

Who Actually Gets Invited to the Table

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[0:00] My name is Tochi. I'm on the preaching team here at the Table Church. And this summer, we've been exploring under this series of Dangerous Imagination, just taking! a deeper dive into the biblical parables and anchoring that into Afrofuturism as a way! to broaden our understanding, but also to expand the scope of our imagination.

Today, in addition to Afrofuturism, and since the kiddos are here, I thought we'd tie in also a Disney movie, Encanto. And I think the purpose is to show that Afrofuturism, at least the purpose of it, transcends age groups, cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities.

So through our exploration of Afrofuturism, we learned that the dystopia is not so much the end of the world, but rather a continuation of archetypes, isms, that plague the present world.

In short, it's a lack of imagining and reimagining. Encanto shows this same dynamic. Through Bruno's gift to be able to see the future, we see an attempt to erase aspects that remind us of things that we're not quite ready to talk about.

This erasure is an attempt to forget a warning that we don't really want to hear. So throughout the movie, the Disney movie we hear, we don't talk about Bruno.

[1:32] It ultimately pushes Bruno to the outskirts of La Casita, or the family home, and into the shadows. Bruno is taken away from human connection and is forced to commune with rats.

The parallel is America's systematic attempt to ignore and sometimes erase African-American plight and narrative. An attempt to highlight American's ideals and ignore American sins.

In Encanto, the family is running away from the possibility of the miracle being taken away. A prophecy that they didn't quite fully understand.

Bruno's prediction is that Mary Bell will be at the center of the miracle, the Madrigal miracle. But it's not quite clear if she'll strengthen it or help to weaken it.

Rather than include her in the deliberation and understanding the entire picture, Grandma, the matriarch of the Madrigal family, criticizes her, dismisses her, and silences her.

[2:44] Yeah. Let's take a look at the short clip. What is going on? Abuela! It's okay. Everything's... We're gonna save the miracle! The magic!

What are you talking about? Look at our home! Look at your sister! Please, just... Isabella wasn't happy and she didn't... Of course she isn't happy! You ruined her proposal! No, no, no. She needed me to ruin her proposal and then we did all this and the candle burned brighter and the cracks... That's why I'm in the vision. I'm saving the miracle! You have to stop, Mirabel! The cracks started with you.

Bruno left because of you. Luisa's losing her powers. Isabella's out of control because of you! I don't know why you weren't given a gift, but it is not an excuse for you to hurt this family!

I will never be good enough for you. Will I? No matter how hard I try...

[4:04] No matter how hard any of us tries... Luisa will never be strong enough. Isabella won't be perfect enough.

Bruno left our family because you only saw the worst in him! Bruno didn't care about this family! He loves this family! I love this family! We all love this family!

You're the one that doesn't care! You're the one breaking our home! Don't you ever... The miracle is dying because of you! No, no, no!

Dejendo! Maribel's search for her uncle Bruno and choosing to listen to him ultimately threatens her place in the family.

The ultimate revelation is that the pressure that Abuelita puts on her is also put on the family, and this is what troubles the foundation. And eventually breaks out in the house.

[5:06] The foundation can only be fixed with an acknowledgement and a decision to start anew in community. Plus... Look at this home!

We need a new foundation! It may seem hopeless, but we'll get by just fine! Look at this family, a glowing constellation!

So full of stars! And everybody wants to shine! But the stars don't shine, they burn!

And the constellations shift! I think it's time you learn! You're more than just your...

Okay, so we gonna talk about Bruno! It's Bruno! Yeah, there's a lot to say about Bruno! I'll start, okay! I'm sorry about your waiting, didn't mean to be upsetting!

[6:06] That wasn't a prophecy, I could just see you were sweating! And I wanted you to know that your bro loves you so! Let it in, let it out, let it rain, let it snow, let it go! That's what I'm always saying! Bro! I'm sorry about apologies, I got to say!

Hey! We're just happy that you're here, okay? Janelle Monae's album, *Bring It Into Afrofuturism*, also provides a similar warning, where we see vulnerable groups, in this case in the form of human androids, silenced by larger systems.

Rather than erasing them from the picture altogether, Janelle Monae gives voice to these marginalized groups, who fight to be remembered, and also to remember their own identities.

The album opens up with Jane 75821 being asked to repeat, I am not, I am a dirty computer, and ready to be cleaned.

Jane refuses to finish that sentence, because she doesn't believe it. Jane 75821, Mary Apple, and Che Cheby, three androids in the form of black women, are all being erased, through a literal reboot.

[7:10] Jane fights to keep her identity through recollections of love and acts of rebellion. And the biggest act of rebellion is holding onto her humanity, despite society's attempt to disregard her as just a machine.

Themes such as being wild and free, and not being America's nightmare, but America's dream, ring loud throughout this album. *Dirty Computer* is about a world that tries to clean people who are different, and erase individual memories, if they can't fit into larger systems.

The resistance is rooted in radical decision to love yourself as you are, and to use your unique gift in your community, just like in *Canto*.

You can see both in *Canto* and *Dirty Computer*, and also the larger number of Afro-futuristic literature that we've been exploring through these series, asks the fundamental question, who gets a seat at the table, and who gets pushed out?

Who gets to be seen and heard, and who ultimately is erased? Today's sermon touches on two parables, the tail end of the parable of the guest, and then goes into the parable of the dinner banquet.

[8:27] But it also speaks of two sides of the same coin, as we continue to explore, and under the Afro-futurism lens. The things that we're exploring are the in-crowd and their race, the host and the guest, the powerful and the oppressed, who gets to speak and who sometimes gets silence.

Janay Monáe's album, *Dirty Computer*, chose to celebrate the marginalized voices within, and chose to amplify their voices. The parable today also reveals that God makes that same decision, to amplify vulnerable groups and invite them into community, and invites us to do the same.

In Luke 4.13, the parable of the guest ends by saying, But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid, and at the resurrection of the righteous. The parable of the dinner banquet goes on to say in Luke 14.15, Luke 14.15, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

A dinner guest said this to Jesus, and in response, Jesus opened up with the parable. A certain man was preparing a great banquet, and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servants to tell those who had been invited, Come, and everything is now ready.

[9:58] But they alike began to make excuses. The first said, I've just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.

Another said, I've just bought five yokes of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. Still another said, I just got married. I can't come.

The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and the alleys of the town, and bring in poor,

the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Sir, the servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room. Then the master told his servant, go out to the roads and the country lanes, and compel them to come in to my house, so my house will be full.

For I tell you, none of those who were previously invited will taste my dinner. The dangerous imagining series asks us to throw out what we consider as right, or the worldly way of seeing things and doing things, and rather to reimagine a world which only God could usher in.

[11:11] The danger in this is that it's counterculture, and through the process of embodying it, you may also be considered naive, ignored, or dismissed.

Yet the invitation still remains open. In the first parable, Jesus is reminding us who we should commune with. In short, those who have nothing to offer us.

There is an intimacy in eating with people, inviting them into your own home or your space. Even more publicly, it can be a public declaration of a relationship or an alignment.

In short, I see myself as an extension of the community, of the people in my table. The host reveals a level of vulnerability in extending the invitation. But the guests, they also cement their place and social status in accepting that invitation.

The new interpreters Bible commentary states, Hosts are no more free from the quest of recognition than their guests. You see, the invitation is as revealing of the host as the acceptance is of the guests.

[12:20] Jesus says, when you give a luncheon, in Luke 14, do not invite your friends, your brother, and relatives, and rich neighbors. The idea is how do we expand the circle? How do we expand our community? How do we expand our imaginations?

And Jesus says this in the house of a Pharisees, who is also on a high social status. So maybe he also has the same concerns. The warning within the parable of the banquet re-emphasizes this advice.

To open up your banquets beyond social norms and current imagination. Maybe they had actual excuses. Or maybe they were just lame excuses.

Buying land, attending to the oxen, being a newlywed. Either way, the parable shows that nobody... Either way, the parable shows that worldly concerns can prevent people from accepting the invitation.

Whether it's an invitation from the host, or in this case, God's invitation to broaden our community.

The host's decision to broaden his invitation is not only a response, but it's a complete reversal.

[13:31] Which is why at the end, he says, none of those who were previously invited will taste the dinner. He is filling up the guest list so that those who were previously invited and refused will not be able to swing back around and come in and change their mind.

This showcases that the future will not be a continuation of the past, but a new practice. Which is not exclude or discriminate based on only social status.

And this has been the underlying point of Afrofuturism. A re-imagining rooted in radical love. The same radical love that Jesus calls us towards. To expand our hearts, our imagination, our scope of understanding, our community.

Can we see ourselves and our community more than the myopic society that society has invested in? Can we broaden our banquet and share our gifts despite attempts of society to erase us or ignore us?

Can we invite those that are in more vulnerable positions than us into intimate fellowship? That leads to friendship and ultimately a straightening of the family.

[14:45] Christ family. These are the questions of the Dangerous Imagining series has invited us to explore. But we get to live out these answers in our lives and our relationships moving forward.

Thank you.