



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Ocean of Mercy - The Second Sunday of Easter- 4_24_2022

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

Anyone here ever been let down by a close friend or a family member? A spouse, or a partner? Ever been abandoned or betrayed by someone you were counting on? Someone you thought would be there for you just as you had always been there for them. Someone you thought you could trust, but when you looked up, they were nowhere to be found.

We all know that feeling, don't we? We've all been there. It's one of those moments in life you never forget. It's like a sinking feeling. The pit forms in our stomach as our hearts break. Betrayal by someone close to you is one of the hardest blows our hearts will ever have to endure. It shatters our trust and it leaves us feeling like we're all alone. I think most of us would rather take an honest enemy over a false friend, which is probably why even years later, abandonment and betrayal leaves scars that never fully fade.

I say all this, because I want us to imagine for a moment how we might have reacted had we been the ones in that room with the disciples? Would we have been angry? Would we have tried to make them feel guilty? Would we have criticized their faith and called them cowards, accused them of just looking out for yourselves? Would we have explained all the things that they would now have to do if we were to ever trust them again? Or would we have just turned right back around and walked out in order to protect ourselves from ever feeling let down like that again?

These are just a few of the ways we respond, aren't they? And even when we do reconcile, it's never quite the same, is it? These wounds, they can cut deep. The poet, William Blake, once said, "It's far easier to forgive an enemy than a friend." And as a former attorney who handled his share of bitter divorce cases, that is so true.

So with all that in mind, what is Jesus's response to his closest friends when He sees for the first time, since they had abandoned Him? What does he say? Peace be with you. That's it. He doesn't even bring it up. Doesn't even mention it. He has no need to accuse or to shame. No need to rub their faces in it or remind them. No need to punish them or make them do some kind of penance or make them pay. No, Jesus comes with pure grace, an ocean of mercy as Richard Rohr calls it. Endless forgiveness as far as the eye can see.

I wonder, do we realize just how profound of a statement that is about God? And more importantly, do we really believe it? And I don't mean up here. Right? I think we all know the official line. I think we heard it many, many times since Sunday school. My question is, do we really believe it here? Do we really believe it when we really need to? Because I have to tell you, I talk with folks all the time who when the chips are down, when push has come to shove, when we really made a mess of things and it feels like our whole world is crashing down, it's almost like all of that stuff about God's mercy and forgiveness, it just goes out the window and we go right back to hiding behind locked doors, scared and alone, still believing in God, but just no longer sure He's on our side.

It's been my experience that too often, when we need God's grace, the most, we turn God back into that punishing, judgmental score-keeping god. The one that we thought we had outgrown years ago, you know, the one that's got a list, the one that we're pretty sure we're not on? In other words, we start to ascribe to God all the ways that we react to friends who betray or abandon us. It reminds me of that old saying that God created us in His image, and then we promptly returned the favor.

I suppose it doesn't help that the church took God's ocean of mercy and little by little over the centuries added conditions and caveats, rules and requirements. We roped off the gospel and appointed ourselves its gatekeepers, and then set about parsing and picking at scripture, plucking out of context whatever we could to justify our own prejudices, always putting ourselves at the center so that we could declare who was loved and who wasn't, who was forgiven and who isn't, who's in and who's out, who's saved and who's not.

But the risen Lord, the risen Lord, doesn't come with judgment and retribution. He's not in the business of dividing and shaming. He comes in peace. He doesn't come with religious requirements and recriminations. Jesus comes with perfect forgiveness so that He might breathe new life into all of us. Just as God once breathed life into Adam, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit unto a new humanity so that we might be reborn and sent into the world as God's agents of forgiveness ourselves.

And so while we come to Jesus, as we always have, as we probably always will, just like the disciples with our failures and our unfaithfulness, our disloyalty and our fears, our dishonesty, and yes, even our doubts, Jesus says, peace be with you. He models God's universal forgiveness before sending us out to do likewise, empowering us to offer to a broken and suffering world, God's ocean of mercy.

And he even shows us where to begin in the most unexpected place with our wounds. Have you ever wondered why Jesus after His resurrection still has all the marks of His wounds? He doesn't come in a blaze of glory, restored to glowing

perfection, surrounded by angels and trumpets. No, he comes humbly quietly, a wounded Lord coming to His wounded friends. He doesn't hide or deny His wounds as we might. He doesn't see them as a sign of weakness or shame as we often do. He bears the marks of His suffering for all to see so that His suffering might help us to bear our own.

They remind us that Jesus has been there as well and so that we will never be alone in ours. Jesus knows what it feels like to have friends turn on you. He's felt the sting of betrayal. He knows what it's like to be wrongly accused and scapegoated, to be publicly mocked, brutalized, and subjected to indescribable pain. And Jesus, God even knows the loss of a child. But even more than that, showing His wounds shows us that our new life, our new life in Christ, our resurrected life comes to us, not despite our wounds, but through them. We come to God not by doing it right. Not by hiding and avoiding, not by playing it safe and being perfect. We come to God through our suffering, through our mistakes, through our humiliation, through our risks, through our failures, and yes, through our doubts.

Seeing the risen Christ still baring His wounds helps us to see ours. Not as a sign of failure, not as a sign of regrets or shame, they have nothing to do with whether we deserved it or whether we're the ones at fault. It helps us to see them instead as an invitation, an invitation to how. How. How will I, with God's help, transform and change the suffering and the pain of my life into something that's life creating, life renewing, life-giving? How do we practice resurrection through my wounds so that we might each become a wounded healer?

Think of the countless stories of those who've suffered tragedy or loss, many of which you probably know, many of whom you already are. People who have taken that experience and in time, and with plenty of good grieving, have learned to integrate it into their lives, to use their new insight and their new perspective and their new found empathy to be there for others in ways they never could have before. To pass through the locked doors of suffering hearts, to breathe new life upon them as no one else could.

I think of a dad who lost a son to suicide who now counsels middle school kids, teaching them about compassion, compassion for those who are different and how to stand up to bullies. I think of a woman tired of being alone following a divorce, starting a group for other women, a get together for brunch and museum tours and a night out on the town. And for the healing conversation that only they can have with each other.

I think of an attorney that I know quite well, who rejected God after being told his whole life that God had rejected him, who one day at a Gay Pride parade of all places discovered a church who dared to march and proclaim God's love in a way he had never heard before. A fearless, radical, inclusive love that knew no

limits and made no exceptions. An attorney who has since become a priest so that he might share that same good news to anyone who has ever been left out or told that they were beyond the reach of God's loving embrace.

Our wounds, they do leave scars, but it's not about hiding them or trying to get over them. It's not about trying to forget them or to move on from them. It's about how. How can God transform them so that through them, we might heal the world? That's the rhythm, the rhythm of life, death, and resurrection to which we are all called. Call to both live and to share.

And that is what Jesus is modeling for us today, so that each of us might have the courage to use our wounds to unlock doors that no one else can get through and to set people free by offering the same forgiveness that we've received, until the day comes when all the world would know God's limitless, endless ocean of mercy.

Amen.