

I know we're not supposed to...but...we're going to talk about Bruno. Ok, if that sentence meant nothing to you, let me back up a little bit. We've all got our comfort movies right? Those movies we will watch whenever they're on, will put on when we've had a bad day, will watch when we need something to fill us and sooth us when it feels like everything has gone haywire. Over the last few years, my comfort movie has become *Encanto*, Disney's animated movie about a family living in the mountains of Columbia whose magical powers keep their town safe, secure, and thriving. I watch this movie on an almost weekly basis, I watched it on all of our flights to and from Greece, it brings me peace, and it also brings me ear worms in the form of music like, "We Don't Talk about Bruno."

At the heart of *Encanto* lies the family Madrigal, each of them endowed with some sort of gift that can be used for the good of all, except for Mirabel, who for reasons unknown didn't receive a gift as a child. The red thread that seems to run through the movie is that there is nothing more important to any of them than family. Their family is what brought them here, it's what they aim to protect. They love one another, care for another, and always aim to put the good of the family above all else. Even when there are conflicts, the underlying tone seems to be, but we're family and that's what counts. It's a beautiful message...until you realize about

halfway through the movie that in some ways this family has not put their money where their mouths are, at least not when it comes to one member of their family, Bruno.

Any time his name gets brought up, people are told to shush, with emphatic statements of, “We don’t talk about Bruno!” Through the wonder of Disney song, you eventually learn that Bruno’s gift was seeing the future, and that gift resulted in him seeing things that people didn’t want to hear, causing fractures within the family and the community, and so one day, Bruno disappeared, feeling that the best thing for his family would be to banish himself, and contrary to the Madrigal family mantra of family first and foremost, they let him go. They didn’t search for him, they let him leave, deciding that the actual best thing for the family is to forget he even existed and forget every prophecy he ever made. It seems to fly in the face of everything they stand for, and yet, until young Mirabel grows up to question just what in the world is going on in her family, no one says anything about it. Now there are a world of other things that happen before the movie’s end, but I don’t want to spoil it, and I want us to sit with this uncomfortable dichotomy that sometimes we can profess to believe something so ardently and then when faced with an actual situation that

pushes us to stand up for that thing, we sometimes falter, and not just us, but actually...even Jesus...

I'll be perfectly honest, it feels a bit like cruel and unusual punishment that I have to preach on my least favorite gospel on my birthday, but woefully the lectionary doesn't orbit around my schedule, so here we are. Now, there are a myriad of ways that we could dance around the discomfort that this gospel causes. We could say that Jesus was having a bad day, we've all said things we don't mean when we're cranky. We could say any number of things about this woman to come up with a reason to justify Jesus' behavior towards her, because well we're human and blaming women when they get treated badly is a go to move sometimes. We could say it didn't happen, though this story's presence in Matthew, Mark, and early non-canonical texts would say otherwise. We could say those things, or we could just say the reality, we believe and confess that Jesus was fully divine *and fully human*, and this text seems to drive home that Jesus had some moments where, yeah, he was fully human, with all of our foibles, failures, and straight up meanness. Jesus gets it wrong here, let's just get that out there. Honestly, Jesus falls a bit pray to the error of the Madrigal family, he fails to practice what he preaches, and in the process, he demeans this woman in harsh terms that make you want to recoil.

So let's set this up here, Jesus has this lengthy back and forth with the Pharisees about what defiles. They're all up in arms about the disciples eating without washing their hands, they're unclean and it's vexing the Pharisees that they're dealing with this guy claiming to bring the kingdom of God when his own followers don't even follow the basic rules! Jesus tells them, the boundary between clean and unclean doesn't really matter, none of the boundaries set up by humans really matter, what matters is what comes from your heart, the words you speak, the actions you show, those are the things that can defile because they can harm others, the rest of it is just fodder for annoying and petty disputes.

Jesus and the disciples then, for once, leave Galilee and head north into the area of Tyre and Sidon, which is prime Gentile territory, which begs the question: what exactly did they expect to find there?! It would have been like me going to Athens and being stunned by how many Greek people there were. As they are walking, a voice cries out, proclaiming Jesus as the Lord, the Son of David and begging for help for her daughter. Jesus can't get this kind of recognition and faith on a good day in Galilee and yet here amongst the Gentiles, he is immediately believed in, so the time has come, will he practice what he just preached to the Pharisees. He said that our

hearts, our words are what defile us, that boundaries can be obliterated, so what does he do? He decides to not talk about Bruno...

The Jesus we are faced with seems callous, harsh, and a little cruel. At first he simply ignores her, when the disciples tell him to do something about this, he says, she's not his problem, he's not here for her kind, when she kneels before him pleading for his daughter's life, he calls her a dog. Apparently some boundaries do matter, and the words that come out of our mouths can do harm. Yet, this woman persists, she pleads, she argues, she fights back, and finally...Jesus realizes...here is a woman of deep faith and he heals her daughter. That could be the end of the story, but what happens after this is a seismic shift in Jesus' ministry. From here on out, Jesus recognizes that his call is to *all* of God's children, the kingdom is inbreaking for *everyone*, that it's time to talk about Bruno, welcome him in and love him, because there is no partiality when it comes to God's children, he is there for everyone. Meaningless human boundaries are only there to be obliterated by the Son of God.

I think part of why this text is such a struggle is because it calls us into deep account for how we live our own lives and how we live out our faith within them. On the one hand, there is the grace of hey, even Jesus messed this thing up every now and again, but on the other hand is the deep call out

that he also worked to learn from that mistake and rethink what it said about his calling, his identity, and who God is in the world. Far too often, we are called to account by the world to put our money where our mouths are, our faith where our feet are. How many of when we are here find it easy to profess that God loves everyone? That God's grace is for all? How many of us when asked what it is that we believe would profess that God is a God of love? But then...what do we do when confronted with putting that belief into action. When voices rise up against the rights and safety of our transgender siblings? When mocking tones are thrown out about people's pronouns and what a nonbinary identity means? When every day more and more of our black and brown siblings are murdered just for existing? When people rail that the poor, destitute, and homeless just need to go out and find a job because everyone is hiring? Where is our faith then? Where is our believe, our confession that God loves all, that's God's grace and welcome is for all? Suddenly, we don't want to talk about any of those things, or worse yet, our voices *join* them and in a feat of amazing mental gymnastics we believe that our words don't conflict with our faith at all.

Jesus calling this woman a dog was derogatory and demeaning, and how many times have words just like that come out of our own mouths about or towards our siblings? Slurs, slander, and just flat our mean words

said with zero thought to our faith because somehow we've convinced ourselves that we can profess that God is love while also believing that that love is only for some and certainly not for others, not for the Brunos we have no interest in talking about, let alone acknowledging.

There are *a lot* of differences between us and Jesus, but the biggest one brought to bear here is that Jesus was willing to learn, willing to change, willing to adapt his calling when confronted with reality, and that is just not what we like to do. When confronted with where the rubber of our faith meets the road of our life, we have a tendency to shut our ears and close our eyes and say no thank you, we're uninterested in that, content to stay in our world where we can hate our siblings and love God at the same time. But as Jesus said to the Pharisees, it is the things that come out our hearts that defile and therefore, no, we cannot hate God's children and love God simultaneously, as much as we claim we can.

So yes, this is the gospel I like least and it is my birthday, but while it is my least favorite, it comes with my most ardent birthday wish, that all of God's people may be loved, seen, and cherished for who they are. Just as Jesus came to extend a word of grace to the Canaanite woman, so may we learn from our mistakes and do the same to those we have shunned. May we open our hearts and let our mouths talk about Bruno. **AMEN!!!**