



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Christ the Mirror The Third Sunday of Lent 372021

I speak to you 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.

One of the true blessings of being over 50 years old is I can be roused out of a sound sleep for many reasons. If I get a little hot, if I eat a spicy meal before I go to bed, if I have some aches and pains, if the cats decide to rouse me to play, I can find myself up early. And this morning was one of those moments. Around 2:00, I found myself unable to sleep and in the past I would curse the darkness, but now I've learned to get up and turn on the lights as it were, and to make some coffee and to make some productive use out of those extra hours.

And I started doing that when a friend of mine, a guy who had a very funny English accent said to me, "When I'm up early in the morning, I just assume it's God's telling me to pray." And that seemed to be absurd, but I decided to try it. And I was amazed that I went through my day, even though I had gotten up early, so much better when I took a little bit of extra time to pray.

And this morning was one such time. I found myself up early. I was up earlier than the cats. The cats decided to sleep in a bit. I was on my own. I was sitting in the living room and I was reading Augustine's Confessions, the tenth book. And I came across a line I'd never really noticed before. And it was so powerful to me. Augustine writes in the fourth century that people go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad streams of rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the turning of the stars, and they do not notice themselves.

People go abroad to wonder at the heights of the mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the broad streams of rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the turning of the stars, and they do not notice themselves. I found this to be an incredibly comforting and profound thought, an observation about human nature. Because so often when we want some kind of insight or so often we want to experience wonder, so often we want to experience some kind of ecstasy, some movement outside of ourselves, we go looking for those things outside of ourselves.

But in fact, the greatest mystery, the greatest gift that God has given us, the depths that we have yet to plumb is the mystery that is ourselves. Who we are, what we believe, who has loved us, who we love, how we love - these are the

deeper questions. And I say all this because Lent is a time of self-reflection. Lent is a time in which we engage in some deliberate mulling over of our memories, of deliberate examination of our conscience, a time to reflect upon ourselves and to pray so that we might be transformed.

And this season of Lent for many of us who have been dealing with this pandemic for more than a year, might seem to be more of the same because one of the strange blessings of this pandemic, for those of us who have remained intact, for those of us who have remained healthy, for those of us who have not lost anyone who we love, for many of us, the strange blessing of this time has been it's given us a chance to think and to reflect on ourselves.

And we cannot go to the mountains and we cannot travel the seas. We cannot look for anything beyond the turning of the stars in our own front yard, many of us over the past year have had an opportunity to see ourselves and to ponder the wonder that God has given us and the mystery of the gift of ourselves.

Christianity has a specific teaching about the self and this teaching about the self should be an aid to the self reflection that we are called to do in Lent. And this is that we cannot truly know ourselves unless we place on top of that knowledge of ourselves or put it in relationship with the knowledge of Christ. To know ourselves we need to know Christ, and to see ourselves truly, we have to look for Christ. This is something which lies at the deepest strata of the Christian tradition, but it has a kind of beautiful articulation of it in the writings of John Calvin, the great reformer from the 16th century.

Calvin says that Christ is our mirror so that if we go looking for God anywhere else, we will be consumed by fear. But if we look for God in the mirror, that is Christ, we will see God represented as Christ and we will see ourselves truly in return. Self-reflection is a process of reconciliation. It's a time in which we see ourselves truly through Christ's gaze upon us. And the self that we experience as Christians is to be in relationship with another, with Christ. And this is the great truth that is before us today.

And it's because of that work of self reflection that you and I have to think of ways that we might be transformed. Because when we see ourselves in a mirror, we can focus on the blemish. We can focus on things that are merely cosmetic. We can focus on things that are shallow, or we can go deeper and see what lies beneath the skin. And the mirror that is presented to us in Christ loves us totally.

The gaze that Christ looks upon us sees the whole person, sees all that we have been and all that we have failed to be, sees all the way that we have loved and all the ways that we have not loved enough, seen all the things that we have done and all the things that we have left undone. And yet the Christ who looks back upon us in that mirror loves us fully and invites us to transformation, to change, to *metanoia*, to conversion, to having our eyes opened and our hearts opened.

In our readings for today, we have two commendations of this work of transformation. The first is hidden in the drama of the gospel that we have in John. In the midst of Jesus, making a whip of cords early on in his ministry and driving people out, we have a kind of vision of the transformation that Jesus invites. Because Jesus drives out all attempts to change and transform religion into a transaction. He draws up the money changers because in a transaction, when we try to pay our way into something, we remain unchanged, we merely express our power. And instead Jesus presents Himself, inviting even the destruction of the temple saying that He would through his own resurrection create the redemption that people were seeking, the reconciliation they were hoping for. Jesus points to Himself and thereby creates the mirror in which people might see themselves and God truly.

And in our reading from 1 Corinthians, we have this incredible line that continues to haunt me, that I read this week and consumed me. It was so powerful. It's simply the line, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," because this is a kind of mirror into the way that we understand power and wisdom. When we are left to our own devices, the way that we might see power and wisdom when they're connected to Christ and His Cross. Because power can be useful and it can be toxic. Power can be a powerful thing, a wonderful thing. And it can also be a thing that eats us alive and eats up others.

And the power that Paul is speaking about here is *dunamis*, which is a power that is creative. Oftentimes when we are left to our own devices, the power that we take refuge in is a power to conserve, a power to control, a power to coerce. But the power that Paul is speaking about here is the power to create, the power to begin again, the power to heal, the power to love, the power to reconcile. So when Paul says "Christ the power of God," Paul is directing us to the mirror of Christ to see in an act of self reflection, the ways in which our own understanding and behavior, when it comes to power needs to be transformed. And we have to go searching for the deeper power that is connected to Christ and His Cross.

And finally with wisdom, there are many ways to understand knowledge and its ability to do things. We can think about knowledge as a skill that might be transferred and used for our own benefits. We can think about knowledge as the ability to grasp large concepts and understand great ideas, but the knowledge and the wisdom that Paul speaks about in today's gospel is Sophia. Which is the power to see things as they truly are. Christ is true because Jesus Christ teaches us to see ourselves and to see our world as it truly is, as we truly are.

Today I have before you a piece of art that I found at St. Martin's church in Trafalgar square, it's an incredible piece done by an Iranian artist, Shirazeh Houshiary. It's a piece that replaced a window that was destroyed during the blitz in World War II. It was replaced in 2008, and Houshiary creates out of this

incredible, beautiful warping of a normal window, a kind of vision of a cross in which there is a center. And through that center, there is sight.

And this is to remind us that we find Christ through looking through the cross of Christ and realizing that the cross is the message that God is not going to be grasped by us by any great efforts of our own. But Christ has come to us. Christ has died for us. The weakness He showed on the Cross was power and a power that was greater than any human power. The wisdom that He showed on the Cross was love, and that love is stronger than death. And this window is not merely a window, but it is a mirror because Christ is looking through it at us.

"I must go home by way of the cross," as an old Presbyterian hymn:

I must go home by way of the cross
There's no other way but this
I'll never catch sight of the Gates of light
If the way of the cross I miss

The way of the cross leads home
The way of the cross leads home
It is sweet to know as I onward go
The way of the cross leads home

As you make this way of the cross this Lent, as you engage in the self-reflection that God has been waiting an eternity for you to begin again today in a way you never have before, to see things that you have missed and the landscape that is your soul and the light that is your life and the mystery that is yourself, may the light of Christ, the mystery of His love and may the landscape of the way we walk together to Christ through Easter light your way.

Amen.

[End of Recording]