



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Scissors The Second Sunday of Easter 4/11/2021

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

Brother Bill, the spirit led me in a different direction this morning. So from the Book of Acts, chapter four, "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart... and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold."

I actually remember the first time that I read this utopian witness of the church as a new Christian in my twenties, I thought, wow, how amazing is this? What kind of people trust each other so much and don't have a greedy bone in their body that they act like one big family, even though they're not? It just must be a natural by-product of being a Christian. When you love each other, you would not want to deny anyone if they had some need. So you would give up what you had in order to help out your brother or sister in Christ.

And this is what the Christian life looks like. Right? And this beautiful mutuality, this wonderful sharing in this sacrifice, this life of sacrificial giving. Well, most of you know by now that the church, we had a big move and so clergy and staff, we had to pack up all of our offices and all the stuff here in the church, and we moved it all to Temple Beth El and they're so wonderful and gracious as hosts. And they gave us offices and space.

And so I think it was a little bit after Ash Wednesday, I went into my brand new office and in there was like 40 boxes that I had to unpack. And my office is right next to Father Chris's new office. So I was in my office and I was unpacking a bunch of the boxes, and I was actually getting my computer set up and all the electronics and stuff, and Father Chris wanders into my office. And he says to me, "Do you have a pair of scissors?" Well, you know the problem with scissors, right? They wander off when you're not looking. And for the past six years of my life here at Christchurch Cranbrook, I have kept in my office intact a pair of scissors with baby blue handles. They are perfect. They fit me perfectly. They're nice and sharp. I love these scissors. No one gets them. They stay in my office at all times.

Now I was smart because I knew that I had to unpack 40 boxes. So you know I did not pack my baby blue scissors in any of those boxes. No, I put it in my car because I wanted to be ready when I got to Temple Beth El to unpack my boxes. So when Father Chris came to me, well, I couldn't lie to him, but I gave him an earful. I said, "Yes, you may borrow my scissors, but I really, really like these scissors. And I would like to have them back by the end of the day and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And he, like the good soul that he is, promised to return them to me.

Well, he and I both worked very hard that day. I actually had to leave earlier than he did, so he stayed longer. And I conveniently, when I left my office left the door unlocked just in case he needed to return my scissors. So the next day I would love to tell you that I went to Temple Beth El and I didn't have a thought about any baby blue scissors. But I would be lying to you. I walked into my office and the first thing I did was look on my desk for those scissors. And then I looked all around. I looked on top of each box. I looked on every flat surface. And then I went into Father Chris's darkened office and there lying on his desk were my scissors.

Now, you know, my friends, I love being Christian. And I remembered at that moment what it said in Acts 4. And even to me more eloquent, what it said in Acts 2: All who believed were together and had all things in common." And I knew my brother, Chris, did not have a pair of scissors, let alone these fine ones. And I knew that God had really given me those scissors. So were they really mine?

And so, you know what I did? I went out of his office, shut the door and the lights and - no, I didn't, I took my scissors and I thought, what is wrong with me that I would deny my brother a pair of scissors? And I began to wonder what was the early Christian community doing when they overcame this idea of possessions and the sensibility of what is mine and what is yours? And instead there was interest in something else that propelled them to give what belonged to them for the sake of others.

Now, usually, it is seen by theologians as a distribution of wealth for the sake of equality, right? It's a proto-communist, proto-socialist, utopian move of some sort by the early church. So the church was considered a community with commune sensibilities, no private ownership, everything held in kind. So no one had any need.

Now for all of you, political science and economics buffs out there, this stuff is fascinating and interesting, redistribution of wealth, equality of resources, regardless of output, and so on. But for us scissor-loving people, the stuff is bothersome and alarming. And if you own anything, does that mean that others who don't have it get to have it from you? Forget about scissors. I own a home. I have a car. There are people up the street from me who have neither. Is Jesus's

community one that shuns private ownership since it is the only way to make sure everyone has enough and there's equal distribution of resources? Is that the point of these difficult texts?

I wonder if it actually may be something else. One of the most important tenets I have learned as a Christian is how God sees all human beings. When Bishop Desmond Tutu was fighting against apartheid in South Africa, there was a March down the streets of Jerusalem. It was packed. There were lots of people there. There were lots of police force there and a fight broke out. And at one point there was a man on the ground and another man above him, kicking him. And Tutu rushed over there, threw his body on the man who was on the ground. And as he too now was getting kicked by the man who was standing. He looked up in the man's eyes and said, "Stop. This is a human being."

Every human being has dignity. Every human being has self worth. Every human being deserves to live. There's nothing about these statements that is earned by any of us. They are gifts given to us by God. And it was made evident through Jesus Christ who took on the flesh of a human being. Christ has made humanity sacred. You cannot separate the divine from the human in each person. And I think this is profound and mind blowing. It means I cannot dismiss the life of anyone easily and no one is expendable. Even those who are useless to society. As a Christian, I see them as God sees them, a human being knit together by the power of the Divine.

What does believing that every person deserves dignity as a human being look like? Well, I recently read a story about a man who was deeply addicted to drugs and alcohol. And he was in a bad way. He was not overcoming it. It wasn't going well for him. He was probably at the end of his life.

He ended up going to an AA meeting, very, very drunk. And he was climbing the stairs to go up to that meeting and there were people behind him, and now I'm going to get graphic. He had diarrhea and he soiled himself and it ran down his leg and it was utterly gross. And he managed to get into the room. He collapsed on a chair and the smell was insane.

And so a group of another broken set of human beings, all addicts, they gathered around this man. And they said to him, "Friend, are you having some trouble? We'd like to help." And it took about five of them and it took them several hours, but they got the man out of the space, some cleaned up the space, and then others just took him and found a shower and they put them in the shower and they took articles of clothing that they could afford to take and still keep their own decency and dignity. And they gave those articles of clothing to the man and gave him his dignity back.

And this is what the passage in the book of Acts looks like to me. They were of one heart and soul. Everything was available to anyone who had need. Why?

Because every human being has inherent dignity. The number one role Christians are to play is to affirm and assure all human beings of their dignity and to prevent ways that rob us of our humanity. Poverty threatens to rob people of their dignity, of their sacredness. When you don't have enough resources to survive and flourish, your self-worth is threatened.

During COVID-19, the number of people who experienced food insecurity, who didn't have enough to just simply feed themselves, it tripled and correlated with that was the increase of depression, anxiety, and self-confidence. Poverty messes with you. One can understand now why the early Christian community tried to combat that problem through the radical sharing of resources. God insists that each one of us is worthy of life and each one of us is sacred.

I think it's the reason that this church next Saturday will be doing this massive clinic here in this space for people who need COVID 19 vaccines. We plan on - I'm not sure how this is going to work. Father Bill has assured me it's going to work flawlessly, but we're going to have almost over 800 people, at least who are going to come through those doors, we're going to get 20 people vaccinated every 10 minutes up here, and then we're going to let them rest in the Guild Hall.

And we're doing that. And it's quite a bit of logistics, I need to tell you. It's a Herculean task. You all need to be here and help with it. And do you know why we're doing it? Because everybody deserves a vaccine. Could you imagine if we put on the SignUpGenius, "There are criteria that you need to fulfill in order to get a vaccine," we would be robbing ourselves of our dignity if we did something like that. I have learned over the years that a simple belief that God made everyone and loves everybody is enough of a guide to keep my moral compass always pointing in the correct direction. I may not sell my house and give away the proceeds, but I will constantly pay heed to the call of seeing every human being as sacred.

Oh, and Father Chris is on vacation, but when he gets back, guess what he's going to find in his office.