



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

***The Grace We Give - The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany- 2\_6\_2022***  
***AudioClerk Transcription***

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

So when I was told to choose a song for this sermon series, I asked what kind of music Jill and Claire might be most comfortable with. And I was told folk music, which immediately brought to mind Harry Chapin's classic song, Cat's In the Cradle. Yeah? And as a kid, I remember my dad's Cat Stevens and Doobie Brothers collection. Rabbi Miller, did you listen to The Doobie Brothers? Yes, you did? Good. Hey, it was the '70s, right? Come on.

But of all those songs, I always loved this one for some reason. I didn't really follow the lyrics, but I could tell it had something to do with a boy and his dad. And it had these references to what sounded like nursery rhymes. And it mentioned the game that my grandmother had taught me, Cat's Cradle. Do you remember that one with the string that you put between your fingers? Well, anyway, of all the songs in my dad's folk collection, this was the one that always seemed like it was talking to six year old me.

And it wasn't until I got older and began to actually pay attention to the lyrics that I realized how true that really was. In fact, it's one of those songs that is still talking to me all these years later. It began as a poem written by his wife, Sandy. She had written it about the distant relationship her first husband had had with his father. Harry Chapin for his part, never paid much attention to it, but all that changed when he had his own son. He was on the road when his son Josh was born and it served as a kind of inspiration to him to put the poem to music and it became a smash hit. The only one he ever had to hit the charts at number one.

It's since become a kind of staple of pop culture. It's been featured in commercials around the world, parodied in sitcoms. It's even listed in the urban dictionary as something you say to somebody who keeps canceling out on your plans. As in, man, it is always cats in the cradle with you. All right, we'll go on without you. We'll have a fun time without you. And while it may have become something of a cultural meme today, Harry Chapin was never shy in admitting that it was a song that truly scared him.

My child arrived just the other day  
He came to the world in the usual way  
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay

He learned to walk while I was away  
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew  
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you, dad"  
"You know I'm gonna be like you"

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon  
Little boy blue and the man in the moon  
"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when"  
But we'll get together then  
We're going to have a good time then

My son turned ten just the other day  
He said, thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play  
Can you teach me to throw, I said, not today  
I got a lot to do, he said, that's okay  
And he, he walked away, but his smile never dimmed  
He said, I'm gonna be like him, yeah  
You know I'm gonna be like him

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon  
Little boy blue and the man in the moon  
"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when"  
But we'll get together then  
We're going to have a good time then

Since becoming parents, if there was one piece of advice that Joe and I have heard over and over again from relatives, from friends, cashiers at the market, random people on the street, it's to do this, do not miss out. Before you know it, they'll be off to college and it will seem, just as the song says, like just the other day they were cuddling with you on the couch, in their jammies. And I have to say, all of you were spot on about that. It already feels like just the other day that Joe and I were trading shifts through the night warming bottles of formula, digging behind the couch for that one green pacifier that always seemed to do the trick. So I get it. You were so right about that.

And yet, I still find it to be a constant challenge to be present. And it gets real for me every time I'm working on a sermon, fixing something around the house, cooking dinner, getting ready for work and my daughter, Alina comes up to me with nothing but hope in her eyes, "Hey Dad, do you want to come downstairs and play with me?" And in that moment, I can hear all of your advice ringing in my ears. There it is, Chris. There's one of those moments. Don't miss out.

And it's not just our relationships between our parents and our children. I think this song names what is perhaps the greatest challenge of all of our lives. How do we find the time for all of those that we love? Our spouses, our partners, our

dearest friends, old school chums, colleagues at work. I know Pastor Manisha and Bill and I, we're constantly talking about how can we find more time just to hang out?

And not to mention the most important relationship of all - God. In the busy-ness of life, are we making time for God? God, who always has time for us, who's always waiting for us to come home. And I know some of us think we're going to catch up on all of this when we finally retire, if we're lucky enough to retire. But as some of you have already discovered, I'm sure, it's not quite that simple, is it? Life doesn't stand still for us. Our relationships don't always wait. Our health fails, our friends die, our colleagues move on, and our children build lives of their own.

Well, he came from college just the other day  
So much like a man I just had to say  
Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?  
He shook his head, and he said with a smile  
What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys  
See you later, can I have them please?

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon  
Little boy blue and the man in the moon  
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when"  
But we'll get together then, dad  
You know we'll have a good time then

I've long since retired, my son's moved away  
I called him up just the other day  
I said, I'd like to see you if you don't mind  
He said, I'd love to, dad, if I can find the time  
You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kids have the flu  
But it's sure nice talking to you, dad  
It's been sure nice talking to you

So maybe you're wondering how does a song, which terrified its own authors, help me to hear the gospel? Well, for one, this song can be a hell of a wakeup call because whenever I hear it, no matter how busy I am, no matter how much stuff I think I need to get done, it always manages to help me carve a little time out of something I didn't have. And yes, I was listening to the song while writing this sermon yesterday, so you know I took a break and took the girls sledding. And so if hearing it helps you think about somebody that you need to call, someone in your life you can reconnect with. If you can hear the Holy Spirit tapping you on the shoulder, inviting you to bring more balance to your life, by all means, say, yes, do it if you can. It's never too late.

But for me, there's more here than just being more determined because no matter how loud the wake-up call might be, no matter how hard we might try, in my experience, life has a way of creeping back in, doesn't it? New obligations pop up, new problems arise, new responsibilities are handed to us and I find myself missing out once more and feeling a little guilty all over again. It seems as though there will always be planes to catch and bills to pay. There will always be tradeoffs to make, and sometimes we'll make good decisions and sometimes we're going to make bad ones. Perhaps most often we're going to have no choice in it at all.

No, the good news that this song helps me to hear isn't about being more perfect. It's about trusting more often in the grace of God. Did you notice that throughout the song there's never a hint of bitterness or resentment between father and son? In the same way that the father in the prodigal son story welcomes his wayward son home, he doesn't chastise him for his mistakes. He comes running down the road to give him a hug. And when his son starts reading that scripted apology he's cooked up, his father is not even listening. He's already planning the party.

In that same way, the father and the son in this song seemed to have nothing but grace to offer one another. When the father has no time to play ball, the son says that's okay. Sure, he's disappointed. Right? But he's not resentful. We're told his smile never dims. And we're told his admiration for his dad, never waivers. Toward the end when the relationship comes full circle and now it's the son with no time, you can hear the love in his voice as he tells his dad how much he cherishes their time on the phone. It's sure nice talking to you, Dad.

And I can't help but hear the pride in the father's voice as he realizes his son is now making the same hard choices that he once did. Holding down a job he doesn't love so he can take care of his own child, making those same tradeoffs in order to take care of his family just as he once did. So while I once heard the song as a warning against parental neglect, today I hear it as a meditation on a simple fact of life that no matter how hard you try, there will never be enough time. We will always miss out on something with someone. The real work is the grace we give each other along the way.

I experienced that as a teenager, my dad, he was a single father doing everything he could, you know. And yeah, he didn't generally make it to my swim meets, but I have to say it really never bothered me. Looking back, I think I just knew deep down he was doing his best. In fact, the only thing I remember about all those swim meets, he might've missed was the one he did make it to. And I don't remember, you know, did I swim well that day? Oh, I can't remember that. I don't remember if we won, but I will never forget seeing him making his way across the pool, timidly, looking for the spot where the parents were

supposed to sit. And I will never forget how it made me feel that day that he had found the time, at least on that day.

The song reminds me that I think we offer each other far more grace than we realize. And I think we beat ourselves up far more often than we should. I think we forget sometimes that love doesn't keep score. It doesn't build resentments, our relationships aren't about being perfect or never missing out. Nor do we expect them to be. It's not about the moments we miss that we remember, but it's the time that we make that we never forget. Those are the moments that we look forward to. Those are the times that God waits for us to rejoice in.

We are all prodigal sons in a sense, all in need of reminding that it's not the time that we are away that counts, but the day we finally come home that matters. And if that remains a struggle for you, if that is still something that you're working on, fear not because the day will come when there are no more planes to catch and there are no more bills to pay. The day will come when we can all finally come home and you know - you know we'll have a good time then.

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon  
Little boy blue and the man in the moon  
"When you coming home, son?" "I don't know when"  
But we'll get together then,  
We're going to have a good time then.

Amen.