



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

***The Fullness of Time The Third Sunday After the Epiphany 1242021***

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.

As many of you know, this past Wednesday, my father died after a long struggle with dementia. As much as I would like to be able to focus on the larger picture of the gospel and everything that we are facing today and all the things that we have as an opportunity before us, as a church at this important juncture in our history, I find that the only way I can get to all of these things is by talking a little bit about that. I cannot follow the advice that I read today in 1 Corinthians, where Paul says to those who are mourning, that they should be as if they weren't mourning. I can't do that. I can only somehow go through the things that I'm facing as a Christian and as a person and to somehow make that public, and hope and pray that somehow the larger message of the gospel is not missed.

And I say this in part, because that's just the nature of things. But I also say it in part, because it goes to the core of who I am as your pastor and as a priest, there are many ways to define the priesthood. Mine is that it is a way of being a very public Christian, so that when I fall and when I fly, I cannot hide any of these things from you. But my hope is that when you see me fall and when you see me fly that you see Jesus and somehow that truth is mediated through my personality. I cannot promise to be holy, I cannot promise to never fail. I can only promise to be transparent.

And one of the things that keeps on going through my mind over the last few days was the last, truly social interaction I had with my father. After an incredible moment of verbal exchange that we had in September or October, he suddenly began to enter this time in which he no longer recognized me. Initially I seemed to be a kind of burden to him. Like I was some kind of hospital orderly that he didn't know the purpose of my being there. At times he would be friendly, if he felt like being friendly. At times, he was ready for me to go as soon as I could go.

One of those moments, I had an exchange in which I looked at him and he was smiling at me. I said, I have a question for you. He kind of moved his eyebrows up because he wasn't really speaking at that point. I said, do you have a son? And he just closed his eyes. He didn't know the answer. But the last social interaction I had with him happened about three weeks ago, I got to the apartment where he was staying and the hospice nurse was in the midst of

washing him and she'd just finished washing them. I saw his electric razor on the nightstand, and I said, why don't I give him a shave?

I offered to do that because there was nothing my father loved more than to get a shave. Whenever we had an opportunity, he would try to do that. He loved being in the barber chair. He loved the hot towels. He loved everything that happened with it. The whole ritual love it, the kind of slapping on of the aftershave, the whole thing. And so I picked up his Braun electric razor and I cleaned it. I came up and immediately he began to kind of stretch out his neck and he began to move his face so that it could meet the razor. And he was just so delighted.

Immediately, as I was thinking about all of those things, that kind of coming together of that present with the past, I started to cycle through all of these memories that happened. I remembered the first time that he helped me to shave, there was not much to shave. There's never been much to shave, but it was this whole ritual in which he showed me the little ritual of shaving that men follow. I also thought of the moment in which at a time in his life, he, for reasons that remain puzzling, he decided to grow a beard. He came to see me in Toronto and he looked like some kind of mangy version of Duck Dynasty. I said, "Dad, you got to get that beard trimmed." He said, "Really?" And I said, "Yes." I brought him to this barber. I knew in Toronto and he got trimmed and he looked so good.

I thought of all the interactions that we've had around that simple ritual of shaving. That was a kind of blessing, a kind of reminder of him much in the same way that all of the messages we've received from the people that he helped through his recovery program were a reminder to me of the greatness that he was when he was at the height of his powers. Those kinds of connections, that kind of organizing of our memories. It's a kind of way I think, in which I was trying to make sense of time, which resisted meaning. The minute he stopped remembering my face. The minute he stopped remembering that he had a son, the minute he no longer could kiss my mother back when she would kiss him.

That invites a question of us all: is the time meaningful or is the time simply wasted? Is it simply lost time in that long agony of waiting until he died. And the answer that I seemed to pull from it all that centered on that ritual act of shaving was that the time was meaningful. It was a moment of connection. While my father didn't recognize me as his son, on the last day, when he was dying, he held my hand tightly because I was simply another human being next to him, comforting him as he was breathing his last breaths.

Christians have a belief about time. We believe that time always has meaning. We also believe that time doesn't simply wind out on its own to a foreordained conclusion by its own power. But rather time goes through a kind of powerful moment in which there is the fullness of time. In which everything is gathered

together that came before and is brought to a head and things are changed. That in that fullness of time, that ripe newness of time, that moment in which we see the whole as it is encased in that last day, there is a moment of deliverance, a moment of rescue, a moment of salvation, a moment of reconciliation.

One of the tasks that you and I have before us today, as we think about the *annus horribilis* known as 2020, one of the tasks that you and I have today is to make sure that none of that time is lost. That all of the things that we have discovered over the past year, as we have struggled moving through this pandemic, as we have had to contend with a time of moral awakening, as we have made our way and learned our own limits and some of the hidden blessings, all of those things, whether they are moments in which we have flown or moments in which we have failed. All of those moments have meaning because in God's time, we believe that all of these things are going to be brought to a head and will go through a process of both death and resurrection because the map of time for Christians is Jesus Christ Himself. And just as Christ's body went through death and resurrection, so all of our time will be gathered together and transformed.

Now all of this is my way of getting at the core, I think, of today's reading from the Gospel of Mark. Because the core of it is not merely the moment in which Simon and his brother, Andrew are called away to follow Jesus as much as our collect would like us to think, but the core of it is the moment in which Jesus speaks the first words He speaks in the Gospel of Mark, which is, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." And the critical thing here is time. The time has come for Jesus. And the term that is used there is *ekplirotheí kairos*, the fullness of time.

Everything that happened before has been leading to that moment, whether we acknowledge it or not, whether it was remembered or not, whether we thought it was lost or not, everything was gathered up in the moment in which Jesus comes and says the kingdom of God has drawn near, repent and believe the good news. When Jesus invites the disciples to enter into that time, He's inviting them to see their lives in the context of that larger transformation, that larger process of death and resurrection, and to experience a kind of change of mind. For that is the meaning of the term "repent" in this phrase that Jesus speaks.

Repentance is not as we so often take it to be simply stopping to do something which does us no good. A kind of moving away from the claim that sin has upon us, but to repent is to be fully changed and transformed. The word for repentance is *metanoia*. It's the change of mine, *metanoia*. And so the Disciples who would follow Jesus would have to see time differently and recognize that the time was short, that the Lord had appeared, that they had to follow the bridegroom as he makes his way to marry, the church.

You and I have to all go through that repentance, that metanoia, that change of mind. And sometimes the people who seem to know it best are actually the ones who know it least. And so we read in our first reading from Jonah, that Jonah goes after protesting the travel to Nineveh to tell these awful people to repent, but God sends him anyway. And Jonah finally relents when he's been swallowed in the belly of a beast. Jonah is astonished because he preaches repentance and the people immediately experience a change of mind.

So this change of mind that we are invited to do in today's gospel, this repentance, this is work we have to do. This is work that we have to somehow do to participate in all that God is showing us so that we don't miss or lose the time that has happened. One of the things that we have learned over the past year is that somehow this church is so much bigger than its building. Its building is critical, but its mission is larger.

And we have learned that we can do difficult things. We can pivot when we need to pivot, we can tackle problems by working together. We can do difficult things, things that we haven't done in a long time, things that we have not done before. We've also learned as a church over the past year that we can actually speak the truth to each other with love. We live in a world in which there is so much polarization, so much distrust, so much disappointment, so much disillusionment, but you and I have watched this congregation over the past year, speak to one another, the truth with love. And finally we have learned over the past year that by God's grace, we can be resilient by claiming the fruit of the Spirit, by holding fast to love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, and self-control, we can be changed. We can find the power to begin again and again and again, all because God's power is in us.

Now, all of these things that we have done over the course of 2020, we cannot lose these things, these moments, these virtues, these character traits that we have shown. We must take note of them. We have to see them as an invitation to experience even deeper transformation. To experience that change of mind on an even deeper level, as we begin to build, adapt, and move forward and follow our mission and fulfill the future that God has prepared for us.

As we go forward into these next few months, and as we continue to try to learn, to adapt to all the different things that will happen, as things begin to enter into the final chapter, an act of this drama of pandemic, you and I need to keep in mind what it means for God to work and redeem time through death and resurrection. There's a final Greek word in today's gospel, it's incredibly important. Again, like repentance, it's one of those words that hasn't been entirely translated into English, and that word is *eutheōs*, which we translate as immediately. Mark uses the word immediately more than 10 times in the first chapter. Jesus immediately comes. People immediately bring Him people who

need healing. The disciples immediately drop their nets and follow Jesus so that they might become fishers of people.

What does immediately mean? The translation is meant to somehow convey a kind of sequence so that you get the image if you just think immediately that Jesus is just rushing through the grocery store of life, just kind of there to pick up a few items and to get into the shortest line possible because He is on a mission. But the root of immediately, the root of *eutheōs* is straight away without distraction, without being deviated from the mission. So the disciples immediately straight away without distraction set an intention and became Jesus' disciples.

May we set such an intention today. May we straight away follow Jesus. Maybe we remember that God redeems all time. May we celebrate the work we have done in speaking the truth in love and remembering to be resilient and by doing difficult things.

Amen.

[End of Recording]