



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Love in Action\_ - The Twenty Third Sunday After Pentecost- 10\_31\_2021***

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

When I began attending church, I was in my thirties, trying to make sense of the world, starting to ask questions about life, about my purpose. I knew there was more to it than money and career, but I wasn't exactly sure where to start, how to get at it. And then one day I saw a church go by in the gay pride parade, and I decided right there on the spot, I might just give this Episcopal church a chance. Not knowing one denomination from the next, but knowing at least that here was one that was going out of its way to show up in the last place I'd ever thought to find a church. Sandwiched right there between go-go dancers and drag queens.

And so I showed up the very next Sunday and I heard two things I will never forget. The first was the invitation to communion, whoever you are, wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith, you are welcome here as the beloved child of God that you are, and always have been. I liked the sound of that and I still do. And while I didn't really understand what communion was all about and, arguably, probably still don't, I knew I was hungry for something and you all were inviting me to a meal.

The second thing was you invited me to follow a rule of life. I had no idea what that was at the time, but it wasn't a doctrine that I had to sign off on. It wasn't a dogma that I would have only wanted to argue with, but instead it was five simple practices that I could understand and seemed to make sense to me. Pray daily, worship weekly, learn constantly, serve joyfully, and give generously. And while I didn't understand it until perhaps years later, that simple rule of life, it must have taken some kind of a root that day because it became a kind of rhythm to my life, one that changed its course forever.

What rules do you follow? What rules have you set for yourself? Do you have rules about how much you save, how much time you spend on social media? Perhaps you have a rule about never going to bed angry or working out as soon as you wake up each morning. We certainly create a lot of rules as parents, do we not? Joe and I are constantly admonishing our girls on the two biggies at our house - please and thank you. In fact, my four-and-a-half -year-old daughter Gianna and I were just having a robust dialogue earlier this week on that topic. And it was going on while we were trying to listen to the Thursday morning Bible study over Zoom.

And somehow in the midst of this argument with Gianna, I must have accidentally un-muted myself, and in so doing treated the Bible study to a little Father Chris unfiltered. Not unhinged, mind you, but definitely a little unfiltered. But good old Gianna, she is a chip off the old block as they say. So when I asked her somewhat exasperatedly, Gianna, do you not know why we say please and thank you? She fired right back, yes, Dad. It's what you say to get what you want.

You got to hand it to her. I have no doubt she will be a lawyer one day. Good for her. So I'm like, okay, you got me there. I guess that's true on a certain level, but that's only half the story. It's really about being humble and being grateful. It's about showing others respect and that you don't take them for granted. It's about showing love, I'm trying to explain to her.

And as I was doing that, it was a reminder to me that these rules that we come up with, the important ones, at least, they're not just good ideas. They reveal something very profound about our values and about the person we hope to become, don't they? That's certainly true of the rule that Jesus comes up with this morning as He responds to this question about which of the more than 600 commandments in the Old Testament is the most important Jesus answers, not with one but two, actually. One from Deuteronomy, which we just heard, and the other half from Leviticus, which He pares down and brings together as one sort of intertwined rule, which we now call the Great Commandment: love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.

He brings these two together, I think because he wants us to understand that you cannot do one without also doing the other. You can't love God without also loving who God loves. In other words, we're in this together. And loving who God loves, I think, Begins with loving ourselves. And I know we struggle with that far more than we want to admit because we live in a world that seems to never miss an opportunity to remind us how we don't measure up, don't we? How we're not good enough, how we're not smart enough, not young enough, not rich enough, not educated enough, not thin enough, not successful enough, not pretty enough. On and on.

And it's hard to unlearn a lifetime of those kinds of messages, especially when they can even come from our own parents, our spouse, our teachers, even our churches. But the good news is - the good news is that they could not be more wrong. Because right from the beginning in Genesis, we learn that we are made in the image and the likeness of God, and that image and likeness of God confers upon every single one of us a worth and a value, one that the world did not give us and the world could never take away. And if we were made in that image and likeness of God, then that means we're all children of God. And if we're all children of God, then we're all brothers and sisters with one another, are we not?

And so loving our neighbor has nothing to do with loving people that we like, or that look like us or who believe like us, or whose politics are like ours, loving our neighbor means seeing them all through the eyes of God, whether you like them or not. Whether you agree with them or not. No matter how lost you think they might be, no matter how wrong they might really be, loving your neighbor. It means taking a leap of faith. To look into their eyes, into the eyes of the stranger, the other, the one who's different - even your enemy. To look into their eyes and see the same image and likeness that God sees in you.

And when you can do that, when you can find the presence of mind to do that, oh, it changes things, doesn't it? It changes you, it changes them. It changes your relationship. And when we can all do that, you can change the world. It can change everything. And that's how we love God. When you did it to the least, you did it to me, says Jesus. You see how they are intertwined? You see how they work together? Loving God, putting our loyalty and trust in God helps us to love ourselves and loving ourselves gives us the courage to love the other. And loving the other is how we love God.

But knowing that is only half the story, because did you notice how the gospel ends? The scribe, he gets it, right? He agrees with Jesus. He repeats it back to Him. He's all in. And so what does Jesus say in response? You're not far from the Kingdom of God. You're getting there. You're on the right track. Now the Gospel says that nobody dared to ask him any more questions, but imagine for a moment, if that scribe had hung in there for just one more follow-up. Imagine if he had asked Jesus, okay, so if I'm so close, what do I need to do next?

What do you suppose Jesus would have said? Do you have any ideas? In the Gospel of Luke, there's a similar dialogue this time with a lawyer, a lawyer who's not afraid to ask a few more follow-ups. And when he asks Jesus what he must do, Jesus tells him go, go and do likewise. Understanding the way of God is a good place to start. Understanding the way of love, knowing the rules, loving God with all your mind, it's important, but it's only half the story. We need to put our love into action. We need to go and do likewise.

And here at Christ Church Cranbrook, unlike any church I've ever been at, we have all kinds of ways to put your love into action through the different ministries and the different missions that you all lead and participate on. And if you're watching at home, you can see them in the connect button. And if you're in your pews, you can see them every Sunday in our communicant, any number of ways that you can love and serve the world through this church.

But I want to lift up one today because it's the one that makes all of that possible. And that's giving because of all those five spiritual practices I mentioned earlier, giving is probably the most difficult. It's the one that we seem to resist the most. It's the one where we lose the most control. It's the one where we can get the most fearful. It's the one that can trigger us mostly. I know, because that was

certainly true for me. And then over time, I started to hear the gospel and I started to hear the Gospel of John. It said, God so loved the world that he gave. He gave his only son, the most precious thing that we could ever imagine, gave so that we might live. He gave so that we could be shown the way. He gave so that we might go and do likewise. God loved and so God gave.

So let there be no doubt giving is love and action, because giving allows us to make a difference in the lives of others. And it can give our life meaning and purpose because it places our life in a greater context and lets us get outside of ourselves. Giving shows God how grateful we are and helps us to remember how blessed we've been. It gets us out of our comfort zones. It gets us off our couches and gets us out into the flow of life. Giving helps us to thrive because it helps others to thrive because we are in this together.

Here at Christ Church Cranbrook, the most important way to give is through an annual pledge because pledges are the engine that fuels everything we do here. They help us to dream bigger dreams. They help us to reach more people. They help us to make a bigger difference in the community. They help us to keep going out into the most unexpected corners of the world to reach even more people with the love of God. But more than that, making a pledge, making a commitment, it's an act of faith because when we pledge we place more trust in God, we place more of our life in his hands. And when we pledge we join with God and we step boldly into a world where we do have enough, where we can give so that others might live. When we pledge we say no to the world of scarcity and fear and yes, to the Kingdom of God. Yes, to what's possible. Yes to a new economy where love and compassion are the currency and fear is forgotten.

When we pledge, we say yes, yes to following the God who so loved us that he gave - gave himself for us so that we might go and do likewise.

Amen.