

Encanto. The word and movie title seems to be everywhere. It is on everyone's mouths in my social circles at the moment, and all over my social media feed. Online many parents have attested to the fact that this movie is their child's newest obsession.

The word means enchantment in Spanish and enchanted everyone is...it just dropped into our Disney plus streaming platform a mere two months ago and has caught on like wildfire.

Have you seen Encanto? Hey! Have you seen Encanto? I just got done watching Encanto. Encanttttoooo tear emoji tear emoji tear emoji. My kid is obsessed with Encanto. The music in Encanto is so good! You need to watch Encanto!

Honestly, I've never been one to jump on TV trends...after all, it took me 8 years to finally watch Harry Potter...which the youth have made sure to give me a hard time about. But I finally gave in last weekend and cozied up to spend an hour and a half of my time watching an animated children's movie on Disney plus--giving this Encanto a try.

One of the things that stuck out to me the most was its diverse representation and strong women characters. This movie gives you a glimpse into the story and life of a family through the its matriarch—la familia Madrigal's ancestry tells quite a journey.

Now, don't worry, I won't give you too many spoilers, but here's the baseline of the plot that you learn of in the first couple minutes of the movie: we start with a glimpse into the past of the matriarch of the Madrigal Family- Abuela they so lovingly call her. When she was a young mother, a miracle happened for her. This miracle is symbolized by a flame on a candle that does not go out. A light in the darkness. Abuela sees this light as a blessing that gave her family the strength and hope they needed. This flame, this light is hope of the Madrigal family, for it provided hope when it was needed most.

This pastor was taking ferocious notes the minute I started watching. So. Much. Material. So many Epiphany parallels.

This season of Epiphany we will be following the texts of the lectionary reflecting on this notion of gift giving but with a twist. Following on the heels of Christmas, our scripture passages will offer us a chance to open up the presents that our faith gives us--the wonderful and surprising gifts of God in our lives --some we love, some that confuse us, and some we might never have put on our wish list!

The first week in January we followed the magi on their journey to see Jesus to pay him homage and present gold, frankincense and myrrh. Yet, even as we depart from that sacred night of gift giving in royal David's city, wonderment and joy still persist, God's light shines in the darkness, mystifying us even today.

Last week we flashed forward 30 years to Jesus's baptism, harkening us back to our own baptism, that reminds us that God claims us as we are, made us to be who we are, and loves us regardless of the mistakes we make. In our baptism we are engrafted, we become a part of the body of Christ. Like Christ, being known and claimed by God inherently thwarts us in community with one another to share gifts

with others as we have been lavishly gifted in our baptism. Our scripture reading this morning-- Paul's letter to the church in Corinth shows us that being a part of community is easier said than done. This week we look at the gift of community.

As enchanting as the miracle of Christ's birth and the light that broke into the world that still night in Bethlehem was, Epiphany begs us to approach the ordinary of our daily life of faith with such wonderment as well.

The Madrigal family in Encanto spends each day ever aware of this miracle that happened for them through the eternal candle that burns in the window in their home, the hope that their family was built upon. Over the years the Madrigal family grows in size and in blessings. They have this big, beautiful home that all the children and the grandchildren live in, and each are given a gift—a blessing—that is all their own.

They are commissioned to use their gifts to serve the beloved community. They were gifted this blessing of the light in a time of need and the lives of the Madrigal family sole purpose is to use those gifts to serve and strengthen the community as a way to honor the miracle.

The blood relatives each are given gifts of determining the weather, seeing into the future, speaking to animals, strength to move towers. In the community there is this great respect and focus on those who have gifts and those who do not..or who do not have the same types of gifts. And this reminds me of the divisions of the church in Corinth to who Paul writes to in our scripture reading today.

Rev. William Pender writes that when we approach Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, "we are reminded that problems and conflicts create the biggest headaches AND the best expressions of faith. The letters to the Corinthian Christians are loaded with profound and practical insight into how to live the Christian faith. But we only have these letters because things were so lousy—church people were fighting, disagreeing, treating each other poorly, dividing up into factions, having moral failures, and so forth."<sup>1</sup>

While many of us turn to the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians on Wedding Days, Paul's intent was far from a dreamy day full of soon to be marital bliss. Unity with many divisions among Christians in this young church is what Paul addresses in most of 1 Corinthians. You see Paul has founded this community, trained leaders on his departure and like a typical church planter, he has moved on to found more communities. This satellite church however, started having issues once Paul was no longer there. In chapter 12, we learn that within the church, people were boasting and bragging about being more spiritual than the other based on their spiritual gifts--speaking in tongues is more spiritual than words of prophecy and words of prophecy makes one more spiritual than those doing miracles. To have this outwardly observed gift was what made someone "spiritually superior". Paul's letter to them draws them away from this superiority and leads them to focus on two things: 1) God- the giver of the gifts--the source of their unity in diversity and 2) the motivation behind using these God given gifts---*for the common good.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fpcknox.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Sermon-1-20-2013-Pender.pdf>

Paul starts from the beginning he says Spirituality itself is a gift from God. That whoever says Jesus is Lord does so only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith itself is a gift from God. And it is this very thing that we all have in common. Our unity in affirming that Jesus is Lord.

1 Cor. 12:4-11: 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the Page 3 of 4 discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Paul emphasizes that we are many, we are diverse, and we are different, but that doesn't put us above or below any others, it just means we are different. Our diversity reflects a diverse God. Our unity reflects a unifying Trinitarian God, three different things unified in one. And all these gifts we are given, God's light--the manifestation of the Spirit in us—is for the *common good*. How we receive and use these gifts is important.

When you are watching Encanto, you can't help but be drawn the members of the family that were...well..pushed aside because they were different. The focus was so much on the gifts, and not the person. And those that had gifts found their identity solely in serving the community out of duty of keeping the family strong. Those that didn't have gifts, or who had gifts that made people uncomfortable were pushed aside. People didn't know what to do with them if they didn't meet the expectations what serving and upholding the family name looked like. And while this idea of serving the community with your gifts is beautiful and inherently theological, I can't help but notice the key here. Motivation. When we are given gifts, do we use them to serve God out of duty? Or do we use them because it stems from our gratitude?

In the movie, the family begins to notice that they were exhausting themselves on the sole purpose of using their gifts to uphold the family name, the hope and legacy of the *family* that rested on supporting the community. Suddenly gifts became a burden, their sole identity was focused only upholding the family. It is the difference between using your gifts to *serve* the community and using your gifts for the *good of community*.

But the plot thickens when the candlelight in the window begins to dim...this once strong structure of a home the family worked so hard to maintain, begins to crack, because their relationships need tending. They were so focused on using their gifts--the service, the work of the community, that they forgot to look to the heart, the good of the community.

We can so easily see our gifts from God as that of duty, rather than extending from our gratitude for God's grace. Serving our community with our gifts becomes something we begrudgingly do or check it off a list so that we feel like we have "done" what we "need" to do. But when we do that, we miss the point. When our lives become so full of the things we "have"

to do, we lose sight of the things we “get” to do that invite us into the joy of glorifying God in our daily lives. That invite us from transactional relationships to transformational relationships.

Often, we think that if we serve our community or if we are meeting a perceived need then it is for the good of the community, and sometimes that is not always the case. Sometimes, we can easily grasp the concept of doing things for the community for the betterment of the community, that we miss the person, the actual relationship, the actual needs. And in turn we miss the opportunity ourselves to be served. It is here, when we seek to serve God not out of duty, but out of our gratitude, when we serve the community for the *common good*, that we experience the true gift of community.

We are a community of people who by the grace of God are able to profess that Jesus is Lord and are constantly scrambling to make sense of how that changes our lives. The beloved community of God is rich in diversity, but often is the most divided community there is because we can't get past each other's differences, or our culture has put us in structures that we find comfortable, but damage how we relate to one another.

I wholeheartedly believe that God gave us each other to help us discern and grow and understand God's love for us more clearly, God gave us each other to provoke us and challenge us into new ways of thinking about our faith and to draw us to more authentically serve God for the *good* of the community. Our communities, even beyond St. John's are a gift in and of themselves, and my hope would be for us to discern how God might be calling us to live into our baptisms and share the light of God, share our gifts and blessings not simply out of duty...but for the true good of all. It is there that the gift of community enriches our faith with such wonder as was present the night God's light broke into a chaotic world leading magi to a baby in a town in Judea.

As we look to tomorrow for Martin Luther King Day, the day we celebrate and honor a man whose vision for God's beloved community was some of the most memorable proclamations of God's love, my prayer is that we are able to see beyond our social pressures, our divisions and all that limits us. And may we, in this season of post-gift giving turn our hearts to a God who gives us the gift of light in the darkness, and the gifts to share that light with the world, for the good of the community.