksmith in a Texas town to which he moved forty years ago. Sitting in his key-filled shop, he

reminds me of Martin the Cobbler in Tolstoy's great story "Where Love Is, God Is." Like Martin, Angelo is jaded about life, observing in the gravely narration, "I got nothing but frustration and disappointment." Not that his life is useless: we see him not only making keys in his shop, but going out on calls to rescue a child locked in a car by her distraught mother; making a duplicate key for a giant machine at a construction site; drilling into a safe for a person who apparently has lost the combination; and helping someone locked out of a house.

He has some casual friends with whom he spends time; flirts mildly with the pretty bank teller Dawn (Holly Hunter) when he makes his Friday deposit; sees occasionally his all too slick investment banker son Jacob (Chris Messina); enjoys taking out Jacob's daughter; and most of all, loves coming home to the fluffy white cat he adores. His problem is that he is stuck in the past mooning over the girl that got away, Clara. Each day he writes her a letter, some of which make up the film's narration. And each day he goes to his mail box, which curiously has a small active honeybee hive attached to its post, and takes out the contents, one of which is always an unopened returned letter he has written to Clara.

Although he had married Jacob's mother after Clara had left him, he confesses that it was Clara, and not the mother whom he had loved. Manglehorn even has a rabid fan in the sleazy Gary, operator of a tanning parlor, who sometimes comes up to talk with him while he is sitting alone at a casino sticking coins into a slot machine. Gary feels indebted to Manglehorn because the latter had coached a Little League team to which he and Jacob had belonged when they were kids.

Manglehorn eventually goes out with Dawn, but on their second date he spoils things by obsessively talking about Clara. So much so that the distraught Dawn walks out of the blue collar restaurant to which he had brought her. Thus he lives up to the "mangle" part of his name. This is not his only trouble.

His beloved cat has refused to eat and has been vomiting, the veterinarian discovering it has swallowed a key and needs surgery. His son is being investigated for some of his financial dealings and asks for money. This culminates in Manglehorn at last taking drastic action, indeed, decisive action that leads him to cast aside everything that reminds him of the past, well symbolized by what he does with the letters and photographs of Clara and an old sailboat he had kept unused in his driveway. The Manglehorn that emerges is a new man, almost in the New Testament sense, although we see little of any faith guiding him. (Indeed, in a sad story about a nun and children in a boat, he declares he has given up believing in God!)

As he seeks to renew his relationships we can only wish him well—his encounter might not be that of Martin the Cobbler's, one with God, but we can surmise that God was close at hand during the change in Manglehorn's life.

This review with a set of discussion questions is in the June issue of Visual Parables. A subscription to the journal will also give you access to Lectionary Links, a feature for preachers that links a film to one or more lessons from the Common Lectionary.