



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

More Than a Place, a Feeling, and a Family_ - The Third Sunday after the Epiphany- 1_23_2022

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.

I am so glad to see so many of you in person, because it has been so cold that I don't feel like doing anything. I don't know if you're in that position too. This has been a cold winter. We forgot that last winter was relatively mild. That was one of the blessings that God gave us in the midst of the pandemic, but like everything else, God is just withdrawing that one too. So we get a cold winter.

And I don't know about you, but everything seems to go wrong when it gets cold. For me, at least. When I try to do something, it takes twice as long. It's not just the snow, it's the cold. And the other day I was on my way to the gym and it was like 5:30 in the morning. I got into my car, I turned it on, and I had no gas. And so I went to the gas station at the corner of Maple and Lahser on my way to the gym. And I go there and I get the pump going. Of course there's been some kind of supply chain issue, and so it's just trickling out and it's like five degrees. The person across from me begins to swear and say to no one in particular, "I've got to get to work!"

I'm watching this gas trickle in and I suddenly began to watch the TV set that is on the pump. Usually, I'm on my phone, but God forbid we have an undistracted moment in our lives. So the TV set just began to play these things and I found them kind of transfixing. I just got really into them. They were really interesting. And one just kept on repeating itself again and again and again, and it just worked its way into my consciousness, like a bad song.

And so I got curious and I found it online because there was something about it that caught my eye. And I'm going to share it with you today. It's this. Bazonzoes in Walled Lake and Lansing isn't just a marijuana dispensary. Because it's not just a place, it's a feeling - it's family. We want to thank our amazing customers and community for being part of our journey. To 2022 and beyond, have a bud-tastic year.

Now, my intent in bringing this up today is not to question the decision by the good people of Michigan to legalize recreational marijuana. And my intent today in bringing this up is not to question the obviously smart marketing that the Bazonzoe family did for their product, because we all know that good

marketing is not about a product. It's about an experience. You sell not just the product, you sell the experience.

But what caused me to have pause is this progression. Not just a place, but a feeling. Not just a feeling, but a family. These are big promises for a marijuana dispensary to give. These are huge promises to give. I can't imagine someone entering into the transactional relationship the Bazonzoes wants to cultivate, as it were. And to say to the purveyor of the store, you know, Mr. Bazonzoe, I'm a little light on some finisks. But we're family, so can I have a free edible?

Or I can't imagine the Bazonzoe family saying to someone who needed to be taken in, hey, come on in. We're family, have a seat at Thanksgiving. Because that's after all what we're about. Interestingly, I kind of wondered what the Bazonzoe family would serve at Thanksgiving besides turkey and Doritos.

Now I raise this up before you today because I see in it a kind of almost religious aspiration as we see in much marketing. Because when we engage in some kind of consumable, we all want some kind of transformation. And so that promise of place and feeling and family, it's quite real. But Christianity is more than just a place. It's more than just a feeling. Christianity is more even than a family. Christianity pivots on a person on Jesus Christ.

And too often we confuse our spiritual journey and our quest for transformation. Too often, we confuse that with a place. Too often, we confuse that with a feeling. Too often, we go looking for the family we didn't have, but in fact, Christianity invites us to more. And if we stop our Christian walk at a place or at a feeling or at a family we'll fall short of what Christ is calling us to be, which is to be disciples and members of His body.

And time and time again, I've seen people stumble in their spiritual walk because they confuse Christ with a place, but there is nowhere in the New Testament that Christ picks up a place and says that it is special in the same way that He is. In fact, in the Gospel of John, in the midst of an argument with a Samaritan woman, Jesus says that the hour is coming when people will not be worshiping God on mountains or in temples, but they will worship them wherever they are.

And in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says some powerful things about feelings, saying that it's not just those who say, "Lord, Lord," who will find their way to the Kingdom of Heaven, but everybody who does my will. And in the Gospel of Matthew, again, there is this confrontation between Jesus and His biological mother and brother and family, in which Jesus says, who is my family? Who are my mother - my mother and my brother and my sisters are those who do the will of my Father.

Everything in Christianity, pivots on Jesus and it's imperative in our journey in 2022 to have a Christ-tastic year, we need to move through and look for the Christ who is more than a place, more than a feeling, more than a family, the Christ who calls us to walk with Him, in imitation of Him in the way that He has created us as we are.

Now, all of this is a way for me to get into this incredible gospel that we have today from Luke. Jesus has come back to His hometown, Nazareth. Back to the place that He knows best, and that knows him best. And in the midst of His early parts of His preaching, He receives incredible accolades. And they mention His family, they say is not this Joseph's son? Look at Him.

And finally there is a kind of emphasis on feeling in terms of healing. The people want Jesus to do the powerful works of healing there that He's done elsewhere. And yet Jesus will have none of it. Instead, He pulls down the spirit and says that He has been called to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus has come to inaugurate a kingdom that has been built on His own image. He'll go out and be in solidarity with the poor, with the oppressed, with those who feel helpless, with those who are diseased, with those who are lost, with those who are struggling so that they might be transformed by being in relationship with Him.

You and I are called to follow that Jesus today. The collect we have before us and that we started our service with today is that we would answer the call of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and to proclaim to all people the good news of His salvation. And that we, and the whole world might perceive His glory anew. To do that, we have to follow Jesus. We have to walk with Him. We have to go to places with Him.

And this is not just to go beyond the walls of this church, but to see ourselves as the body of Christ in action. Because when we are reaching out to the poor, when we are reaching out to those who are held captive, to those who are oppressed, to those who are hungry, when we do that kind of work, we're actually going with the grain of the body of Christ. We're seeing ourselves as tied up in their lives and their lives as tied up in our lives.

The art I have before you today came to mind as I was working in a dental clinic that I organized for a large group of refugees in Dearborn. It's by Bill Viola, and it's called The Raft. It was done in 2004 in connection to the Athens Olympics. And Viola wanted to create a different vision of community than the Olympics. The Olympics was not going to be a moment of great champions, but a moment of great solidarity and suffering.

And so he put this group of people in the middle of this room who represent different ethnicities and races and economic classes, and he puts them together.

And then out of nowhere, he blasts them with water. And they get hit by the blast and they fall together on the ground. And then they get up and slowly recover.

One of the things we do when we follow Jesus and experience Him among the poor, the oppressed, the hungry, those who have left their home and have no place, those who have lost their family and have to begin again, those whose feelings are completely gone. We find in those moments when we're with people, ourselves, because all of us need the Jesus we seek. And all of us are members of the body of Christ.

And this is why Paul tells us we are members of Christ's body. Those of us who have high honor, those of us who have low honor, those of us who are teachers, those of us who are apostles, those of us who are ministers, those of us who are evangelists, all of us have a kind of membership together in Christ's body, in which when one suffers everyone suffers. And when one is joyous, all rejoice. And in that moment, we find our footing in Christ.

The people in Viola's portrait are standing on solid ground. And yet he calls it The Raft because when we are hit by something unexpected, when we are knocked off our feet, we find ourselves adrift and we find ourselves reaching out to others. You and I have been called to follow Jesus. You and I have been called to move beyond the things that we hold onto in our lives so ardently, to move beyond our place, to move beyond our feelings, to move beyond our families and to find our life in Him. The people of Nazareth, Jesus's hometown, his relatives, they heard this news and wanted to throw him off a cliff. They were filled with rage. What will you do?

Amen.