



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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. Please be seated.

Today, I'm going to preach a sermon to you with a title, and the title is called Finding Jesus: A Mystery in Three Parts. Now, this sermon is not about a confessional moment in my life, but an actual hunt for an actual material Jesus. And so the first part is going to be The Mystery Presents Itself.

About two years ago, we were beginning our construction project and we had this beautiful statue of Jesus welcoming a child in our old atrium. And we called Cranbrook and asked them for a reference to someone who could restore the statue and maybe store it for a bit of time. And we got a highly reputable person. And so he came and he took the statue and brought it to his factory in Hamtramck. And there he restored it and there he kept it.

And everything seemed to be going fine. We paid a little rent on it every month. And Jesus seemed to be happy. He wasn't complaining. And then in February of this year, we contacted or tried to contact the restorer, and we discovered that all of his phone numbers had been disconnected. And then the warehouse had been closed, the studio had been closed. And so I called a local gallerist and I asked for a bit of advice. And he said to me, Father Danaher, my advice to you is to get a lawyer. No one ever wants to hear that advice, just to let you know. You should begin with empathy, but don't say get a lawyer.

And I thought about it for a half second and I realized if I got a lawyer, I would never see that Jesus again. And so instead, I thought about who I knew in Hamtramck that knew other people. And so I contacted a friend of mine, Scott Hocking, who is an incredible artist who lives in a factory in Hamtramck and has this incredible life. And I said to him through text, "Scott, I'm trying to find Jesus, the statue from the church. It was with this restorer." And then he told me, "I don't know where he is, he disappeared. But I do know the person who owns the warehouse, his name is Don Kilpatrick."

And so I wrote Don Kilpatrick a very stern text. "Hello Don. This is Bill Danaher from Christchurch Cranbrook trying to track down a statue that is in the warehouse you purchased. I would like to connect with you as soon as possible." So to my surprise, he immediately wrote back, "Oh, hi Bill. Scott mentioned to me you'd be calling me. I don't know where it is, but I can give you the name of

Jay, his assistant." And so he texted me a number. So I called the number. Jay picked up the phone, thankfully. Jay heard about the statue, but he didn't know where it was exactly. But he heard that some of the statues had been moved to this place in Novi, known as Premier Towing and Installation. It does movement of factory warehouses and machines, and for some reason they've recently gone into artwork. And he said, I don't know their number, but I have an email. I'll try the email.

And not wanting to trust that I decided to go on Google and find out where it was and give the person a call. His name was Tom. And then Tom had a sense of humor that he liked to try out on me. And so he said, "Oh no, I'm in Arizona." And I said, "You're in Arizona?" "No, just kidding. I'm actually down the street from you. Ha ha, ha." I did not write back lol, no emojis for this man. I don't play when it comes to Jesus. And so Tom agreed to bring Jesus back for a sizable donation, and I gave it. And so I had this great moment in which I could purchase Jesus the way that He purchased me in grace. And the Jesus statue that we have is now safely epoxied and fastened to a stone in the columbarium.

So that is moving towards the conclusion of part one of this mystery presenting itself. And I want to draw a quick lesson from that to today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, because what's interesting about what I discovered, is that I could not force the issue by exerting power or privilege. I had to work a network and I had to ask people who I knew and trusted and to find my way through informal communication. And that's exactly how we read about the resurrection in the Gospel of Matthew. The angel reveals the message to two women who had come to the tomb.

And from the beginning, Christian thinkers have wondered why it was that God in Christ chose to reveal the revelation of the resurrection to two women. And the answer again and again, that comes, given the fact that women did not have power or prestige in that society. The answer that comes again and again, is that women could be trusted with the message because they knew how to work those informal networks of communication.

And this is a lesson for you about the resurrection. The way you and I will discover the truth of the resurrection isn't going to come from a knockdown, drag-out argument, or some kind of statement that's going to help you believe or make you believe, but in fact, it's going to be coming to you by trusting the testimony of others.

Part 2: The Mystery Deepens. As we were getting Jesus ensconced, I suddenly realized that everybody that I had called actually had a connection to the church in a weird way. Don Kilpatrick had actually started coming to church three weeks before I texted him, and that was why he texted me back so quickly. He thought I was onto him. And I knew his number because he had given it in as a kind of

welcome moment. And I didn't get clued into that until at the end of our conversation he said, see you Sunday.

All throughout this caper where I was trying to find my way to finding Jesus, I realized that it was not me who was the hero of this story. It was everybody who helped me. They wanted to bring Jesus to me. And that was a revelation because I have to say, I got a little excited when I figured out how to find Jesus without going to a lawyer. And it is exciting for me to have connections in Detroit. And if you ever need anything in this world in Detroit, I am the guy that finds you the guy. I am the guy who finds you the guy. It is something that you can bank on. But I needed their help and they gave their help. They thought of this project as worthy of their time and investment.

And that is another lesson that you can see in our reading today from Matthew, which is that we tend to lean in and try to push and to figure out what is this resurrection all about? Because when we're dealing with disappointment or stress or anxiety or anger or loss, we grab onto what we can hold onto. But the revelation of the resurrection is that the timing is God's and God is usually always already coming to you. If you can release your grip a little bit or soften your focus, you'll see that God is always there.

Part 3: The Mystery Unfolds. When I brought this statue back and when we got it placed on the pedestal, I suddenly understood its purpose. The statue was originally constructed by an artist named Grace Turnbull. She was born in 1880 and she died in 1976. And she was an author in polymath. She was fluent in several languages. She picked up languages for fun. She wrote two bestselling books, one on comparative religion in the '20s called *Tongues of Fire*. And another on a Greek philosopher named Plotinus that she published in 1936 called *The Essence of Plotinus*, where she had taught herself Greek to read this ancient text. And it was published by Oxford University Press, and it is still cited today in dissertations.

And she was a defender of civil rights, unflinching. Participated, marched, protested. And also she was a teetotaler. She thought that we were on the right track when we had prohibition. She did not like alcohol, and when friends would come to visit her, and this is the artistic community, she would not give them a cocktail. She would offer them apple juice. Grace was a character, and this statue is magnificent because it does something I've never seen in any other depiction of Jesus with children. And if you take a look at it, I have a picture of it right on your bulletin. And if you look outside, as you go out of the service, go out this door and go to the right, you can see it for yourself.

Now, there are many depictions and many sculptures of Jesus welcoming children where He is sitting and He's personifying that great, wonderful gospel story where Jesus says, let the children come unto me. But in this one, Jesus is

holding a little girl's hands and He is teaching her to walk. And this of course, is a confirmation and thanksgiving for any of us who have spent any time with children trying to nurture them in the love of God and of the faith.

But it's also a witness to the resurrection because this little girl learning to walk personifies our walk with God, and that is how the resurrection comes home to us. That is how the resurrection goes from, as a friend of mine says, a rumor that we hear, to a truth we live in our bodies. We solve that problem, that mystery of the resurrection by walking with faith.

Augustine of Hippo, the great bishop and Saint from Northern Africa, at one point was having a knockdown drag out with somebody who was doubting the faith. And they said, how do you know there is a God? And Augustine said, solvitur abulense cum Deo. Thankfully the person did speak Latin, but I'll translate. Solvitur, it is solved by walking with God. You and I this Easter, have an opportunity to walk with God and to find the Christ who is waiting for us, the Christ who has risen from the dead, the Christ who is alive, and the Christ who is with us always.

Amen.