

Even Mirabel Has a Gift

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January 16, 2022. Today's sermon is about gifts. Just as everyone in the Madrigal family in the new Disney movie "Encanto" has a special gift to contribute to the community, so Paul writes in our scriptures for today that there are many gifts among the Corinthians, and all are important.

Readings: [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#), [John 2:1-11](#)

*** Transcript ***

The new Disney movie "Encanto" — we just talked about just a little bit — is in one sense a fanciful tale about a magical family where everyone has a gift that makes them stand out from the others. In another sense, it's a story of a community's trauma, and survival, and resilience. The Columbian people have been through a lot, and the fact that they are alive at all is a miracle in itself. They survived because of the family Madrigal, led by Abuela, who brought them to a place of safety and created a beautiful house and community protected by magic.

Everyone in the family Madrigal has a special gift to contribute to keep that community going, and when each child reaches a certain age, they are given a magical doorknob that opens the door to their own unique gift: strength, beauty, creativity, healing, transformation. All of the Madrigals have a gift — except, it seems, for Mirabel. When she tries to use her doorknob, the magic appears to fail for the very first time. Mirabel, everyone says, does not have a gift. And while Mirabel's parents support and encourage her, Abuela and some of her siblings continually remind her that she really doesn't have anything to share, and her best contribution to the family is to stay out of the way.

In our second reading today, Paul is writing to the people of the way, followers of Jesus, who are trying to figure out who belongs, how to live together, and most of all, what it means to be a follower of Christ. They are, Paul sees, discussing these things among themselves, and as often happens in this new community, they have begun to argue about who is worthy to belong and who has the most value. In the process, some among them attempt to rank the gifts of those in community, lifting up those who have more valuable gifts. It's tempting to see the showier gifts as more important, and the Madrigals struggle with this too. In "Encanto" Mirabel's sister Isabela prides herself in her ability to make perfect flowers and spectacular beauty, and she seems to delight in holding herself above Mirabel in particular, and the Corinthians are no different. Like the Madrigals, the Corinthians have invested a lot of energy in determining whose gifts are the most important.

As Paul watches the growing community in Corinth, he realizes that they have missed the point, and he seeks to help them understand who they are. In today's reading, Paul writes that there are many gifts among the Corinthians, and all are important. All of the gifts the Corinthians have, that we have, come from God. There are no right or wrong or better or worse gifts, Paul tells us, because they all have unique value. In "Encanto" no two Madrigals have the same gift, and everyone is overjoyed to watch as young Antonio Madrigal opens his door to discover that he can talk to animals! It's interesting to note that there are several lists of spiritual gifts in Paul's letters and other places in the scriptures, and each list is different.

Paul also makes it clear that the gifts God has given are not intended for our own status and benefit, but for the good of creation. He writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good.*" Abuela reminds the Madrigals often that the gifts they have are essential for the community's

very survival. Mirabel's sister Luisa has unbelievable strength, and Mirabel realizes that she is beginning to crack under the pressure of literally carrying the weight of the world (or at least a couple of pianos and a few donkeys) on her shoulders. This feeling that it all depends on you can cause a lot of pressure, and certainly the Corinthian leaders feel this as their community grows and faces challenges and oppression.

That is why it's so important to remember that the gifts God gives us, unique as they are, are not meant to make us stand out, but to bring us into faithful, just, loving community. No one gift — no one of us — can stand on our own. And we aren't meant to. This week we remember Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the message of justice and community that he shared. He had profound gifts for preaching, encouraging, speaking truth to power, calling for God's justice in this world. And with him, behind him, before him, were so many others whose gifts were equally essential to the change that the Spirit was bringing through those days of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. And the Spirit continues to work through the gifts of those seeking God's mercy, justice, and healing in our still-broken world.

We often think of Reverend Dr. King as a hero whose words inspired thousands across the country, and that is certainly true. But not everyone saw it that way at the time. He wrote some of his most profound words from a jail cell after being arrested, and called in those around him who wished that the truths he spoke about racism, classism, and economic injustices were not so hard to swallow. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s gifts were actually seen as threats to those in power, to the point that he had an FBI file and was ultimately assassinated. Truth be told, we generally still prefer the easier truths, spoken in soft, gentle words and tones, to the clearer prophetic voices that reveal the broken places and pain we would rather not face.

Paul in his letter makes it clear that all gifts, not just those that feel convenient or easy, are given by God for the good of the community. Like those challenged by Reverend Dr. King's truths, the Madrigals have their struggle with this too. Mirabel and her family notice that there are cracks in their house, the magic seems to be faltering, and it gets so bad they can't ignore it any longer — although Abuela certainly tries. As Mirabel figures out what is causing the problem and finds a solution, she uncovers secrets about her Uncle Bruno, discovering that he hid away after his gift for prophecy seemed to predict the very destruction they are now facing. Bruno's inconvenient gift, perceived as a threat, was locked away for years.

Mirabel is not daunted, and convinces Bruno to delve into the truth instead of hiding from it. In so doing, she finds that she does have a gift after all. Mirabel has a capacity to face fear and doubt with courage, and call people together in ways that no one knew were possible. And in the end, not just the Madrigals, but all of those they had been protecting, join together in the process of rebuilding their community on a stronger foundation. In a new way, because of Mirabel, Abuela learns that everyone's gifts have value, and all of the Madrigals learn just how important community is.

All gifts, not just those that feel convenient or easy, are given by God for the good of the community. Just because we don't recognize or understand a gift doesn't mean that it's not essential. And it is only in community that we can truly discover and live into the gifts God has given us. Paul says over and over that the gifts of the whole community are necessary for its well-being. And in our gospel today, when the wine runs out at the wedding of Cana, Mary helps Jesus see that his time has come after all, and as frivolous as it seems, all of the guests benefit as the celebration of joy and love continues with the best wine. Our community can help us see the gifts we have when we may not yet see them for ourselves.

There are many gifts, but the same Spirit, given by God for the common good. And everyone has gifts to share, even Mirabel.

Thanks be to God.

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