

We are the Church Together

How many of you have seen the movie Encanto? It is on Disney plus and the music and the story is amazing. It starts about with a young Alma Madrigal who with her husband Pedro are fleeing their country because of an armed conflict. Her husband doesn't make it but Alma is able to say her triplet children, Julieta, Pepa and Bruno.

By a miracle, her candle attains magical qualities, and blasts away those that are chasing her and creates a home, the Casita for the Madrigals to live in, along with a magical hidden town sheltered by tall surrounding mountains: an "encanto".

Fifty years later, the candle continues to burn and the town thrives under its protection. The candle's magic gives superhuman abilities to each Madrigal child when they turn five, which they use to help the villagers.

The entire family has supernatural powers. Someone has super-hearing, another can change the weather, and another can heal people with food. Mirabel, the main character did not receive a supernatural power when she turned five. So she is treated differently by the family. But there's one family member who has been isolated from the family because of his prophetic powers. There is an entire song dedicated to the fact that the family chooses not to talk about him or his prophecies. But throughout the movie, it becomes clear that without this particular family member, the legacy of the family is in jeopardy. When you watch the movie, you will see that indeed Maribel, does have a gift and is able to save her family with her gift.

Today we are looking at our gifts, our supernatural powers if you will. And you all know we are always looking for someone to do something in the church. Always. I saw a cartoon once of a man and woman looking worriedly at a piece of paper the man was holding. The caption read, "It's from our church...we've been called up for active duty."

Like I said, we are always looking for someone to do something at the church.

You just heard a reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he talks about the body of Christ. Here Paul explains what the body of Christ is and what it means to be an active participant in that body, fulfilling your unique role.

Verse 12 says "for just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

While working on this sermon I thought about preaching prophetically, calling the church to rise up, get involved. fill that nominating slate that always seems to have empty slots and be the body that Paul is calling us to be.

But then I realized that I would probably annoy everyone with that sermon – including myself. Here’s why.

First of all, do you know the expression, “You’re preaching to the choir?” Okay, so THIS is where that comes from. The church – especially the crowd gathered on a Sunday morning for worship – is already full of people who are hard at work within the church; whose blood, sweat, tears and prayers go into the church, day after day, so it can run smoothly and live out God’s call in the community. To preach a sermon asking people who already do SO much to do more is, quite frankly, just obnoxious!

Second of all, people are tired. 50 years ago, when people thought about this scripture and churches went out to gather volunteers, mainline congregations were different than they are today. A lot of them were bigger and there were more people to help do the work that needed to be done.

The churches were filled with different family structures as well. Rarely did both parents work full time outside the home, 40 hour work weeks were considered full time and not the bare minimum and people were able to be home more. Kids were not involved in as many activities as they are today. No one played sports on Sundays. People had more time to give and they weren’t two years into a pandemic.

So when I saw our assigned scripture for today, I decided that rather than preach a sermon on why and how we need to be the body of Christ, irritate everyone and set unrealistic expectations for us that we are inevitably going to fall short of, let’s be real.

Today’s work is a very busy place to live in. I am not going to sit here and talk about all the things that need to be done and why and how and when and then somehow convince you that you are not as busy as you actually are so that you agree to do something else for the church.

Although, we do need some more folks on some committees so that actually might have been a good idea.

Truth be told, I do not think Paul would have wanted me to preach that sermon, anyway. Because I don’t think that Paul intended for this text to simply be a proclamation of what the church could or should be. I think that Paul intended for it to also be a vision of what the church already is.

Paul said: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

This means something. This means that we are individual people, but we are part of something that is so much greater than we could ever understand or explain in human terms. This means we all have an important job to do, one that perhaps we are already doing. This means that while we do our job, there is always someone working

alongside us; that we support the work of other people just as they support us in our work.

This means that our journeys through life and faith and church are not ones that we have to travel alone, that even when we feel lost, we are never far from God's grace through the individuals that make up the body of Christ. This means that we have a safe space where we can come, week after week, and be reminded of this grace; where we can be recharged if we are feeling empty and strengthened if we have nothing left to give.

This is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. Right now a lot of people are skeptical about organized religion. They think that it is full of rules, hypocrisy and meaningless formalities. But I assure you, the body of Christ is not in the business of meaningless formalities. The body of Christ is in the business of changing lives.

And that is what we are a part of here.

I don't want anyone to hear this scripture and feel bad that they are not doing enough for the church or serving on the right committee or making it to worship every single week. Instead, I want each and every one of you to hear this text and rejoice that you are already part of this church, this body. You are part of something right here, right now that can change your life.

Yes, we are a religious institution and a nonprofit organization and we have bills to pay and properties to take care of and blah, blah, blah. But Jesus did not call his disciples to drop their fishing nets and go beg people to join church committees! Jesus called his disciples to drop their fishing nets and invite people into the Good News that was happening in their midst.

And we are still called to do this today. The story of Jesus Christ and the way that God is working in this work is still being written and guess what? We are part of this story. Being part of a church is more than simply being on a committee; it is about writing this story, coming together and being the body of Christ.

Churches are different today than they were 10 years ago, 50 years ago, 100 years ago. Our church is different today than it used to be. Sometimes we try so hard to duplicate the past that we forget to look at – and celebrate – what is happening in the present.

We have to remember that into each generation, a church is called – called and inspired by God – to serve their community, to reach out to the world and to be the body of Christ in a way that needs to happen in their lifetime. The way that our church exists and functions today may be different than the way that it has in the past, but that is not something we should worry about; this is something we should embrace. We should embrace who we are today and who God is calling us to be.

Because as long as God stays at the center of all that we do, we will always be the body of Christ. We will be living and tangible proof of this scripture. And it will change lives.

So today, as we read this scripture, I encourage all of us to see it through a new and clear lens. We do not have to do things the way that they were done 50 years ago in order to be the body of Christ today. We do not have to run ourselves ragged and make ourselves crazy in order to fulfill this scripture. We do not have to feel guilty that we cannot do more in the church in order to live out Paul's words. We do not have to jump through ecclesial hoops in order to feel like we belong.

It is my hope that we will always look at the church not just as a list of things that we need to do, but also as a list of the beautiful and divine things that we are already doing. I hope that we can rejoice in the multitude of ways that we are already serving our community, helping one another and being fed spiritually.

I pray that we will reimagine what our church could look like as new members and long time members come together and listen to God's still speaking voice in our midst. I want to hear about ideas for new ministries and projects and not be afraid to let go of some of the old ones. I want to feel excitement and energy. I want us to get to know one another and care for one another in simple, yet powerful ways.

On a more personal note: I would like to say this: I don't know where I would be without my church. There is where the body of Christ comes alive for me. There is where I get to live out my faith. This is where the intangible pieces of my faith become tangible and real and transformative in my life.

This is where I get pushed and questioned and affirmed and loved and supported. This is where I get to experiment with new ideas and yet still be comforted by time honored traditions. This is where I get to learn and serve and grow. This where I can be imperfect, show my flaws, confess my sins and get always know that I am a beloved and blessed child of god. There is where I see what resurrection truly means. This is where I find grace.

This is what I want the church to be for all of you. So come, come and worship, come and serve, come and learn. Get involved in the church; not because you have to or because someone cornered you, and you felt like you couldn't say no, but because it feels good to be part of something bigger and because the more you give, the more you get back in return. Be the most unapologetically authentic version of yourself. Know that no matter who you are or where you are on your journey through life, you are already a part of us; you are a part of this body, the body of Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.