On a recent thirteen-hour flight, I had the option to watch several academy award-winning films. After perusing the airline magazine reviews, and having heard that Vera Drake’s leading lady, Imelda Staunton, had been being nominated for best actress, I assumed it definitely would be a worthy choice.

The film is set in London, England, during the 1950’s, and focuses on a working class family whose matriarchal figure, Vera Drake, is a gracious, altruistic woman who spends most of her time, energy, and resources to help others. Throughout the movie, her munificence earns her the adoration of many who, having been aided by her, conclude that Vera Drake has a “heart of gold.” However, her immaculate reputation becomes soiled when her secret is revealed. Unbeknownst to her family, she has been performing abortions for over twenty years, internally justifying her efforts as “helping young girls out.” This stunning revelation is unveiled when authorities identify an abortion that Vera performed to be the cause of young woman’s near-death experience. This event, and others that follow, bring to Vera’s awareness that what she believed was morally right has had terrible consequences.

The raw and unsettling realities of abortion echo throughout this film, affecting both Vera Drake and the young women she assists. The viewer is left with an immediate and overwhelming empathy for Vera and for the young women in the film. These women represent women everywhere who in their anonymity are hurting. They hurt because they have been through an unspeakable pain, and they hurt because their hearts have become so raw that they can hardly bear the touch of memory.

While women have the legal right to choose to have an abortion, that choice is still immoral. Vera Drake illustrates how the choice of abortion holds far-reaching implications both for the person who performs abortion and for the one who undergoes abortion. It also explicitly discourages arguments in support of abortion by revealing its horrid truths. Vera disguised her motives in a moral framework that proved to be incorrect. The young women made a secret choice and ended up bearing the responsibility of an indescribable burden, which forever impacted them emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Worse, yet, the aborted children are amongst “the least of these,” and their rights are left inaudible. How often do we in our fallen humanity make choices, and only later realize their grave ramifications?

Today our society chooses to mask the unsightliness of abortion behind sanitary conditions, qualified doctors, and legal sanctions. However, the consequences of choosing abortion are factual and not so concealed in the reactions of those who exercised their choice. More importantly still, the harsh consequences of abortion call for a need for people everywhere to choose to shower the thousands of women who have survived this experience with love, compassion, and understanding. Let us also exercise those same attributes in all of the choices we make.

Vera Drake is rated R for depiction of strong thematic material.