



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Mind The Gap_ - The Third Sunday After Pentecost - 6_26_2022

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

I have this usual practice on my preaching weekends. I will get ready early on Friday, get a nice cup of coffee going, and I'll sit down and I'll start to put together all the thoughts that I had throughout the week as I ask the Spirit, what am I going to say to the people this weekend? And so I was doing that on Friday. I had a beat. I was going to tell you about how Jesus sets His face to Jerusalem.

And then around noonish, my phone blew up and I started getting texts and phone calls and messages from people who were very upset about what happened on Friday. Perhaps this happened to you, perhaps you received texts of joy and, and everything, but we all experienced, maybe something on Friday. And it was a little overwhelming to me. It was overwhelming to the people who were talking to me. And I went back and looked at my paper and I thought, I don't know what you want to tell them, Lord, but I know this isn't it.

So I started again. And I looked at all three texts, the story from First Kings, the one from Galatians, and the one from Luke. And I thought, did they have anything in common? They're very strange, different stories. One is about an old prophet who is about to pass the mantle to the new one. Another one, the book of Galatians is about a church founder who's teaching his new converts what it means to be Christian. And finally we have Jesus, who's trying to get people to follow Him.

And I thought, oh my gosh, they all do have something in common. Somebody's cranky! Somebody's irritated in each one of these texts. Elijah was so irritated with Elisha. He's this old man, this wonderful prophet, been called by God. And God says to him, all right, it's time for you to give the mantle to Elisha. So he goes to this young guy and he says, It's time for you to receive this mantle. And what does Elisha do? Elisha's like, okay, I got it. But I got to go back and kiss my mom and dad goodbye, and like make them a meal and stuff like that. And Elijah's so irritated with him. Just like, dude, we don't have time for this. But I actually, I'm grateful for Elisha because I have a kid who's about to leave me and go to Minnesota for college. And I'm like kisses, lots of them. So I'm all for what Elisha did, but it did irritate Elijah.

And then we have the epistle, the book of Galatians where Paul, who's the church founder, is trying to teach the Galatians what it means to follow Jesus,

how to be faithful and what it doesn't mean. And they're not listening to him and he is getting really irritated because there's other voices talking to them. And then in the Gospel we have the Savior, who's going to Jerusalem and He's trying to get people to follow Him. And they're all cranky. They're all irritated because things aren't quite going their way.

And I thought this is really helpful, because I think we live in cranky times. There's this general irritation and annoyance and frustration and lack of patience with everything that keeps happening. Like every week there's something and we're all getting short with each other. We're getting tired of the situations that are affecting our society. And so what do these stories, what do these readings today teach us about how to navigate difficult times? And what can they teach us about being cranky? And what do they show us about a god who brings justice and peace for all?

So in Jesus' case, what seems to be driving him crazy are the excuses, right? So they sound like legitimate excuses. We have a man who wants to bury his father and have a funeral. We have another one who wants to wish his family goodbye, but Jesus lets them know in no uncertain terms, if you want the kingdom, you have got to go now. There is no hemming and hawing. There is no waiting until the right moment. This is the time. Don't try to tie up loose ends. The demand on you is immediate. The Savior of the World is calling you. It is time to do it.

So maybe a response to the times that we live in is for you to get up and get going. Now. Now is the time for the Kingdom of God to come among us. There's no more waiting. There's no more excuses. It is time to move forward. And that sense of immediateness that comes to you is a call on your heart put there by Christ. And so there's no time like the present. So if you're called to do it, do it. However, sometimes some of us are actually not called to immediate action, especially those of us who are older and wiser and have already done the hard work that we were called to do in our lifetimes.

And in that case, I think the prophet Elijah is really helpful. There is something about the gift of wisdom. That is what Elijah offers Elisha. This gift of wisdom, this is what the world could so desperately use. And wisdom is not having knowledge and knowing things, wisdom comes from God. Wisdom is seeing things and experiencing things and knowing things so large because you have the vision of God. In fact, the only way to really receive the wisdom of God is for you not to be in control anymore. The more control you have, the less you're able to experience the wisdom of God. And so Elijah is slowly letting go of control and he's beginning to have the wisdom that he can impart to Elisha.

I would love for the church to reclaim the vision of elders. People who have fought throughout their lives for justice, suffered through the pains of this world, experiencing having no control over everything, and waiting for God's wisdom to be given to them, and now want to share with all of us how God granted them

wisdom. This gift of wisdom, it is a beautiful antidote to a very cranky bickering world because wisdom grounds you. It reminds you what is important and what is not. And it gives you the patience to be able to do the hard work of lasting transformation that requires slow and deliberate change.

So two responses to crankiness: go do it or impart wisdom. Here's the third one. The third one comes from one of the most confrontational books in the Bible, the Book of Galatians. Paul is extremely cranky in this because the new church that he founded is filled with uncircumcised Gentiles, and now their faith is in peril because they're being told by some disciples that they're not real Christians. Real Christians get circumcised. That's what they were told.

It is not lost on me that this weekend we encounter in our spiritual ancestors, people who are telling men what to do with their bodies in order to be right with God and in order to be lawful. And Paul says, no, no way, uh-uh, circumcision and uncircumcision, this is not how you get close to God. You are focusing on the wrong things. In fact, he actually gets so irritated with them that this part doesn't make it into the readings that we read today. But it's right before and it's in the Bible. Paul actually says, I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves.

But then Paul reminds us, participation in the life with Christ does not happen by imposing laws and restrictions on one another, but by being free to bind ourselves together in love. So Paul says you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only don't use your freedom as an opportunity for self indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another for the whole law is summed up in a single commandment. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you're not consumed by each other. And this is the third antidote to deal in a world filled with strife and bitterness.

I had visited my sister several years ago when she was living in Dublin, and she took us around to all the fun touristy places. We used a lot of public transportation and I remember the first time I got into a train or subway or whatever we were getting on. All of a sudden she got ahead of me. She turns around, she yells at me, "Mind the gap! Mind the gap!" And I was like, "What are you saying to me?" And I was like, looking around, is there a gap store here or something? I didn't understand what she was trying to tell me.

And then I looked down and they're written on the platform. It says, mind the gap. And what happens is there's a platform and then there's a train and there's like a chasm in between them. And there's a hole, and this is the way of reminding you, there's a difference between where you are and where you need to go. And you need to pay attention that there's some space there. Be aware of it, be mindful of it.

And Paul knew this and Paul said, if you try to fill that gap with the ways of the flesh, you're just going to have problems. You're going to have dissensions and it's going to lead to death and destruction. You're going to do things like use envy and malice and greed and enmities and strife and anger and quarrels and factions to try to understand the chasm that's between you and the others. But Paul says, don't do that. You've been enslaved to love one another. So pay attention to the space between you and the space between them and let the Holy Spirit fill the gap with the fruits of the spirit.

So God is going to bridge the chasm with love, with joy, with peace. God will fill the chasm with gentleness, with patience, with generosity. The spirit will give you faith in order to see the other side. And the spirit will give you self control. What this means is that as you go through a world that seems to become more and more embittered every day, more polarized, more painful, and the gap between where you are and where others are, becomes more and more expansive, if you try to fill the gap with your own devices, inevitably, you are going to resort into ways that are not life giving. But when you let the Spirit bridge the gap with only the gifts that God can provide us, that's when we can start to see the Promised Land.

So as you navigate through our world together, our life together, our nation together, our state together, our community together, let the gap between you and where you want to go be filled with love. Let it be filled with patience and gentleness. Let it be filled with extreme generosity, your own control of self. The Spirit will be at work. Dealing with difficult times is not new. Every generation has had to do this, but we have the gift of having a vision of how to do it from our spiritual ancestors. We can learn from Jesus that we need to act now for the time of transformation is now and the Kingdom is now. We can learn from Elijah how we can share our own wisdom and pass it down to others who are seeking the wisdom of God. And we can learn from the Galatians, how to practice the fruits of the spirit instead of practicing the divisive ways of the flesh because we have all been freed by Christ. You are free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit to a yolk of crankiness.

Amen.