



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Exodus of Jesus_ - The Last Sunday after the Epiphany- 2_27_2022

I speak to you 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.

The gospel addresses us in two ways. The first way that the gospel addresses us is by coming alongside us as we are walking through a passage in our life or an event in our life or a moment in our life. And the gospel shows us that that moment of walking in the midst of our life is actually a moment in which Christ Himself is present.

Those moments are moments in which the gospel comes as a kind of baptism of what already is there, a kind of intensification of what is there that was hidden in plain sight. And it comes to us as a kind of confirmation that we are not alone and that Christ is with us. We see, even in our cities, a kind of revelation of this address by the gospel. In our reading from 2 Corinthians, there is a wonderful piece of scripture there that has found its way to the center of Detroit.

It says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." In Marshall Fredericks' Spirit of Detroit, that beautiful, iconic sculpture that is right at the point of convergence of the city of Detroit, where it meets the river, those words are inscribed on the background. And that's meant to suggest to us that this city is not merely the work of human hands, but it's also a kind of spiritual project that we all do together.

Now in this first way that the gospel addresses us, we tend to think of things as both/and. Things are both spiritual and natural. They are both/and spiritual and natural in our lives. But there is a second way that the gospel addresses us and this way is not so much a both/and, but an either/or. When we are faced with disease, when we are faced with addiction, when we are at the end of our rope, when we are frustrated or oppressed or imprisoned in some way or another, the gospel comes to us as an invitation to turn and to face God and to be changed.

And we tend to make that transformation, that either/or by letting go of a part of ourselves that we think is precious. By going, as we read earlier in Luke, through a period of dying to ourselves, so that we might be reborn to Christ. And that either/or is also a kind of decision that we make that is grounded in our baptism. Because in baptism, we engage in three renunciations of sin, death, and the devil, and we turn to Christ, who is the source of our life, the source of our liberation, and our Lord.

And that either/or is incredibly important. We miss it at our peril because there are a lot of ways in which we will go through this world and experience the comfort of the gospel as both/and. But there is a kind of decision that we have to make when it is a kind of either/or decision. Those of us who have struggled with addiction, know that there comes a time in which we have to make an either/or decision, usually when we find ourselves at rock bottom. And those of us who have struggled with disease know that there is a moment in which we cannot control events and we have to turn to Christ and to find in Christ some kind of spiritual support that can get us through our illness. And those of us who have experienced death and the incredible way death destroys so much. Those of us who experience that know that the only way out of death is by letting death run over us and find our way to resurrection in Christ.

And we are living through, as Martin Luther said in 1519 in a brilliant piece of writing, we are living through a time of monsters in which we have these tin gods setting themselves up and trying somehow to expand their powers in this world. And so we have a dictator trying to take over another country and we have a governor who is going to tell us what to do as parents with our children. And then we have another governor who's telling us who can be said to be what they want to be or who God has called them to be. We are living in a time of monsters.

And when we are confronted with a world that seems so out of joint, so disorienting, the choice that the gospel gives us is either/or. Are we willing to turn to God? Are we willing to turn away from whatever things that we have done to contribute to those monstrosities? We have a decision to make. We have to be changed. Now, all of this is what is at stake in today's gospel from Luke. It is tempting for us to be distracted by the fact that Jesus engages in this incredible manifestation of himself as luminescent. And musicians from the beginning of Christianity have lifted up that transfiguration of Jesus. But in fact, this gospel for us today is an invitation for us to change, not Jesus to change. Jesus is merely appearing as he truly is when he appears bathed in light. But it's you and I who have to make the change.

And the frustration that Jesus shows in today's gospel comes because the disciples themselves, despite seeing things, as they have seen, despite hearing things they have heard, they are unable to comprehend that they themselves have to be changed, and to be part of the change that is in this world, if they are to follow Jesus. And so Jesus is inviting them to change and they are resisting. They don't quite get it. And that, to those of us who are reading this gospel, is an invitation for us to be better disciples than even the disciples that went with Jesus, better disciples than Peter and John and James.

And as I was thinking about the music that helps me hear that message of change in the gospel, I was actually thinking about something that wasn't a

classical piece of music, but is actually a piece by Bob Dylan. And it's I Shall Be Released and I've asked Claire and company to perform it.

They say everything can be replaced
They say every distance is not near
So I remember every face
Of every man who put me here

I see my light come shining
From the west down to the east
Any day now, any day now
I shall be released

They say every man needs protection
They say that every man must fall
Yet I swear I see my reflection
Somewhere so high above this wall

I see my light come shining
From the west down to the east
Any day now, any day now
I shall be released

Now, yonder stands a man in this lonely crowd
A man who swears he's not to blame
All day long I hear him shouting so loud
Just crying out that he was framed

I see my light come shining
From the west down to the east
Any day now, any day now
I shall be released

Now the reason why I think this song helps me hear this gospel so powerfully is a couple of things. One is that this song kind of caught on in the midst of the last cold war we were in, in which we were feeling constrained. We had missiles pointed at each other. We were experiencing social unrest. We were experiencing tectonic change in our world. And many of us when this song was first played, experienced it as a powerful expression and recognition of being both stuck, but hoping for something more. And it comes in its first iteration as a kind of prayer, a kind of belief and trust in the promise of God, that God will somehow be the force of release and liberation and transformation.

And so throughout all of the different verses, there are moments in which people experience different kinds of confinement. The confinement of wanting

to swear that we are completely innocent, man who swears he's not to blame, or the person who is stuck behind a wall, or the person who is feeling the distance. But the light that comes is a promise of liberation. And the light that shines in our gospel today from Jesus is an invitation to make a journey of liberation. And that invitation is hidden in plain sight, because there is a translation of the gospel that has become the one that we use.

And it misses the most important point in today's gospel, in my opinion, which is that when Jesus and Moses and Elijah are speaking about their departure, that word departure is actually in Greek *exodus*. And while the Hebrew Bible has a different term or title for the book of Exodus in the entire milieu of Jesus' time, it became routine to use that term Exodus, to refer to the journey that Moses takes when he leads the people of God out of bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. And that Exodus, that Moses led set in motion a kind of Exodus theme to the way the people of God moved through time and space. We are not bound forever because God is with us and God invites us on a journey to liberation, and that journey will change us.

And this Exodus motif is an important part of our own consciousness as Americans when the early United States was trying to figure out what the seal of the United States was going to be. Instead of an eagle, Benjamin Franklin said it should be actually a picture of Moses holding a staff and leading the people of Israel through the Red Sea. In 1828, when Absalom Jones preached the first sermon to celebrate the liberation of African-Americans from the international slave trade, he picked Exodus as his text.

So we are seeing today both an invitation to change and an invitation of exodus. And this goes with the grain of what we are called to be as not only Americans, but as Christians, we are called to follow Jesus. And we are called to let go of certain things as we move into Lent. To confront the things that keep us in prison and to place them in God's hands so that we can be transformed and liberated from the things that imprison us, so that we can be changed so that the monsters will be tamed and we will not become monsters ourselves.

Over the past few days, I've been praying through a kind of acronym that has become my exercise of prayer for Lent. And it is that in Lent this time, I want to turn my face to God. And FACE for me has become a kind of acronym that stands for the things that draw me from God, which is Fear, Attachment, Control, and Entitlement. And so my prayer is to pick up one of those things that keep me from being in better relationship with God and better relationship with others.

So to say a little bit about each, fear is what often forces me to engage in a lot of triggering behavior and a lot of reactivity. And so when I confront, when I ask myself, when I ask God to reveal to me my fear, I am asking God to lift up those

parts of my own personality that can become prey to things that I'm not proud of. And I ask God to change my fear to faith.

And attachment is something that I lift up and try to think about all the ways that I can allow my attachment to things to keep me from actually be being truly present to the people around me. I can become overly attached to affirmation and go chasing around, hoping for someone to finally like me when they aren't going to like me. Or I can become attached to things that numb the pain in my life. And so I can fall prey to addiction. And so when I think through my attachments, I think through the things that are part of me, that pull on me, that seem to be almost like having handles on my body that could pull me in the wrong direction. And I place those attachments in God's hands. And I asked them to be replaced by some affections, the kind of good relationships with others that I need, the kind of life-giving things that I need.

And control is something that I enjoy. Things work out really well when I'm in total control for me. But the more I try to white knuckle things, and control them to my own vision, the more I don't allow space for the Holy Spirit to work in the midst of our relationships. And so one of the things I have to surrender is control because if I don't surrender that control, I won't allow that space between us to become fruitful, for the spirit of God to bless that space between us.

And finally there is entitlement. I tend to extend myself into things. I throw myself into causes. I throw myself into situations. I work hard and that's a good thing. But when I extend myself too much, I become either the hero or the villain in a melodrama of my own making. And I engage in a lot of negative behavior when I find myself as either the hero or the victim. And so one of the things I have to do with entitlements is to try to see myself in the story that God is telling me about myself, to see myself in a larger story in which God has come to be part of my life and the grace that has come from the people around me. Those are the things that I truly have to rely on. Not on any kind of demand or dessert that comes from entitlement.

Now, these things, FACE, Fear, Attachment, Control, Entitlement, they keep me from being transformed. And it's my intention this Lent to lift them up. And I suspect that you might struggle with one of those four as well, if not all of them. And so maybe one thing we can do this Lent is to set ourselves on this practice of lifting up these things, of asking God to reveal these things to us. And one thing I want to say, and to emphasize is that oftentimes we go through difficult times in our lives and it's not always the best of time when you are being entirely gripped with fear, or experiencing a contest of control, or experiencing the draw of an attachment, or feeling completely enmeshed because of entitlement.

That's not always the best time for you to lift up those things. So if you feel out of sorts, or if you feel lost, or if you feel lonely, or if you feel like you might be in an unsafe place, be gentle with yourself as you go through this prayer exercise. And

know that at the end, God is with you fully, and God loves you fully. The disciples did not get it in today's gospel, and yet they followed Jesus on His journey to death and life. They just moved their feet and they kept on walking and they eventually were able to see the height and the depth and the breadth of God's infinite love in Christ. So make that journey, make that exodus, let yourself be changed. Place these things in God's hands and be ready to be surprised.

Amen.