

At the Movies: 2. Encanto
Mark 5:24-34
August 26, 2022
Pastor Tami Luckhardt

I recently returned to work after a couple of weeks away. The first week, our family celebrated the marriage of our youngest daughter. The week following the wedding, Jerry and I hosted our son's family of 5 in our home. With our middle daughter's family living just 7 doors down the street, we had one week with all 5 grandsons on the same street. This created many opportunities for play dates. Our oldest 2 grandsons, Oliver (8) and Parker (6), are at the age where they are starting to compare themselves and their gifts to each other. Oliver is a naturally gifted hockey player and so he spent most of our outside time on his rollerblades. And Parker is a Lego genius. There was always a Lego set amid outdoor play. Over the course of the week, what we discovered was that Oliver was envious of Parker's Lego skills and Parker was envious of Oliver's hockey skills. So, we spent time with both boys explaining how they both have different, but special gifts. And how boring the world would be if we all had the same exact gift and how beautiful our family was because of their gift. But most importantly, how much we loved them for who they are. I suspect this will be a conversation that will continue over the years.

We continue today in our summer message series *At the Movies* with a message based on the 2021 Disney musical, *Encanto*. I first saw it last Christmas as we watched it with four of our grandsons and I remember thinking, this would be a great storyline to use in our summer movie series. The music is composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda of Hamilton fame. I mean, come on! If for no other reason, watch it for the music because it's magical!

One of the reasons we do a series like this is to help us recognize the gospel message in the world around us. This movie holds lessons in faith for both adults and children alike for what it means to belong, what it means to have faith, and what it means to wait. So how about you? Are you waiting for something? Peace in a relationship, escape from situation, a new or better job, clarity on meaning of your life's circumstances? Maybe you are in need of belonging, or maybe you are waiting for that sense of belonging for someone else in your life, a friend, a loved one, a child who is hurting or feeling "less than" and so their hurt is your hurt. Maybe you're wondering, "is it too late for a miracle?"

Today we will meet two women who ask that same question. We'll see the similarities in their circumstances *and* in their solutions that will help us find the courage and boldness to step out towards Jesus in faith. One woman is found in the Gospel of Mark and the other is the main character in today's movie, *Encanto*. So, as we enter into the world of scripture and film, I pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to you today about whatever it is that you are waiting for. And whether it is for you or someone else, may you be encouraged to seek it with courage and boldness.

Let's start with a brief synopsis of the movie. *Encanto* (meaning charmed or enchanted) takes place in the 1950 Columbian village of Encanto and follows the story of a girl named Mirabel who was born in the very special, very gifted Madrigal family. This movie tackles intergenerational trauma and the pressure to uphold family expectations among complicated family dynamics and relationships. This family is special because at a certain age each member of the family receives a special gift (or a superpower) that is meant to contribute to the well-being of the family as well as to help the community. For example, Mirabel's sister, Luisa, has the gift of super strength and her sister, Isabella has the ability to create beauty wherever she goes. They live in an enchanted house named Casita. Casita is kind and very helpful towards

the family, using its ability to rearrange its features to suit the family's needs or aid them in their daily routines. The Casita deeply cares about the Madrigals and always puts their safety and well-being first.

When the time came for Mirabel to receive her gift, the community gathered around her in anticipation, but the magical door behind which the gift was hidden, vanished before their very eyes and Mirabel did not receive a gift. And so, she remains “normal”, miracle-less in this miraculous family. She is positive and helpful but is still considered to be “less than”, shamed by the rest of the family and the community. People look down on her and she looks down on herself as well.

The movie begins several years after this heartbreaking event, on the night when her younger cousin, Antonio is set to receive his gift. But on this night, Antonio (as well as the entire community) is worried that the same thing that happened to Mirabel might happen to him. Well, good news! Antonio touches his doorknob, the door opens and his gift is revealed, the ability to talk with animals. Everyone is excited, and frankly relieved, that the miracle of the gifts has continued and so a great party ensues. But Mirabel, understandably, has mixed emotions about this. She is happy for her cousin but now she is the only one in the family without a special gift. And when the family gathers for a family photo (without her) she wonders, “Am I too late for a miracle?”

That question may be on your mind as well. Are you waiting for your chance to belong, to feel loved and included? How often do you pray, and plead, and beg for God to perform something extraordinary in your life? This song captures those losses, hurts, and slights in life where we feel like we’re not getting what we need, how we feel left out or less than, or feel like we’re on the outside looking in, may be even a little desperate.

This question must have been on the mind of the woman in our gospel reading today as well. This heartbreaking yet, inspiring story is found not only in Mark but also in Matthew and Luke, indicating that it is important and needs to be told.

To set the scene, Jesus had received a desperate message from Jairus, a high synagogue official. His 12-year-old daughter is sick and dying. Will Jesus come and heal her? Of course, he will! Everything we know about Jesus says he would do that for anyone, but Jairus is a man of great personal influence and power. He’s a mover and a shaker in that community. If Jesus had a public relations director, the Jairus visit would have been at the very top of the day’s itinerary. It would have been highlighted in bright yellow and circled in red Sharpie with a few exclamation marks. And why? Because it demonstrated how rapidly Jesus’ image is rising in the eyes of his fellow Jews. Mark tells us Jairus “falls at his feet” and begs Jesus to help him. This was beyond extraordinary. The leader of the synagogue was an important man. For one man to prostrate himself before another was a sign of absolute helplessness.

So, on that day more than most, Jesus is a man with a mission. You can picture him striding purposefully down the street, his disciples calling out, “Make way, make way for Rabbi Jesus!” And around that army of disciples is the surging crowd: voices calling out, hands reaching out to touch him. It’s holy bedlam. And hidden within that rowdy crowd, is a woman. Not a powerful or famous woman, but one who has a very personal reason for seeking Jesus. She is sick. She has been sick for 12 long years. She has spent all her money on every sort of doctor, but no one and nothing has been able to help. This new rabbi, with his very public healing powers, is her last hope.

Due to the common understanding of blood in the first century, this woman would have been excluded from the community and from her family. If she was lucky, her family might have sent her a little food every once in a while, but if not, she would have been begging on the streets. This woman was the very picture of alienation, desperation, and loneliness. She longed to be healed of her condition. But even more than that, she longed to be reconciled with her community... to no longer be an object of shame and pity but to belong! And like Mirabel, she would have been seen as someone less-than, an outcast, someone who has "something wrong with her" But then, also like Mirabel, she decided to take action for herself.

That morning, she covered her head so no one would recognize her. She pressed her way through to the front of the crowd and there in the midst of the pushing and shoving, not assuming in any way that she was worthy of a personal visit with Jesus, she reached out and just managed to brush the edge of Jesus' clothing. She was acting on her faith, faith that by just touching his edge of clothing, she would be healed. As a powerful feeling swept over her, she knew in that instant she had been healed. It was miracle. This is the only miracle recorded in the Gospels that happened without Jesus' consent. Every other miracle tells us that Jesus saw, spoke or acted first. But this time was different. This woman took matters into her own hands trusting that her faith in Jesus was power enough.

And then the unexpected happened. Jesus stopped in his tracks and looked around and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" And *"the woman, full of fear and trembling came forward out of the crowd. Knowing what had just happened to her, she fell down in front of Jesus and told him the whole truth. And he responded, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease."* (Mark 5:33-34) *Daughter*, he called her *daughter*. Not the typical way Jesus addressed someone he was healing. And he not only healed her body, but he also healed her broken relationships. He welcomed her into his own spiritual family. *Go in peace ... what blessed words for a woman who has known so little peace for such a long time.*

Maybe you recognize yourself in this story and long to hear these words spoken to you. Maybe you've tried to reconcile your situation yourself only to fail or be rejected or rebuffed. Or maybe you cling tightly to everything and allow no one in. I know I have the tendency to do that. This week the church staff will be spending a few days, off site, on an annual staff retreat where we will learn more about working together as colleagues, how to lean into each of our gifts so we are the strongest team possible. We'll also finalizing plans for the upcoming fall season and dig deeper into our faith stories. In preparation for this event, we are all spending some time with the Enneagram. The Enneagram is a personality typography that describes 9 different personality types. And my type? I'm a "Perfectionist." Perfectionists have a high internal standard for correctness, and we expect ourselves to live up to those standards. I feel an incredible of personal responsibility that things are done right. I do everything I can to avoid making mistakes or losing self-control. I have a friend with this same personality type and she calls us, "The Control Sisters." As a perfectionist, I have a hard stepping out in faith. I struggle with releasing control of my life-even though I know in my head, I never had control of my life. That's why every morning, before my feet hit the floor I pray, "Lord, I offer my life to you."

So, Mirabel as she sets out on her own journey to find her way to belonging and self-worth. But with every step Mirabel takes in this pursuit, it comes at a cost to another family member. And by the end of the movie, every family has lost their special powers and even their magical house has crumbled into ruins. Finally, Mirabel realizes that the true miracle is not the extraordinary gifts that her family members possess, but rather the ordinary ways in which they can show each other how they love, care and support for one another. And they realize that this is what gave Casita it's magic and so they work together and rebuild their home! The miracle that she

was yearning for had been around her this whole time. It was all of them, coming together, loving each other and embracing their true selves, unconditionally and without reservations.

The gospel message for today is this: *Jesus gives His full attention to anyone who presses forward with faith.* In James we were told: "Come near to God and God will come near to you." But the question is, are you desperate enough, like the woman in our gospel story, to do that? For 12 years she had used all the resources, ideas, favors and time and now, she was desperate. In Jeremiah 29 God says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." In *The Secret of Christian Joy*, Vance Havner wrote: "Mind you, this woman was shy and timid. She was not in habit of elbowing her way through the crowds, but when we are desperate enough, we'll do anything to get through to God. Our Lord said, "if any one thirst, let them come to me and drink." (John 7:37) Thirst is not casually wanting a drink of water. When we really thirst, we must have water and have it in abundance and we will find our way through any obstacle to get it.

So are you ready to release control of your life to the Living God? Are you ready to release your desires, plans and expectations to God and ask God to align your heart with God's heart? This is not to say that God answers all our prayers. I know I have prayed prayers that seem to go unanswered or are answered in different ways. I wish I could tell you why this is but, honestly, I don't know. This is one of the great mysteries of our faith. What I do know for sure is that when you draw near to God, God draws near to you and promises to never leave you.

What obstacle needs to be removed from your life that is standing in your way of being courageous and bold? What is keeping you from drawing nearer to God and seeing yourself as the beloved Child of God that you are? Here's your homework for this week -- Think about one attitude, activity or behavior that is an obstacle in your walk with Jesus. And then get serious about doing something about it. Do whatever it takes to get closer to Jesus.

Let's close with this prayer from Pastor Ken Gire's book, *Intimate Moments with God*, Let us pray: "We confess, O Lord, how often we have followed in the crowd pressed around you. We have touched you, but only in the rush hour of religious activity. Sunday after Sunday we take our part in the crowd as we sit through the service. We sing the hymns and hear the sermon. We read our Bible, say our prayers, give our money. How could we be so close your presence yet so far from your power? Could it be that our arms are folded? Could it be that our hands are full? Could it be that our minds so full of our own ideas there is not room for yours? I pray that if our arms are complacent, you would unfold them in outstretched longing for you. And if our hands are full, I pray that you would empty them so that we might cling only to you. I pray that if our minds are so content with our own thinking that you would renew us by revealing to us the living truth of your Word to see ourselves as you see each of us, your beloved child. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of August 28, 2022

Prayer for the Week

Here in this time of prayer, O Lord, I offer myself fully to you. Fill me, here and now, with a deep sense of your presence and a strong sense of your empowering Spirit. Take this time and renew my faith and replenish my heart. Rebirth my spirit so that I may live with hope and confidence this day and every day, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This week's readings relate to the themes found in the movie, *Encanto*, that was the basis for the sermon given on August 28.

Monday, August 29

Scripture: John 14:25-31

"I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid. You have heard me tell you, 'I'm going away and returning to you.' If you loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than me. I have told you before it happens so that when it happens you will believe. I won't say much more to you because this world's ruler is coming. He has nothing on me. Rather, he comes so that the world will know that I love the Father and do just as the Father has commanded me. Get up. We're leaving this place.

Observation

The word *Encanto* means charm or enchantment, and it's a word that reflects a sense of wonder. The movie takes place in a village in Colombia that only exists because of a miracle that enchanted the Madrigal family and provides a flourishing place of protection from the violence its villagers once fled. The miracle is centered in the home of the Madrigal family, represented by a candle, and embodied through the rituals and spiritual gifts given to different family members.

Application

As with any good story, the movie's plot revolves around a threat to the entire community. **Abuela** Alma, the family matriarch (whose name means "soul") loses sight of the miracle and mistakes it for the candle itself. The struggle to save their home is juxtaposed between Alma's belief in an unchanging tradition and her granddaughter **Mirabel's** desperate attempt to save her family. The question for us is whether God is at work in our lives. In today's reading, Jesus wants his disciples to know that God's presence is not dependent on seeing Jesus. How have you known God's presence and work in your daily living?

Prayer

God, you have ordered this world and all things that are in it. Help me to see your hand in all that is around me. Give me the confidence to allow you to work through me. Amen.

Tuesday, August 30

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:23-25

The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other.

Observation

In *Encanto*, Mirabel is viewed as un-special by her community and of little value because she has no gift. Every other person in the Madrigal family receives a gift, but for some reason Mirabel is denied. Furthermore, the family places shame on Mirabel precisely because she has been denied a gift. As the movie's plot unfolds, it becomes clear that Mirabel has a gift, just not one that looks like everyone else's gift.

Application

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses metaphorical body language to explain spiritual gifts. Each part is essential to the whole. Some may see themselves as lesser Christians because their gifts don't seem as great or impactful as others. However, all gifts are valuable and as Christians our value is not dependent on our specific gifts. Like Mirabel, we should not doubt our place in the family because of the manifestation of a gift. We are still in the family. Have you ever felt less than or more than others as a result of your gifts? How do Paul's words help you see the role you play in the church family?

Prayer

God, thank you for giving me life and bestowing on me certain gifts. Grant me the clarity that I need to see these gifts while also seeing the gifts in others – not so that we can compare but rather so we can complement each other as we seek your greater purpose for us all. Amen.

Wednesday, August 31

Scripture: Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

God has given his grace to each one of us measured out by the gift that is given by Christ.

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.

Observation

Mirabel sings: "I've been patient, and steadfast, and steady. Bless me now as you blessed us all those years ago when you gave us a miracle. Am I too late for a miracle?" As Mirabel witnesses the cracking of the Casita (house), she goes from trying to serve her family to trying to save her family because she loves them. She is waiting for a miracle for her family's sake, believing she must have a purpose.

Application

Like Mirabel, we often start out with a desire to serve our families, churches, and communities. Soon, our love motivates us to try to save them. Some may grieve over not doing enough to save their loved ones, not doing enough to keep their loved ones from hurt or pain, or committing parenting mistakes that might hinder their children. We are called to serve, not save. What role does God play in our serving? How would serving change if you see serving as letting Christ work through you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I know that you have promised to be with me always. Help me to remember that you are more than a casual observer and always ready to guide and empower my work each day. Amen.

Thursday, September 1

Scripture: Luke 4: 16-21, 29-30

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."

They rose up and ran him out of town. They led him to the crest of the hill on which their town had been built so that they could throw him off the cliff. But he passed through the crowd and went on his way.

Observation

In *Encanto*, Bruno is Mirabel's seemingly deranged uncle that she didn't personally know. After being given the gift of seeing the future, Bruno escaped the family because his visions were not helping the Casita or town. There were theories about what happened to Bruno, but those theories were debunked when Mirabel eventually meets him. The closer Bruno and Mirabel **become the wiser** Bruno becomes. He reminds Mirabel that she has a purpose within the family even if she didn't see it.

Application

Bruno says to Mirabel: "You're exactly what this family needs. You just need to see it." Have you experienced the wisdom of Bruno's words? Surely Jesus was what his family and hometown needed, even when they were not ready to see it. Even when a person is feeling lost within their family or group of friends, they have a special purpose that others see.

Prayer

God, use me to encourage others and affirm the gifts that they have. When I see that persons have drifted away and relationships have become strained, use me to be a bridge of love and acceptance. Amen.

Friday, September 2

Scripture: Acts 9:26-31

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. They didn't believe he was really a disciple. Then Barnabas brought Saul to the apostles and told them the story about how Saul saw the Lord on the way and that the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them about the confidence with which Saul had preached in the name of Jesus in Damascus. After this, Saul moved freely among the disciples in Jerusalem and was speaking with confidence in the name of the Lord. He got into debates with the Greek-speaking Jews as well, but they tried to kill him. When the family of believers learned about this, they escorted him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea,

Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. God strengthened the church, and its life was marked by reverence for the Lord. Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the church continued to grow in numbers.

Observation

Abuela Alma is the founder of the magical candle and the matriarch of the Madrigal family. She is the head of the household and has the ultimate say over the candle and Casita. Because Mirabel didn't receive a gift, Abuela and Mirabel (in spite of being grandmother and granddaughter) didn't have a close bond because Abuela feared Mirabel would ruin the family. Mirabel felt this pressure and went above and beyond to prove herself.

Application

As the magic was dying, Abuela says a prayer to her late husband. "Open my eyes. If the Magic is here, help me save the miracle." In reality, the magic was all around her, but Abuela was close-minded. Abuela had everything to save the magic, but her eyes were closed to it. Today's reading from Acts comes after Saul (who would become Paul) has a life-changing experience – from persecutor of Christians to Apostle of Christ. He is initially rejected, but Barnabas (the encourager) becomes the bridge of acceptance and love.

Prayer

Dear Lord, once again, I offer my life to you so that I may be a bridge of love and acceptance at a time when there is so much division and hostility in this world. Open my eyes to what you can see. Amen.

Saturday, September 3

Scripture: Matthew 5:14

You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden.

Observation

At the end of *Encanto*, Abuela and Mirabel reconcile and inspire the family to rebuild Casita. Healing the relationships between Alma, Isabela, and Mirabel is what gave Casita its magic back. As they were rebuilding, Mirabel sang a song that reminds us that our miracles are not magic. The miracle is inside all of us.

Application

Mirabel sings: "The miracle is not some magic that you've got. The miracle is you." It's an inspiring message that reminds us all to dig from within and realize how special we are. You have been created by God, endowed with special gifts. In the movie, when the light of the candle was extinguished, the people did not immediately see what Jesus said to his disciples: "YOU are the light." How are you allowing that light to shine through you?

Prayer

God, thank you for sending Jesus into the world as your light, the light that shines even in darkness. As I once again embrace your light, living as a follower of Jesus, let that light shine in me so that others will see you. Amen.