



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

I speak today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Like, I suppose, many of you, I've watched a bit of the Olympics. I find the Olympics fantastic, but I have to admit, I don't watch a whole lot of it. But what I do watch, I get the most out of. And I loved, for example, that moment in the 1500 meter race when Cole Hocker, an American, came out of nowhere it seemed, from the middle of the pack to win the gold medal. He was following two higher ranked runners ahead of him, and they became so incredibly centered on the competition between them that they kind of drifted into the middle of the track. Hocker saw an opening along the inside track and he exploded out of nowhere and somehow got the gold. In an interview afterwards, he said that while he was waiting for his opening, he saw it open and then, "I just let God carry me to the finish line." Such a beautiful turn of phrase. "I let God carry me to the finish line."

But I have to be honest with you, I am a counter programmer. I am someone who always looks the other way when people are looking at one thing. For example, I have never seen the movie Titanic. There was a time in the nineties where everybody was watching the movie Titanic. It was the thing to see. Leonardo DiCaprio being amazing. Kate Winslet being beautiful. Leonardo DiCaprio sitting on the bow of the Titanic saying, "I am the king of the world!" James Cameron doing his best film. I did not watch that at all. Not at all, because I always go the other direction, because there's always something missing in the big picture that we usually have in our minds.

And so over the past week, instead of watching a whole lot of Olympics, and I know that some of you are just majoring in Olympics these past couple of weeks, I found myself watching this art film of about 17 minutes by two Swedish artists called The Ten Meter Tower. And what this film did is these artists in 2016 put out an advertisement and offered people \$30 American, having never been on a 10-meter tower from the Olympics, the diving tower, if they would climb up it and jump and be filmed and mic'd during the whole thing.

And 67 people answered that advertisement. And the film is comprised of all the reactions that people had when they got to the top of the 10-meter tower, which is about 33 feet. And I found it amazing. These non-Olympic swimming suits were

so ordinary and these non-Olympic bodies so beautiful. We forget just how beautiful the normal human body is. The body we live with, the body that gets older, the body that grows, the body that changes. They all got up and they were all, for the most part, terrified.

And the purpose of the film was to capture people facing doubt in the midst of difficulty. And I found every one of them facing their doubts beautiful. The first one that caught my eye was the first person that they have jumping and completing, actually finishing the whole assignment. It was a 10-year-old girl, and she went and looked over the edge and then got a little bit scared, and then she backed up to midway on the platform, and then she says to herself, “Alrighty, let's do this.” Then she runs and leaps and holds her nose, which I found so amazing because you know that that nose is just going to be full of water in just a few minutes. And I was so amazed at her courage. She reminded me a little bit of the youth that we went with to New York City and the work that we did day in and day out, caring for people and working and volunteering. I was so proud of her.

And then just watching her go through that, I suddenly had the most amazing memory of my own life. I thought about a moment that happened to me when I was five years old. My family went down to Florida as a whole extended family. This was like the precursor of the snowbird phenomenon. And we stayed at this hotel that had an Olympic 10-meter diving platform. And I, being five years old, had no sense of fear. I climbed right up and I jumped five times until the lifeguard pulled me out and dragged me over to my mother who was tanning and said, control your child. This is not just against the rules. It's probably illegal.

And that memory suddenly became so precious to me. It reminded me of my own little moment of facing difficulty and not having any doubts. I actually remembered this moment when my brother sent me a card when I was in the midst of a challenge, and he said in the card, “To me, you'll always be the little boy who jumps off the high dive.” So I found it beautiful to see when ordinary people, the rest of us who are not Olympians, who do brave things. And this film was an example.

My favorite one though is something I really want to share with you because there's a dialogue. It's a couple and they're just getting to know each other and they're in their early twenties and they're up on the platform together. And they have this extended dialogue that I reverse engineered into a script. So I'm going to read that for you today and take a bit of a risk, but hold on, it's going to be good, I hope. It's about – the couples' names are Frida, who's tall and blonde, and Linus, who is tall and not blonde.

Frida: “Just make a decision and stick with it.”

Linus: “I won't do a running jump, that's for sure. If I jump, it will be from right here,” pointing to the edge.

Frida: "Then go ahead, swim to the ladder and I'll join you."

Linus: "Well, are you really going to jump or will you chicken out?"

Frida: "There's a good chance I might. And if I see that you, well, not exactly hurt yourself, but if one arm flies off, if you say, Frida, don't do it, I won't."

Linus: "I don't know. It's a long way down." No, Linus, talking to himself. Get this over with.

Frida: "You're doing it for you. So how do you feel?"

Linus: "I'm just going to tune you out for a little while. No, go ahead and talk. I'm just not really present."

Frida: "What if I jump first?"

Linus: "No. I want to jump first, if it's okay with you."

Frida: "Okay."

Snapping his fingers quickly and looking over the edge.

Linus: "I'm going to scream my head off."

Frida: "So am I."

Linus: "My knees, they're shaking. I've just decided to go for it and my knees sensed it. Now I know why they say go weak in the knees."

And it's at this point that I have in your bulletin, and for those of you at home, you can see that still from that moment where Linus says, "Now I know why they say go weak in the knees," because in this part of the script, things take on a few layers.

Frida: "So deciding to jump made you go weak in the knees? When we were just fooling around, you're okay, but you get rattled after you make the decision."

Linus: "What? Sorry, I'm not listening."

Frida: "Okay. You're not listening." Inaudible word whispered and a shrug.

Linus: "Your voice is soothing though."

Frida: "Right now it's sink or swim. Wait, what did we agree on? If you jump, I jump as well?"

Linus: "If you fall, I fall as well, Frida." And Linus moves to the edge.

Frida: "Be careful."

Linus: “See you on the other side. See you in heaven.”

Frida: Heaven?!

Linus: “I'm going for it, Frida.”

Frida: “Yeah. Be positive. It's fun.”

Screaming, Linus lets himself fall from the tower. Frida cheers and applauds loudly. She motions for him to swim out of the way. Frida shouts, “Don't say anything!” And she holds her nose and jumps screaming too. Scene.

Now this dialogue captivated me because the artists are trying to depict humans in difficulty struggling with doubt. And they are. But I also want to suggest to you that this dialogue in this film captures humans making great leaps of faith. What is a leap of faith? Kierkegaard in the 19th century said that the leap of faith is something all of us face in Christianity, because so much of Christianity is unprovable. And so much of Christianity is something that we can't get to through self-reflection. There has to be a qualitative change, he writes, when a person opts in and chooses to believe and to bank on that belief. At that moment, there is a qualitative change in the individual. They no longer are a person who believes in propositions. They're no longer a person who engages in self-reflection. They become a new creature. They become a person of faith.

And all of us, I think, know what it's like to take those leaps of faith. We all know difficulty. We all know doubt. We all know these things because they hold on to everything that brings death to us. Everything that brings disease, everything that brings disorder, everything that brings disruption, all of these things fill us with doubt. And yet, the moment in which we are most human, I would suggest, is when we decide to take a leap of faith.

The little girl at the beginning of the film that I described to you, the one who says, “Alrighty, let's do this.” I looked at that again and I gave thanks for all of the parents and all of the teachers and all of the friends and all of the siblings who were the sources of that inner voice she spoke to herself. That moment of self-soothing, she said to herself, that moment of self encouragement when she said, “Alrighty, let's do this,” and she jumped. There is nothing so amazing as seeing a child or a youth do something that is a great leap of faith.

And as we know, we never take these leaps alone. We're always surrounded by people who work to bring out the best in us. That is maybe one thing where Kierkegaard did not quite see things completely accurately. For him, it is the individual who makes this great leap. But for me, we are always surrounded by others. They help us make that great leap together. And Linus and Frida, they are trying to find their way to make great leaps in their lives, to not only make it through that little test but to somehow hold their relationship together and to

build upon it. And relationships are not built by certainty. They're not built by clarity often. They're built by these tiny little leaps of faith. And so it is with community. We encourage one another to take these leaps. Even if we say something like, be careful, which, how can you be careful plummeting 33 feet?

In today's gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to take a great leap of faith. This is what is meant when He says that not only is He the Messiah who makes more of everything, not only is He the bringer of abundance, not only is He able to somehow feed 5,000 people in the wilderness so that everybody has what they need, but He invites them to take a great leap on Him and to follow Him, and to see Him as the bread of life, the Son of God. And that is not something that can be proved. It wasn't provable then, even though surrounded by miracles, and it's not provable now. We have to choose and gather up all that is in us and perhaps listen to the community we're part of and take that leap ourselves.

That's what it means to follow Jesus. And there's a few other things that Christianity has that builds on this idea of the leap of faith. In Christianity, that leap of faith does not happen only once. It might happen in a deliberate way in your life that you can remember at a time and place. And some people call that our conversion moments, where we know that we have moved from being blind to now seeing. When we move from a world that sees black and white to technicolor.

But in fact, our life of faith is one of countless moments of *metanoia*, where we make little leaps together and for ourselves and for God. Bit by bit, every day we make a leap of faith and we believe and we hope. And sometimes things don't go as we hoped, but we believe and we still make those leaps again and again. That is what it's like to go through the continuous conversion of Christianity. Christianity cannot be timed and calendared in the past. Your life in God is always in the future. Your life in God is always ahead of you. Your work as a Christian, your life as a Christian is always ahead of you through these little moments of *metanoia*, through these little moments of leaps of faith.

The second thing I want you to see that's different for Christianity is that it's not an individual that makes a claim about existence. That is what Kierkegaard's trying to speak about, and he's one of the best philosophers ever, and truly a Christian. But what is different about Christianity as today's gospel makes clear is that it is rooted in relationship. Our leaps of faith are not a moment of self-actualization. It's a moment of being transformed by a relationship with God. And that makes all the difference because in that moment we know Jesus. Not as someone might know the Buddha, not as someone might know Socrates, but we know Jesus who lives in us and who is the source of that new creation, who we are in Christ.

The final thing I want you to see that many, many, many commentators miss in this gospel, and that is that Jesus is God's leap of faith for us. Jesus has come and made himself vulnerable and human so that all of humanity might be transformed

through him. Jesus has come, walking on water and leading His disciples, as He does. Feeding the 5,000 as He does, and then dying a very tragic human death so that you and I might live. Jesus's great leap of faith has already been taken for us so that when we make a leap of faith, we're responding to that deep invitation that has come through Him.

What does a great leap of faith look like for you? Over the past week, I found myself thinking about another moment from 2017, not just this film, but also this incredible opportunity I had that was given to me by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit to be an ecumenical guest of the Beatification of Solanus Casey, who was a Saintly Capuchin Friar, who died in 1957. And Casey's whole ministry was spent working the door for the monastery so that when anybody came in with a problem or need, he would try to welcome them as if he was welcoming Christ.

And Casey is credited with the development of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, which still operates to this day in Detroit, and which we are going to do something similar to when all of us volunteer to work at Crossroads this month. We are putting on the only soup kitchen that is continuously working in Detroit on Sundays. And the Capuchins, since the Depression, had an operating soup kitchen on the east side.

Casey is credited with many miracles, but my favorite thing is a miracle of some sort, although it's not capable of being proven, that happened when he was in the early days of the soup kitchen. It was told by the homilies for the day, Cardinal Amato. This is what he wrote:

One day there was no more bread and there was a long line of more than 200 people waiting for something to eat. Father Solanus approached and began to recite the Our Father. A little bit later knocking was heard at the door and a baker appeared with a large basket full of bread. He had also brought a truckload of God's gifts of bread. When the people saw this, they began to cry with emotion. Father Solanus simply stated, see, God provides. No one will suffer want if we put our trust in divine providence.

Casey was one of those people who understood that incredible paradox and leap of faith. In a world in which there is not enough bread, he put his confidence that there would be bread enough somehow, and there was. That is what it means to take a leap of faith. That is what it means for each of us every day to take a leap of faith. And so it is that Cardinal Amato said that Father Casey lived with an incredible human and Christian intensity.

In all of your doubts and all the ways you're buffeted by death and disease and disorder and disruption, what does that leap of faith look like for you?

***“On difficulty and doubt”- The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost 8/11/24***