



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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

Well, if you have any interest in watching a real life reenactment of today's parable of the complaining children, I would invite you over to my backyard sometime this summer. My girls have become friends with a group of other kids in the neighborhood, and they meet up just about every day in the backyard to organize some kind of game. Tag, hide and seek, soccer, right, that kind of stuff. But before they can begin, they have to first decide on the rules.

Well, the problem is, at six years old, at least at that stage in their development, they all seem to think that they are in charge. So you can imagine how that goes, right? And just when the arguing and the bickering has subsided and you think they're actually going to start playing the game, somebody adds a new rule or a new little wrinkle or a modification and the whole thing starts over again.

And I'm inside the house, listening to this all play out, trying to write a sermon. So hearing Jesus in the gospel today sound a little exasperated, I suddenly don't feel so bad. And like Jesus, I do feel bad for them. Because they can get so caught up in arguing about the rules that they can miss out on the fun of playing the game. But apparently, their little egos have developed at a faster pace than their capacity for self reflection, so they get stuck. They want to have a good time, they want to have fun, but they all want it their way.

Well, fortunately, we adults, we don't have this problem at all, do we? We're far too mature to let our egos get in the way. We don't have issues with control. Please. So yeah, Jesus sounds a little exasperated to me. He and John have been trying to proclaim the good news, albeit in different ways. But it seems that no matter how they do it or how they say it, it's not pleasing some people. Rather than receive the gospel, they want to complain about the messenger.

How they are dressed, how they live, what their credentials are, who they eat with, who they talk to, who they've been healing. Oh, on what day of the week have they been doing that healing? Like bickering children, they are so caught up in policing the rules and nitpicking that they risk missing out on the gospel altogether. Even when the Kingdom of God breaks in right under their nose, they can't seem to hear God's wisdom. Nor do they see her deeds, because they're too caught up in judging the messenger to see the message already at work, healing the world right around them.

Do we ever do that? Do we ever dismiss the message because of our dislike of the messenger? Even when we know they might be right? Even when we know there might be something to them? Do we let our pride keep us from hearing it? It certainly happens in politics all the time, doesn't it? No matter how good the idea, if it came from the other party, forget about it.

Well, that's what's happening here. Jesus has been teaching and preaching about a new way of understanding God. A new way of being in relationship with God. One that is based on grace and unconditional love. One that is experienced through humility and surrender. And one that shows up in the world as forgiveness and reconciliation. But it seems as though it's just too much for some of us. The message is too radical. The messenger too unconventional. The implications too revolutionary. So like the kids in my backyard, they too get stuck. Stuck on an old understanding of God who needs to be appeased. A God that we have to work really hard to win over. A God who demands sacrifice for our prayers to be heard.

Matthew records Jesus speaking about his generation, but it still happens today, doesn't it? We even have a growing number of Christians who we are calling "the dones." Those who are still faithful, but are done with church. Because they are fed up with the finger pointing about which church is right, who's saved and who isn't. The endless social debates and the moralizing and all the hypocrisy that goes with it. It seems that whatever the era, the gospel can get lost when we too behave like children. And turn what should be liberating and life-giving into just one more thing to fight over. One more heavy burden to bear.

Fortunately, I think most of us, most Episcopalians, we have largely moved on from the judgmental God and the rigid religious rules. And I would guess that most of us don't see church as an onerous burden. At least I hope we don't. I think the problem for most of us is probably the burdens that we place on ourselves. Think about the things that we are angry about in our life, the people who have wronged us, that we still carry a resentment for. It affects our mood. It affects our health. It affects our ability to be open to new experiences and new relationships.

What about our pride? Does our ego make us competitive? Do we endlessly compare ourselves to others? In our efforts to keep up with the Joneses, are we living above our means? Have we allowed our debts to climb too high and our savings to become too low? Are we burdened by a need for control? Do we have rigid expectations about the people around us? Even our own family members, what they're supposed to do, what they're supposed to say.

Do we exhaust ourselves trying to manipulate them into doing things our way? Do we get angry when they don't? Are we burdened by perfectionism? Trying to prove ourselves to others. To our parents, to our children, our colleagues, our

co-workers. Do we work extra hard, stay extra late, put in extra time? Not because we love doing it, but because we're trying to prove ourselves worthy.

How about our busyness? Didn't we all learn during the pandemic just how nice it was to be so unscheduled? Didn't we all talk about how great it was to have time to meditate and to read and to pray and to take long walks? What happened? Have we all just kind of relapsed? Has the fear of missing out crept so back into our lives?

The burdens we place on ourselves are countless. More than I could ever list. But it's worth making a list of yours and to look closely at them. Although they are not religious burdens per se, they might as well be. Because most of them, if not all of them, are in some way a replacement for God. And if you doubt that, pick one of yours and ask yourself, what is behind that? And then keep asking yourself that question until you drill down to what it's really all about. And I think that you will find that most, if not all, of the burdens that we place on ourselves are the result of us putting our trust in something other than God, in someone other than Jesus, beginning with ourselves.

In other words, they are prisons of our own making. And they lock us out from the peace and the joy and the love that awaits us. That is why Jesus says, come to me. Come to me. Lay down your burdens, and I will give you rest. He is reminding us that in the same way that we had the ability to pick up those burdens, we can also put them down. But how? How do we do that? As Paul says, as we heard, knowing what we should do is not enough. We are all at war with what we know to be right. And what we actually do.

Well, unsurprisingly, I don't have the answer. But I can share what helps with me. I begin by reminding myself as often as I can that I'm a beloved child of God. That I don't need to win God's approval or anyone else's. I don't have to do it all. I don't have to pretend to be someone I'm not. Just be the person God made me to be. Be at peace with that. That's more than God needs. It's more than enough. It's the first lesson in Sunday school, isn't it? It's the truth that fuels everything. In the day to day drama of life, it seems as though it's the easiest lesson to forget. It seems I'm constantly picking up those old burdens once more, despite knowing that I struggle with letting them go.

I was sharing this with a friend of mine, one of our children's godparents. And he said, you know, Chris, rather than trying to let them go, pray to God for help letting them be. Because letting go might be just too far of a bridge sometimes. These old temptations and old resentments, they have a way of hanging around, don't they? The people that trigger us, they keep coming back into our life.

So instead, when I notice the feelings of anger and jealousy and resentment, whatever, when I see them creeping back into my life, I say to myself, Chris, just

let it be. They may not disappear from our life, and we don't have to be controlled by them. We don't have to react to them. We can notice them, acknowledge them, and don't beat yourself up for them. Instead, remind yourself that you are not those feelings, you are not your fears. Let them be.

Finally, let God's wisdom be vindicated by her deeds. Take a leap of faith. Try putting down one such burden. Start small at first. Pick an easy one, if that's possible. And see if the fruits of the Spirit, contentment, kindness, peace, hope, joy, see if those don't begin to flow into your life and get some momentum going. And as you go, don't be discouraged. Putting down our burdens, it doesn't mean that life will stop throwing challenges our way. Things that we have no control over. Illnesses, loss of a loved one.

And as we've been hearing these last few weeks, following Jesus will, at times, be divisive. Standing up for the least and the lost will be hard work. We're going to make some enemies along the way. But reacting to the world with love and compassion is a far lighter burden and a much easier yoke than anger and control, especially when we know that with Jesus, we don't have to bear any of it alone. His yoke is made for two. He will be with us always, right alongside us, helping us to carry it, helping us to stay the course if we get off track. Helping us to carry His message of love and forgiveness wherever we go, and bring the fruits of the Spirit whenever we do.

Amen.