

I know we aren't supposed to talk about Bruno...but we're going to, and if you have no idea what that sentence meant, don't worry, I will explain. Last year, Disney did what Disney always seems to do. They perfectly encapsulated some of the most fundamental truths about life that connected with adults so deeply that it left them teary and worn out by the end of the film, while simultaneously entertaining kids beyond belief and providing an ear worm of a song with enough oomph to drive their parents crazy with the 8,000 request to hear the same some over and over.

If you've seen *Encanto*, you know what I'm talking about, and if you haven't, I'll give you a quick rundown. *Encanto* is a story of the family Madrigal, who through the wonders wrought by a magical candle, are a family in whom each member upon reaching a certain age is bestowed a gift, a gift that helps provide life, sustenance, and strength to the town where they live and the people of their community. There's Luisa, imbued with superhuman strength, Dolores who can hear anything from a mile away, Pepa who can control the weather with her emotions, Julieta who can heal you with food, Antonia who can talk to animals, Isabela who can create limitless amounts of beautiful plants, and then there's Bruno... Bruno's gift is complicated, because Bruno can see the future.

Throughout the beginning of the movie, his niece, Mirabel is constantly told, and *sung to*, that the family does not talk about Bruno. He had a vision long ago that threatened to destroy the family, and after that vision no one has seen him, the assumption being that Bruno has fled and gone off to live on his own where his visions won't threaten anyone's peace and tranquility. Yet, as their family's powers start to crumble, Mirabel gets the sense that Bruno is the key to saving them all.

What Mirabel eventually discovers is that Bruno never actually left the house. He didn't flee. He didn't disappear. He hid. He hid within the walls of the house so that he could be near his family still and so he could, from behind the scenes, patch the literal cracks that were seeping into the house. He was still using his gifts, but in a way that no one could see them, experience them, or know they were being impacted by them. When Mirabel finds Bruno, he is so petrified of someone knowing where he is and what has happened to her that it takes an extraordinary effort just to get him to talk, let alone move out of the walls. For Bruno, the far easier thing was to take his gifts, hole up in the walls, and hide away so that he didn't disturb, bother, or bug anyone else after all that he had been through.

When you watch the movie and hear Bruno's story, hear what his other family members have to say, and sing, about him, you can't blame him

for his choice to hide in the walls. If your entire family decided that you were a person not to be spoken of, I think there would definitely be a consideration of finding the best hiding place possible. However, since this is a Disney movie, when it all works out in the end and Bruno is reunited with his family, they all realize that hiding, well...it's never the best option, for anyone...even if it gets you a fabulous song out of it.

I don't think any songs have been written about the Gerasene demoniac, or Legion, as he calls himself, as evidenced by Geoffrey telling me how *not fun* choosing hymns for this week was, however, if there is anyone that can kind of understand Bruno's plight, I think in some ways it would be Legion. For him, hiding, staying away, are completely viable options, no matter what phase of his life he is in. For him, at all turns, the best option seems to be to cover himself, hide himself away, and keep clear of anyone or anything that could cause a problem.

Jesus comes upon a situation this morning that honestly sounds like it could come straight from a horror film. He and the disciples have crossed the Sea of Galilee and have entered the land of the Gerasenes. This was a territory kind of in the middle of nowhere, and was an area heavily populated by Gentiles, so this is not really normal territory for Jesus and the disciples to be wandering into. Upon their arrival, they are greeted with a

sight that one can imagine was downright terrifying. Passing by, or through, the local cemetery, a man emerges who clearly is plagued by demons. His clothes are in tatters, his wrists and ankles most likely bruised and bloody from the chains which have attempted to keep him in one place, he is haggard and worn out, and screaming at Jesus who has just tried to exorcise these demons from him. It's a scene that most of us would flee from immediately because it doesn't seem safe or able to be contained.

Yet, Jesus asks this man a question. He speaks to him humanely and he wants to know just one thing, what is his name. It's a simple question, but a powerful one, for by knowing something's name, one is able to exert power over it. Jesus hadn't been able to exorcise these demons initially, but now that he knows who they are, Legion, he can rid this man of them. We're not going to get into what happens next, because I want to get to the end of the story, but suffice it to say, Jesus heals this man, and I feel really, really, really bad for these pigs.

Word travels extremely fast throughout the area telling of what Jesus has done and the fate of these pigs. People flock to where this all went down and when they find this man, the man they knew only to be chained to tombs and tortured, in his right mind, clothed, and sitting before Jesus listening intently, they are filled with immense fear. They ask Jesus to leave,

intimidated and afraid of the power he wields. He agrees, but this man has one last request for Jesus. He wants to go with them. He wants to leave this land where people have only known him as the wild man in the cemetery and go with Jesus wherever he is off to next. He doesn't just ask Jesus, he begs, and Jesus tells him...no. Instead, Jesus tells him he must return to his home, a place he probably hasn't been in a very long time, and tell everyone what God has done for him. Jesus essentially commissions this man to be an apostle, to spread the good news of what Jesus has done, so that people beyond Galilee will be a part of the flock.

There is so much fear present in the end of this text. The people of this community are afraid of the change that has been wrought in this man, afraid of the immense power Jesus has, afraid of the change Jesus can cause. This man is afraid of what his life will be like now, afraid to go back to a world he hasn't known for so long and try to be this new person, afraid to face the questions, afraid of what people's reactions will be, afraid of what comes next now that he has his life back. On the surface, we might think that his request to go with Jesus is sweet and simple, and yet, beneath the surface, it's not. At the heart of this question, this man wants to do what Bruno did, hide away so that he doesn't have to face the questions, the strange looks, the difficulty of re-emerging back into his life. He wants to

essentially say to his community, I'll get out of here, I won't scare you anymore, and you can all happily say, "We don't talk about Legion."

I think in a lot of ways we can relate to this instinct, to run, to hide, to want to stay away from the questions, to simply stay in the place that is safe, comfortable, without risk, particularly when it comes to our faith. I would imagine that we all have our stories, maybe not as dramatic as Legion's, but we all know the ways in which faith, God, our church communities have changed us, have had a deep and lasting impact on our lives, but more often than not if given the choice, we don't talk about it. We're worried we might offend someone or people may think we're weird or people may ask too many probing questions or we simply don't want to let people in to something that personal to us. We don't want to be commissioned by Jesus to go out and talk to people. We want to stay put, behind our walls and say we don't talk about Jesus, no no no.

But if that's the case, then what really is the point of being changed? I mean yeah it's great for us, but if it only impacts us and doesn't impact the world around us, then isn't that a woeful waste of God's love? To just hoard it for ourselves and say, this is my story, my journey, and no one needs to know about it. I mean, we spend an awful lot of time wondering why people don't come to church or think faith matters much anymore, but have we ever

considered that part of that is because we aren't willing to share how deeply we have been changed by our faith, by our community in Christ. I mean if someone asked you why you go to church, the easy answer would be, yeah because it's something I've always done, my family is there, faith is important to me. That's not an answer that's going to inspire anyone to explore what God has done and is doing in the world. But if we say, let me tell you about the impact being in community has had on me, let me tell you how faith has stirred my heart and changed my life, that's different.

If Legion had gone off with Jesus, sure people might have heard his story, but they also would have had Jesus right there in front of them to see and experience. No extra people would be changed necessarily because of him. But by staying, by being willing to share and show how much Jesus had changed his life, who knows how many countless people were stirred to figure out just what this Jesus thing was all about. We can't leave it all up to Jesus. I mean, Jesus does a lot, but we also have to too. If Mirabel had never hauled Bruno out of the walls, their family may have crumbled. If Legion had gone with Jesus, who knows who might not have heard the message. If we hide, if we keep to ourselves, who knows what or who we might be missing out on. So we have to decided are we not going to talk about Jesus, or are we going to come out of hiding? **AMEN!!!**