



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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

Our gospel today follows directly on the heels of last week's, when Jesus famously asked the disciples, who do they say He is? To which Peter responded, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus says, bingo. Blessed are you. Then this is the rock on which I will build my church.

So here we are just a couple of verses later and Peter has managed to go from rock to stumbling block. From blessed are you to get behind me Satan. I mean even for Peter, this is a quick turnaround, right? What's going on here? Well, today we see that while he may have gotten the words last week correctly, Peter hasn't quite grasped what the Messiahship of Jesus really means.

There was a common belief at the time that the Messiah would come as a kind of mighty warrior, somebody with divine power and military might, who would restore the Jewish kingdom, bring peace and justice to all people, and if the prophets and the psalmists are to be believed, pour out a heavy dose of God's wrath upon the heads of their enemies. And if such beliefs were behind Peter's objections today, well, can we hardly blame him? Because, let's be honest, even after 2000 years of Christianity, such notions still persist to this very day. Might makes right. Enemies must be defeated. Justice requires punishment. Persecution justifies violence. Forgiveness is a sign of weakness. And peace, peace comes through strength.

And yet Jesus has a very different way of seeing the world. One that would turn upside down all of those conventions through love and compassion, through peace and humility, but also through sacrifice. And so Jesus has no intention of giving in to Peter's temptation, despite knowing where it will all lead, because where it will lead is the very mission itself.

James Cone in his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, draws parallels between Jesus and one of His great followers, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, who in 1968, turned his face towards the city of Memphis. The civil rights movement was gaining enormous strength, and the sanitation workers in Memphis were suffering terribly, under awful working conditions.

Martin Luther King had already received countless death threats. He had been attacked and beaten. His house had even been bombed. Like Peter, some of his friends and family had tried to dissuade him at times, fearing for his life, but he

too would not be deterred despite knowing all too well that he would likely not live to see the Promised Land of his dreams.

Martin Luther King did not go to Memphis to die. No more than Jesus went to Jerusalem to die. They went in the hope, in the hope that they might change the hearts and the minds of those who lived there and indeed everywhere. They went in the hope that the way of love, the way of non violence that they embodied with their very life might create the space needed to open our eyes and to see one another as God sees us all.

Playing it safe, giving in to temptation would have meant abandoning not only those most invisible, but also those who had become blind to their suffering. Not only those who were oppressed, but also the oppressors. Because they knew. But I think we all know deep in our hearts that none of us, none of us can be truly free until we are all free. That any peace that we think we have, if it is without justice, if it is without equality, if it is without the full inclusion of all of God's people, then it is no peace at all. It is but a muted violence, a silent internalized oppression that gets passed off as just the way things are.

That is the life that we are to lose if we are to find it. That is the false peace that we must all die to if we are to rise to something new. That is why we too must be willing to pick up our cross and to make our lives a living sacrifice as well, because love, the way of love, means nothing without it. Think about that for a moment.

Can you think of any experience of love in your life that did not involve sacrifice? Sacrifice is love in action. They are two sides of the same coin. Without sacrifice, love is just a passing sentiment, a Hallmark card that never gets mailed. Sacrifice changes us. It changes the people around us. It changes our little corner of the world because it means we have to move. We have to get up. We have to stand up. We have to get out. We have to change our direction in some way. We have to rearrange our priorities somehow. We have to put someone else first. We have to let our plans go. And we have to let our need for control to go out the window so that we can try something new, something that might feel very strange, even scary.

And we too will face stumbling blocks, the same stumbling blocks of safety, security, and the status quo. But no matter how well intentioned they may be, no matter how practical they may sound, when we see injustice in the news, when we see somebody being bullied right in front of us, when we pass a homeless person on the street one more time, whatever it is that breaks your heart, whatever it is that stirs a righteous anger within your soul, hold on to that, because that's the Holy Spirit grabbing you, getting your attention, trying to break through those temptations. All the temptations that we tell ourselves about how it's not my problem, about how it's their problem, about how it's on

their side of town, and it's probably their fault anyway because of their bad choices, and besides, isn't this what we pay our taxes for anyway? Aren't these problems all just way too big for us? The challenge is too many, the people too far away?

When I lived in San Diego, we were only about 20 minutes from Mexico, so you would go down there in the same way that folks out here, you guys go to Windsor. And so one time when my mom was visiting, I took her down to TJ, Tijuana as we called it. I wanted to take her to my favorite Baja fish taco place down there. They were amazing. And as you came back to the border, to cross the border, you would always get accosted by these little kids, these little street urchins, asking you for money, trying to sell you one thing or another. And if you went down there as often as I did, you'd learn to just kind of wave them off, to kind of ignore them.

But my mom, she, she wasn't so jaded. She saw those kids through the eyes of a mother. And there's this one little boy in particular, he couldn't have been more than maybe four or five years old. He had just enough English to ask my mom if she would buy some Chiclets. These little gum packets they always seem to sell. And my mom, she didn't shoo him away. But instead, she knelt down to see him in a way that only a mother could.

And I remember her turning up to look at me and she says, you know, I just want to pick him up, take him home. I just want to take all these kids home. I'm not so sure she had seen that kind of poverty before, at least not that up close. To her, he was just a precious little boy who needed to be held and loved. As a mother of three boys herself, she had an instant imagination for what he might grow up to become. And she could also see in his vacant eyes the terrible toll that life was already taking on his little heart.

Of course, that very real moment of compassion soon gave way to reality. What could we really do? There were too many, that system way too broken. My mom's reaction awoke in me my compassion, but it seemed we could do little more than talk about it that whole ride home. We've all had those kinds of moments, have we not? Where our compassion seems to come up against an absolutely overwhelming need, where our desires to help comes up against overwhelming obstacles, where we feel helpless.

Have you also noticed though, that sometimes, sometimes the thing we're called to do in those moments is to just hold that feeling, to not be so quick to dismiss it, to not be so quick to distract ourselves, but to sit with it, to let it marinate in our hearts. Have you noticed that sometimes picking up our cross means to let our heart stay broken for a time so that we might pray about it? So we might cry about it, so we might stay up late at night pondering it, so that we might wonder about it, talk about it, share it with others, and see if their imaginations might

open ours. That's what the Holy Spirit can do when we let her. She doesn't just wake us up, she stirs our heart. She keeps us alert. She keeps us primed and ready for the openings that God will inevitably send our way.

In the case of that little boy in Mexico, the Holy Spirit kept him on our hearts as well. Until the day came, maybe it was a year or two later, when we were approached by a group who had been operating a foster home in Tijuana for homeless children. Dorcas House was the name. And they were about to run out of funding. They had been turned down again and again. And our church was their last gasp to find a backer who could underwrite them. It would be a large commitment, 200,000 a year. Every year. Money that we had not budgeted for. Money that we could never budget for. But it would be a way to rescue some 40 or 50 little boys and girls, to give them a future, and perhaps most importantly, a house mom named Sylvia, who would pick them up and hold them tight and love them and give them space to dream once more.

Was that commitment scary at first? Yes it was. Were there liability concerns? Absolutely. Were we worried about parishioners traveling down to Mexico to visit the children? You bet. Did it mean we had to fundraise constantly? Oh yeah. Did some people grumble that this project was diverting time and attention from our most venerated traditions? Yep, we had those voices too. But moved by the Holy Spirit, despite the costs and the risks and the doubts, we turned our face to those children, to their hopes and dreams. And in the process, we experienced the most liberating, the most life giving, the most loving ministry that we could ever imagine. It didn't just change those kids' lives, it changed our lives. It transformed that church in a way that it has never been the same.

Sacrifice will look different for all of us at different times and in response to different needs. Sometimes it will mean pulling out the checkbook. Sometimes it will mean making time on your calendar. Sometimes it will mean signing up for something you're not so sure about. Sometimes it will mean having coffee with somebody you'd rather not. Sometimes it means getting off the couch and getting into the streets to stand with the marginalized until the margins are no more.

The Messiah will come and will bring justice to the oppressed and the poor. He will come to bring healing to the suffering and the sick. But not by force. Not by military might, he will not be a conquering hero, but a suffering servant. Not armed with a sword, but with a towel. And he will bring peace, but not through retribution and revenge but through humility and generosity, and sometimes with a lot of patience. But always through sacrifice.

And while none of us know when that day will come, while we wait, I have to admit that sometimes I wonder. I wonder if the day will be, if it will be the day when the followers of Jesus, when each and every one of us together comes to

finally see that with God's help and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we were the ones we'd been waiting for all along.

Amen.