

Movie Review – Ulee's Gold

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I am honored to be invited to share a book or film review with our Presbytery. There are so many choices, it is hard to know where to begin!

But I recently had the opportunity to watch a movie I haven't seen in several years, a quietly powerful film called *Ulee's Gold*, which hit theaters in 1997. Peter Fonda plays Ulysses "Ulee" Jackson, a Vietnam veteran, widower and beekeeper by profession, who lives in the panhandle of Florida and has been given the responsibility of caring for his two granddaughters while their father "Jimmy," Ulee's son, serves time in a Florida penitentiary. Jimmy's wife, "Helen," is a drug addict who has abandoned her daughters and family.

Jimmy asks his father, Ulee, to find Helen and rescue her from his partners, dangerous criminals who have kidnapped and drugged her in order to learn where he hid some cash after a heist. Ulee very reluctantly agrees, but soon discovers that helping her get clean is more than he can handle. And, he finds himself entangled with the two thugs who put his son in prison.

Contrasting with the turmoil in Ulee's family life is the steady rhythm he maintains in caring for his bees. It is a monastic existence; the soothing hum and unchanging schedule of feeding the bees, moving them between his bee yards, and extracting the honey—the highly desired Tupelo variety—structures Ulee's internal life so that he can guard his feelings of grief and anger, but also enables him to keep his family at a distance. Venturing outside his private world to help his son and daughter-in-law forces Ulee to take risks which open him to new possibilities for trust and peace.

Peter Fonda's performance in this film is nuanced and breathtaking, and the film is a multilayered exploration of family commitments, healing and redemption. Patricia Richardson (from *Home Improvement*) and a young Jessica Biel also shine. It is rated "R" for language, adult situations and violence.

--Delisa Buckingham-Taylor, Grace United Church, Fort Atkinson