



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Four Phone Calls\_ - The Twenty Fifth Sunday after Pentecost- 11\_14\_2021***

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have a wonderful audio visual team that are actually live streaming. Hello everyone at home! They're live streaming these worship services. And the other thing that they do is they go back and they cut out the sermons and post them so that people, if they want to watch them again, or go through them there they are.

And so the video director, Andrew, always asks me, what's the title of your sermon? I never think about titling sermons. I'm like, I'm just glad it got there. So, I was thinking, oh, I know what I'm going to tell him today, because he's going to ask me right after service, what's the title of my sermon? And I'm going to say, "Four Phone Calls." That's my title. Because this past week I had four phone calls.

The first one was from a parishioner and she asked if the church would pray for friends of her family. There's a woman and her husband who are teachers and they were in Addis Ababa and they were fleeing for their lives. And they were hoping to get a plane out of the place and get home because there's a threat of an abrupt regime change. That is just way too reminiscent of what just happened in Afghanistan just three months ago. And my first thought was honestly, where's Addis Ababa? I'm ignorant. And what the heck is happening there?

And then my second thought was actually, no, you know what? I don't even want to know what's happening. I cannot take any more war or bad news or genocides or dictatorships or whatever keeps us human beings from getting along with each other and loving each other and just living peaceably.

And then later on in the week, I was on a Zoom call. And Father Bill was talking to the Mission and Outreach Committee about our good work in Haiti. And we are doing good work in Haiti, even though things are so bad there. And Father Bill wisely pointed out that the situation is quite dire. It's probably not going to get better and it's not going to be an easy fix for this country that is on the verge of collapse, if it's not there already.

And then I received another phone call this week from a concerned parishioner from a sister congregation. She asked if I knew what the State of Michigan had

done when it changed the no fault laws for auto insurance. Her son who was 21 years old, suffered a terrible car accident while he was in college. And it resulted in a severe closed head injury, leaving him wheelchair bound and dependent on others for care for the rest of his life. And he's lost his ability to take care of himself because of the change of the no fault insurance and the change to the catastrophic fund that paid for the long-term care for those who've been permanently damaged in their auto collisions.

And she asked me, are we okay as Christians for this to happen? Those who cannot take care of themselves now have no one to take care of them. Now, I don't know how you all manage all this news, but I just found myself sort of shaking my head and muttering under my breath, Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. And the Lord Christ responds and offers these words to us: "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars do not be alarmed. This must take place, this is but the beginning of the birth pains."

Does that send shivers down your spine like it does mine? The beginning, just, it never seems to end. It feels as if this world has been in labor, birthing something new for a very long time. When is it going to stop? Why doesn't Jesus give us a word of hope instead of ensuring us that there are more trials and tribulations?

I don't know about you, but I find myself in either two cycles of life. I find myself in the first cycle of life sort of thanking God that I have avoided another destruction or catastrophe, like, I'm just really happy. And every morning I say, oh, I'm so blessed because I'm not living in Addis Ababa or in Afghanistan. I got away with it and I feel like I managed to make it through the crossfire today. And I managed to avoid a head on collision where I become a paraplegic today, or I am not in a nation that is on the verge of collapse today. And I breathe a sigh of relief. I say to myself, well, you got away for now.

And then comes to the second cycle of life. And of course, the second cycle of life always happens because this is a game where the house always wins. And at some point we all enter into that other half of life, trauma. Warring nations, famines, plagues, angry mobs, illness, and death, they surround you. They come straight for you and you have to figure out how to climb yourself out of the muck, fighting for your life. Hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel, hoping that you can get back to that first part of life, where you're dodging bullets and escaping unscathed until the next catastrophe hits you.

But Jesus is offering a third way, a third way that allows us to break that cycle of trying to avoid trauma and then trying to just get through it. What is this third way? Well, the disciples they've come to Jerusalem and they're gawking at that gorgeous temple. It's a beautiful edifice. It's amazing, big, large, human feat of gorgeousness that's dedicated to the glory of God. If there is a structure that should be ensured to withstand anything, it should be the house of the Lord.

And so the disciples turn to Jesus and they're like, check it out. Isn't that impressive? Jesus says to them, do you see those large buildings and those powerful institutions that seem unbreakable? They're going to fall over like Legos. They're going to go up in fire like the Cathedral of Notre Dame. They will crumble. They'll be no more. Do we think that something will be lasting until the end? The world lays waste to everything sooner or later. Things of the world die off. They get destroyed. They are changed irreversibly. Physical structures are toppled. Political structures are destroyed. People die, even nations die. It all goes away and this is just the beginning.

So what is the third way? What is the way that Jesus offers? Jesus tells us, embrace the impermanent. Embrace the impermanence, because the one who promises us that it is the beginning is birthing something new and will make sure that it happens. But until then, embrace the impermanence. That idea of embracing what is going to be changing, it's actually a very ancient concept that's shared by many expressions of religions. And especially those that are out of Asia. Accepting that the only thing constant is change, right? We know that inherently. And the reason that other religious traditions embrace this idea is to help us deal with our suffering. So it says things are going to change. Don't hold on to them. Let go and understand that as a change, that's part of life and that will decrease your suffering.

Now that's the way that Eastern religions look at it. But Jesus, He's actually not very interested in us being sort of Zen when things happen to us. Jesus is interested in something different. Jesus is saying to us that in the midst of calamities and tragedies, as we head to that final day, the day of the Lord, when all things will be new, the day of the Lord, when Jesus completes the work of resurrection, Jesus says, I'm going to give you three things in order to get through it. So the first thing that Christ gives us is wisdom. We are wise. Now wisdom is not the same as knowledge, knowledge is to know something. Wisdom is to know that you don't know in the midst of something, and that you trust that God knows.

We're reading a book during our Sunday forum and Wednesday night series, during our Thrive series. And it's called *Thriving During a Post-Traumatic World*, by Dr. Randall Bell. And there's this really interesting piece in it where he talks about how you can be a healthy person in a really healthy environment. So if everything around you is going wonderfully and you yourself internally are grounded and good, then you have certain characteristics. And your characteristics are you're fun, you're playful, you're open, you're inviting, all is going well.

But now if you take the same person who's grounded and rooted and you put them in an unhealthy environment, in an environment that's spiraling out of control around them, a chaotic space, a place of trauma, something changes.

And what changes is that the person has wisdom. They are wise in knowing that everything is really messed up, but it's not them. They are wise in knowing that they continue to get to be themselves in the midst of the crazy. They're wise and knowing that God is there.

And so the characteristics of a person who is in an unstable environment is that they're forgiving, because they understand that things are not well and they can let go and forgive and be forgiven. They're responsible because they still have integrity, even in the midst of an unstable environment. They're empathetic because they know everybody's going through difficulty. They're authentic and they're warm because that is the only way to be in the midst of not knowing anything. And they're ethical. When you are wise, you can manage the impermanence of your life.

The second thing that Christ gives us is in the midst of everything that's transient, we can depend on one thing. We can depend on the church. Now, the church is as you know, a gift from Jesus Christ. Jesus is considered the groom and the church is considered His bride. It's that close and that intimate of a relationship. In the Book of Hebrews, it talks about how Jesus who has given himself for the sake of the whole world made the perfect sacrifice. What do the people who are faithful and believe in that do who are confident in that truth? They're the church.

So it says that we provoke one another to love and good deeds. We meet regularly and see one another and care for each other in person with bodies and hugs and smiles. And we encourage one another. If you think about the last trauma we all went through, COVID-19, what did the church do? While we were on lockdown, what did we do? We called one another. We took care of each other. We wanted to make sure we were okay. Every week we had service here. Father Bill and Claire made sure not a single week stopped so that we could gather together and be together through Zoom and through church at home, and so that we could be cared for through this craziness.

And we encouraged one another and we provoked one another to love and good deeds. We created the COVID-19 response fund and we cared for thousands of people helping them with all their needs. That is what the church does in the midst of calamity. The church is a mighty fortress. It's against all hordes of devils that fill the land, all threatening to devour us. We trembled not, unmoved we stand, they cannot overpower us.

The third thing that Jesus gives us is an invitation to utter those words that I found myself muttering all week long, the cry of the heart, Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. It turns out that this is an ancient call of Christian. And here's the fourth phone call. I called Joe Balistreri, musician in residence. And I was like, "Hey Joe, I know we always sing and say, *kyrie eleison*, Lord have mercy throughout worship services, but what's the story behind that? And he said that

they've probably been saying this maybe since the second century, back when Christians were persecuted for their faith and they were killed.

And in the Greek, *kyrie eleison*, it actually means a little bit more than simply a command, like Lord, have mercy. It's actually a testament. It's a testament that we know that God is showing mercy to us. We know that God will care for the whole world. We are actually, when we say, Lord have mercy, we're proclaiming what is true. We're not requesting it. We know it. It's a wisdom. We know that the Lord is having mercy, that Christ is having mercy.

So I am grateful. I am grateful that I have a faith that doesn't sugarcoat the truth. I know that this life is not easy and I know that things go badly very quickly, but I also know that when we hear of wars and rumors of wars, I want you to remember this. Christ has saved the world. So you be wise as you read the signs. You go to church and provoke one another to love and good deeds and meet regularly with one another so that you can be a fortress against everything that surrounds you. And you go ahead and utter with all of your hearts, Lord, have mercy and the Lord will.

Amen.