



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

What a blessing it is to be before you. Are you normally seated before the sermon? You may be seated. I didn't want to break protocol.

I want to turn our attention to Jeremiah the 17th chapter as we give God thanks for this opportunity to stand before you on this Sunday morning that Martin Luther King Jr., sixty years ago, bemoaned the most segregated hour in America. We appreciate not only this symbolism that is overcome by us worshiping together, and the wonderful music tradition that you've lifted up, but how you live this out on a daily basis. Your faith, your work, your witness, is being felt throughout this whole inhabited earth.

It is a privilege as the senior pastor at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church to partner with Christ Church Cranbrook in ministries that have blessed the city of Detroit. Pastors throughout the Detroit metropolitan area brought together white, black, city and suburb. There were some suburbs that I had never been to before. I had never been to Grosse Ile before. And because of your senior rector and Pastor Manisha and Father Chris, we have worshiped and had conversation and dialogue with pastors on Grosse Ile, the east side of Detroit, Grosse Point, Farmington Hills, so on and so forth, the City of Detroit.

It is such a blessing to have this real substantive relationship between Christ Church Cranbrook and Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, your senior rector, the Reverend, Dr. William J. Danaher and myself. He preached at Hartford this morning, a masterful message. Really put the pressure on me. That's what your friends do for you. And I just thank God for him and his helpmeet, Sister Danaher, who brings together faiths and yet still has time to support her husband in all that he does, and be a wonderful mother and first lady of this church. That's what we call it in our tradition, the first lady of the church. I didn't want to ruffle any feathers, you know? I'm going to get you in trouble, you know.

But it is not easy to be the wind beneath somebody's wings. And so we pray not only for Father Bill, but for his wonderful wife as well, and for each and every one of you. I see Dr. Brandon Waddles here today and all his business and all that he's doing at Wayne State University. To see this wonderful jazz ensemble accompanying this wonderful choir and music ministry. And certainly what a blessing it is to be amongst you, especially on this day.

And what I'm trying to say is Christ Church, you live it every day. You live the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. every single day. And I won't go back over

those preliminary remarks. Were you able to hear them in the back? All right, I got thumbs up in the back. Pastor Emerita, good to see you. Priest Emerita, what a blessing it is for your work with the seniors and, hallelujah, our Silver Saints. We thank God for you and your continued work in this vineyard.

I want to turn our attention to Jeremiah, the 17th chapter, reading from verse 12 through 14. "A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, shrine of our sanctuary. All hope of Israel, oh Lord, all who forsake you shall be put to shame. Those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the underworld where they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the Lord. Heal me, oh Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are my praise." This is the word of the Lord, and we give thanks unto God.

Sanctuary of God. The sanctuary of God is the focus of not only Jeremiah's life and ministry, but the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. You cannot understand Dr. King and his work and his life without understanding the sanctuary that gave his life focus and meaning. It was a nurturing point for him. He said he experienced so much love in his life that he didn't have the ability to hate anybody. And much of that love was given to him in the sanctuary.

Martin Luther King Jr. was, yes, a prolific orator. He was a civil rights leader. He was a political activist, but he was a clergyman. He was a preacher, he was a Christian. In the year, today, of his death, he stood at Riverside Church on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and declared that one of the major reasons he opposed the Vietnam War was because he was a Christian, a believer, a preacher, and he could not see the destruction of life and the denial of freedom of anybody and come into agreement with it.

It was God's sanctuary that gave his life focus. And many people have argued that this particular verse in Jeremiah must have been some Sudanistic contribution by some editor on down the line from the original manuscript. However, just because Jeremiah might have exhibited some tension between the temple and himself, and at times was critical of worship and the temple, this is not a non-sequitur to his previous perspective on religious ritual. It is the peak of his perspective. It is this moment in which the pendulum swings upward in his relationship with God in the temple.

That's realistic, right? Because sometimes we feel very good about church and other times we don't. It's okay. Jeremiah went through it too. Martin Luther King Jr. went through it too. You and I will go through it. Father Bill goes through it, sometimes. But ultimately we must look away from the valley of frailty and the frustrating foolishness of the world and keep our eyes squarely focused upon the goodness of God that we celebrate in the sanctuary.

It is here that we build our hopes on things eternal. It is here that we encourage and admonish people to do likewise. It is here that we look up before God and pray as Jeremiah did so we see that in the sanctuary we find the purpose of God. Jeremiah described God as being glorious and, in essence, that was his purpose found in the sanctuary, to glorify God. This is his Hallelujah chorus, so to speak. This is him understanding that amidst the flood of human experience that threatens to overtake us, the pressures of this mortal existence, there are things that God can do that nobody else can.

It is in this moment in which he glorifies God, that he speaks to the purpose of God. It is in the sanctuary that we understand what God's imperatives are and what God's abilities are. That's why we come into the sanctuary. We give glory to God, not just to pay lip service to God, not just to sing pretty songs, not just to be seen, but we give glory to God because we understand what God has done, what God is doing, and what God yet will do.

You see, that is the reason why we give these exalted titles one to another, right? So if I hear a Freemason say, worshipful master, I don't get upset because he's not saying that a human being is supposed to be worshiped. He's saying here is someone of integrity, honor, and compassion who is amongst us. When I hear people say, Mister or Madam President, I don't get upset because it is a configuration of two Latin words. One meaning to sit, the other one means before. So we sit before a nation. Citizens, leaders, we sit before a community.

We have names and nomenclature that convey meaning like justices, legislators, educators, designers, builders, artists, preachers like Dr. Danaher. Preacher or pastor is more than an advisor or counselor. In Hebrew, it conveys the meaning shepherd, and that means somebody who will die for you, somebody who will live for you. Someone who searched, nobody was waiting in line to become a shepherd in biblical dates. There's nothing fancy about being a shepherd, and it was a dangerous job. It was a thankless job. And I don't think it's changed too much since those days, but it was imperative to have a shepherd that the sheep may safely graze.

And what I am saying on this day is that Dr. King reminded us whether he was at Dexter Avenue in Montgomery, Alabama, or Ebenezer in Atlanta, Georgia, that God is to be glorified in all that we are and all that we do, that the abstract had become concrete, and our glorifying God means that God is omnipotent, that ultimately all power is in his hands, omniscient, and nothing will be hidden from God. Omnipresent, that God is so high, you can't get over him, so low you can't get under him, so wide you can't get around him, that he's everywhere all at once at the same time. And that when we glorify God, it is because of what the Lord has done.

Abraham received God's promise. That's why we give God's glory. Joseph was taken from the prison to the palace, that's why he gave God glory. Moses sat between the devil and the deep blue sea, and he placed his feet upon the shores of freedom and self-determination. That is why he gave God glory. And God has brought us together amongst all of the years that the forces of interposition and nullification have threatened to divide us. God has brought us together in mutual respect, in common purpose, and in love for one another and God. And for that, we are to give God glory today. That is the purpose of the sanctuary.

But also we find in Jeremiah, and in Dr. King, the proper place of God's sanctuary is revealed because the implication of the text is the temple is exalted, that it's lifted high above the mortal ills of this world. And indeed I think there's like four potential places where the original temple could have been constructed. But there's one thing that they all have in common, in that they're all on elevated platforms because they wanted an outward symbol of something that was very real and substantive. And that is that God is elevated, that God ought to be lifted up, that the temple of God and the purpose of God should be above the reach or control of any special interest that would try to manipulate, co-op, or control God for their own narrow purpose. God is beyond the reach of any special interest that would try to manipulate God for their own purpose and reason.

You know what bothers me about all these mass shooters going to these clubs where people are just having a good time, or going to a school or going to a supermarket, going to someplace? They all feel like they're on some mission from God, right? They all feel like God has compelled them. But what they need to understand is that God comes strange. It's okay to have a difference of opinion. It's okay to have a difference in belief, but we must allow others, because of the grace of God, to live their life, and for freedom, Christ has set us free.

It bothers me that so many times God has been used in the most violent and cruel way. That taking the Lord's name is more than just putting a cuss word behind God's name, it is claiming that you're doing something in the spirit of God and you're not. Now, be careful when you come to somebody and say, well, the Lord has told me to tell you this, or God is moving me to say this and that. Remember that blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is the only unforgivable sin in the Bible.

You know what I least appreciated, that's the best way I can put it, from the last presidential administration was how many times they tried to use the Bible and the Word of God to justify what they were doing. This is beyond Republican, Democratic, Independent. I'm just talking about this habit and this pattern that I

saw emerge from when the former president was walking through Liberty University, quoting 2 Corinthians. When you look up one day and he's saying, I have a black friend, but then devastating the black community, or I appreciate the workers who make the taco salad and then building a wall. Or one day he's for the NRA, the next day he's against the NRA. One day he's for the LGBTQ community and then he's against the LGBT community and appointing conservative justices. One day he says, we all ought to be free. And the next thing he's appointing some justice that limits freedoms. One day he's in a church holding some weathered Bible in his hand, and then that same day they're tearing down the seat of democracy.

And what I'm saying is, whatever you believe, the Bible and the causes of Christ are not some political bargaining chip. They are not some type of way that we can persuade one another to believe our own political opinions and our purpose. Because we look up into the hills from which comes our help, because it's beyond our control. It's everything if it grabs us, but it's nothing if we grab it and try to use it. Oh, I'm glad that the sanctuary of God is up above, up above the troubles of this world.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a lot of difficulties in life just dealing with his own personal life throughout the struggle because it was a long journey. And I remember when I was dealing with the situation, I was renting a home and the landlord let us know after being there for years that they were going to sell the home. And then I said, we love this home so much, we're going to buy it. We went to see about getting a mortgage and then he priced the home so high that I couldn't even get a mortgage for the home. And I told him, I said, look, you've priced it too high. There's a huge gap. He said, oh, just bring some cash, that'll cover that. I said, well, why, why on earth would I bring any cash? Why would I pay more than what a home is worth, just to live in it?

Then I was going through a difficult time and I'm a pastor and ministering and I'm having all these visions of my family being homeless. I'm feeding the hungry. I started thinking about being amongst the hungry. I'm helping the homeless. I thought about we're very close to being homeless. And the pressure was on me so much that I used to come home and watch HGTV, the building shows and the fix-it-up shows, and I couldn't even watch that anymore.

I had to learn how to pray. I had to learn how to labor under a burden. I had to learn how to lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help. And my help came from the Lord in that I found a credit union that said we give clergy special favor because we count character into our evaluations.

Let me tell you something. Keep your eyes above. Don't fall in love with the things of this world. That love can lift you up. I know there are going to be complications in life. I know there are going to be pressures, but we must keep

on focusing on God. You may think it's too late, but I tell you, we serve a god that has a habit of waiting until it's too late before God moves.

Someone said that God never starts until it's too late. You may think it's too late, just like they thought it was too late to help Lazarus when Jesus was walking amongst them. They said Lazarus is sick. Jesus said he's not sick enough. They said, Lazarus is dead. Jesus said, he's not dead enough. They said he's been in the tomb for four days. There is no life. There is no hope. And Jesus said, now it's time. Now I'm ready to move because it's never too late with God.

I tell you, somebody is saying today, they're in church today and they're saying, I can't hold on. I don't have enough resources. I'm looking around and all I see is deficits. I don't have enough money. I don't have enough education. I don't have enough influence. I don't have enough power. I don't have enough talent. I don't have enough skill. I don't have enough strength and health to see what needs to be done all the way through until the end. But I tell you that we serve a God that specializes in helping us when we don't have enough.

They didn't have enough to feed 5,000 people. They didn't have enough to feed 4,000 people. We serve a god that can take what you bring God and make it enough. I tell you, we serve a God who knows what to do with nothing. If somebody's down to nothing, I would say be encouraged because God knows what to do with nothing because he stepped out on nothing and created the world. Came out of nowhere because there was nowhere to come from. God stood on nothing because there was nothing to stand on. God spoke to nothing because there was nothing to speak to. God said, "let there be" to nothing. And the sun started shining and the stars started twinkling, and the water started roaring and the birds started flying. And I tell you, God can speak to your nothingness and bring something out of nothing.

But before I go down to my seat, I believe we should understand one other thing about God and His sanctuary, and that is it is a place of protection. It is a place of protection. It is a safe place. Father Chris, it is a place where we know God is with us to put a hedge of protection around us.

You know, when I was young, we used to play dodgeball and there was this place in dodgeball where they couldn't hit you with the ball. If you got hit with the ball, you were out. But if you could get to this safe place, I don't care how hard they hit you with the ball, you were still in the game. When I was young, we used to play sandlot baseball and as long as you kept your foot on the bag, I don't care if they tagged you out or not, you were still in the game. When we used to go to the court and play a little basketball, if I could just get to the free throw line, I don't care if you were seven feet tall, you couldn't block my shot.

And the sanctuary of God is a place of safety and protection. You know, at that time when you went into the sanctuary, if you had a debt, you had to settle it somewhere else. If you had a vendetta, you had to take that somewhere else. All you had to do was to get to the sanctuary. The sanctuary was a safe place, and that was to symbolize that in God we have safety. That is why David said that he is our refuge and our strength. The throne of God, the temple of God, was to represent the presence of God and the presence of God in our life amidst the stresses and strain of life.

Paul said that we should look unto Jesus, that we should press to the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ. Sometimes you have to press your way to the sanctuary. Somebody took an hour to get ready to come to church today. Thank you for pressing. Somebody had to press beyond a bad phone call or a situation that tried to distract you from coming to church. Thank you for pressing. But however you press to God and to God's safety, press on.

Jesus in Matthew 26 was very, very powerful in that in one moment He is comforting the disciples, letting them know that everything would be all right at the Last Supper, that their worst fears would not come true. He was breaking the bread and He was giving thanks, *in Christo*. He was admonishing them. In a sense, they had nothing to be afraid of. But when we see Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is in anguish. He's sweating so profusely that it's like blood is dripping from Him. But it was actually the anguish and the agony that He was going through as He was asking God to allow this moment to pass and the cup of suffering to pass. And He's asking God for a way around the Cross and finally He says, "Thy will, not my will be done."

But here's the interesting dynamic. On one hand, Jesus is saying everything is going to be all right. On the other hand, Jesus is under tremendous pressure. And what we find is that there are times in our life when we have to put on a brave face for those who are around us. Sometimes you must meet your employees, your students, your family, your friends with a vision that God is going to work everything out. But yet you must wrestle with your own doubts because it is not appropriate every time to make yourself the issue. Some people can't get out of their own way. It's always about them.

But when you understand this dynamic, you yourself may battle with depression while you are encouraging others. You yourself may be picking somebody up when you yourself are tired. You yourself may be a conduit of healing when you yourself are sick. You yourself may be putting the balm upon somebody else's wound as you yourself are wounded. In this life, sometimes you must put on a brave face, but I'm so glad that I have a sanctuary. I'm so glad that I have somewhere to go.

And when I think about Martin Luther King Jr., I think about the night he picked up that phone and he received a call and somebody threatened his life. He wrote that this time it really cut to his heart. It was so real, he believed it. It was so real, he couldn't go back to sleep. And he put on a pot of coffee, and he sat down at his kitchen table and he said, Lord, I can't do this. I'm worried about my family. I'm worried about my children, but he said in that time God told him, Martin Luther King Jr., you stand up for justice. You keep fighting for a better day, and I will be with you.

Oh, I'm glad that we have a sanctuary. I'm glad that we have safety. I'm glad that we have somewhere to go where it's all right for the tears to fall. It's all right to call to God. It's all right to say I'm suffering. It's all right to hold out to God's unchanging hand. Do not forget the protection of the sanctuary of God now and forevermore.

Amen.