

- Isaiah 49:1-7
- 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
- John 1:29-42
- Psalm 40:1-12

We thank God for this day of worship and praise. It is so good to see you once again, Christ Church Cranbrook. We thank God for you and for your service, not only to the community that surrounds you, but to this whole inhabited earth, for your leadership for the great music. For the great worship and praise that goes forth from here, we give God thanks.

And I want to turn now our attention to Joshua, the 3rd chapter, verses 1 through 5 which read, “Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. After three days the officers went through the camp, giving orders to the people: ‘When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it.’ Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’”

The hope of the unknown, the hope of the unknown. My friends, God has given us an instinct to be mindful of new experiences. It is good for us to be careful in life so that we do not live irresponsibly and take our lives seriously. It is good for us to live cautiously when we are faced with the unknown.

But as with any good thing, this instinct can be turned against us and against our progress, and we can become fearful of the unknown. We can become so afraid of moving forward that we are constricted and condemned to an existence of hopelessness, and that is more destructive than what we are afraid of. Xenophobia is literally the fear of strangers. As if somebody who would wear a hijab or somebody who on a daily basis would pray differently than we do, wear long garments, would somehow not have the same hopes, aspirations, and desires for their community and the world that's around them as well. Like that person is not given to make mistakes, just like we are, that somehow we're supposed to be afraid of them because they speak a different language.

Misogyny. I remember I was a grown man before I understood the term is literally the fear and distrust of women. Racism, sexism, all of our phobias are based on fear. There's something about the unknown that inspires within many people the fear. And let me tell you something. Any tyrant, any kind of hegemony is founded and sustained in fear.

Those who would deny that they are concerned about the unknown are not being honest, but we do not have to be afraid of it. As a matter of fact, we are called as Christians, not to be afraid, overcome our fear. Walter Brigham has said that the task of prophetic ministry is to

nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.

You have to take the world, if you are in prophetic ministry, to a place that they've never been before. If the dominant culture is fear, bring courage. If the dominant culture is materialism, bring spirituality. If the dominant culture is narrow, broaden its view. If the dominant culture is constricted, overcome the horizons.

Oftentimes liberals offer critique, but they don't have a real alternative. Conservatives want to take us back to the past. We have to find a better way. You know, I don't understand this generation. We are so afraid. My daughter, when she goes to play, my wife is right there making sure she's okay. I said, what happened to the days when we used to come in the house one door and go out the house the other door and play until the street lights came on, or your mom would yell out of the window to come in and play? Right?

Now, you don't have a bicycle. You might be on the other side of town. Don't have a scooter. Or a wagon or a Big Wheel, you might be so far away that you get in trouble. You know, jumping off garages. I grew up in the city, so I used to explore alleys and things like that. Many of you can't relate to that, but there might be one or two who can.

We were not afraid of the unknown. We were looking forward to the unknown. We explored. I don't know, maybe it was because we had shows like Star Trek. I know you have – there's so many new Star Treks out, the new generation and the Next Generation and Star Wars and things like that, but we just had the original Star Trek, right? And every episode started in the same way. These are the voyages of the Star Trek Enterprise. Its five year mission is to seek out new worlds, new civilizations, new people, to boldly go where no man has gone before.

What happened to that spirit? And the great thing that we affirm when we get to Martin Luther King Jr.'s day of service is the fact that we have and we are committed to boldly going where no civilization has gone before because it's the unknown and we don't have to be afraid of this new world.

The first thing we need to realize is in the unknown, there is a great opportunity ahead. In the unknown, there is a great opportunity ahead. And that kind of perspective is always giving people victory over their fears, you know? When they stood on the banks of the Jordan, I imagine that they were afraid. The banks were overflowing. Some have even speculated that it was winter time and the melting of the snow had caused the banks to overflow.

The water was rough, the water was cold, the water had projectiles going through it. And the only thing that could have inspired them to go forward was the fact that God told them that this was a land flowing with milk and honey, which literally meant to an agricultural society that it was fertile ground. And for them that meant life. For them, that meant opportunity. For them, that meant economic growth and sustainability.

It reminds me of in the movie Harriet, when the slaves had the slave traders behind them and they had this river in front of them. And they said, "All right, well, what are we going to do?"

Are we going to go back to the slave traders or are we going to go through this river? And we don't know if we can make it on the other side or not." But the opportunity on the other side of the river was so great that they crossed the river.

It reminds me of 6 million African Americans who migrated from the South from 1916 until 1970 because they were seeking warm weather. Just checking to see if you were still up. They were seeking opportunity! What enabled you to become the person that you are and have the relationships that you have fostered down through the years? Why did you step into the new life in Christ that you did? Why did you change your habits, friends, world view, education? Why did you risk asking that special somebody to the dance?

Why did you say I do or I don't, I will or I won't? Because you saw that your decision was going to grant you an opportunity. When you look at the opportunities ahead and not just get caught up in what has gone on in the past, you are inspired to be creative. You are not held by the way you've always done things before. It's imagination. It's innovation.

I wonder in the traditional church, are we constricted always to the way we've done things before? In a lot of ways, yes, but in a lot of ways, no, and we can never be, because we must think creatively. We must think with imagination. In order for us to be the best church, the best family, the best individual, the best community, the best nation, we have to think with great imagination because there's great opportunity ahead.

God said there's a great opportunity. And that's what they were moving towards. Not just a blessing for one tribe, but a blessing for everybody, equal protection under the law for everybody, capital gains for everybody, benefits of health for everybody, economic, educational, political opportunity for everybody, a role to play in society for everybody.

When we gave our life to Christ, we saw it as an opportunity. Even if it meant making sacrifices and changes, we did so willingly so that we could benefit in the long run. That's the long story of the Bible, that we would have the opportunities that everybody else had. The oppressed would find freedom. The guilty would find pardon. The lost would find direction. The troubled will find peace. The sick would find healing. The blind would find sight. The deaf would hear and the lame would walk.

I know the wilderness sounds like a bad place now, but let me tell you, to them it couldn't have sounded that bad because that's all they knew. Except for Joshua and Caleb and the Levites and a few others, they didn't know anything else, but the wilderness, they were probably thinking, what's wrong with the wilderness? Some of their ancestors said, it's better to go back to Egypt than to go off into the wilderness, but every now and then you have to go, so you have to go if you're going to grow.

I read a story once about the founder of Woolworth's Department Store. I know you don't know anything about that, the original five and dime. So Walmarts, Target, all that is based upon the model of Woolworth. And Woolworth's is actually still in business. They are essentially Footlocker because Footlocker bought them out and decided to put all their chips in that basket.

But understand this. When they started, it was a young man that worked at a hardware store and he saw that the inventory was outdated. He said, we've got to get rid of this inventory. Nobody wants it. Put in the middle of the store, sell some for 5 cents, the others ten cents. Even in 1879 that was a bargain. The sale was a big hit, so he did it again. And the young man who was clerking there told the owner, look, we've got something here. We ought to do this all the time. And the owner said, look, you have a nice idea and it worked out twice, but we're not going to do it again.

And so discouraged but not deterred, the young clerk eventually started his own business, which became Woolworth's, which became a multimillion-dollar industry. And when the boss was interviewed sometime after that, he said, this plan, if I would have followed it, would have netted us so much. And I am disappointed that I didn't. As near as I can figure it, every word I used in turning Woolworth down has cost me about a million dollars.

We must see that there is great opportunity ahead. There's opportunity in Christ to have all our needs supplied. There's opportunity and goodness to learn how to love more. There's an opportunity in peace to find true rest. There's an opportunity in joy to find true happiness. There's an opportunity in worship to get closer to God. The Spirit of the Living God fall fresh on us today.

But also we must consider – and this might sound strange, that if we're going to claim the hope of the unknown, we've got to see that there's some battles to fight. There will be some battles to fight. At the same time, God told Moses in the burning Bush that there was freedom on the other side of the Jordan. He also told him that he was going to have to fight the inhabitants of the Promised Land. You know, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, all those ites, the Jebusites.

What happened to the Jebusites? Nobody knows, but they were waiting for them in the land flowing with milk and honey. There were obstacles like the Wall of Jericho waiting for them in the Promised Land. And so what that tells us is, is that's a natural part of the kind of growth that God calls us to.

And I know that's not always easy to hear. In Chinese, there's a compound word. that is the basis of the word "crisis." One means danger. The other means opportunity. Danger and opportunity go hand in hand. We have to face the realities that are before us if we're going to claim the opportunities that God has promised us.

Crisis means that what was working in the past is not working now. Crisis means did we have a decision to make? Crisis means that our survival is hanging in the balance. It's dangerous, but there's an opportunity ahead of us. That ought to make you happy. That ought to bring your joy.

Let me tell you something. I know that diversity is a tough reality. If anybody wants to sugarcoat it and say, oh, well, we're all going to sing kumbaya, kumbaya, my Lord all the way through is not being realistic. There are going to be some misunderstandings. There are going to be some arguments. There are going to be a lot of times where we don't see eye to eye, but it's worth it. To go through what we have to go through in order to get to where God

wants us to be, it is worth it! You're going to have an argument if you live monolithically or if you live diversity anyway.

I remember they were interviewing a lesbian woman one time on TV, and one woman said, "Are you the way you are because you hate men?" And she thought for a moment, she said, "Well, women are no picnic either, you know." That probably went over a lot of your heads and we'll let that be, but there's going to be struggles no matter what. There's going to be struggles, so why not struggle for that which God would have us to claim? When the nation treated us like second class citizens, we were excluded from opportunity, quality and justice. We were excluded from the right to fight as African Americans.

Now, I want you to think about that, we had to fight for the right to fight in America. Even though we've been in every armed conflict this country has ever had from the Revolutionary War to World War I, and the Buffalo Soldiers, World War II with the Tuskegee airmen and onward and onward and onward. We had to fight for our right to fight because we knew that fighting meant respect. You don't even have respect unless you're out there fighting. Right?

There was a Mississippi Congressman in 1917 that said, once the black soldier was allowed to see themselves as a hero, it would be but a short step to the conclusion that his political rights must be respected. So in other words, if you want citizenship, you've got to earn it. You can't do it with somebody else fighting for you. It was just as much our fight as it was anybody else's. And it honed within us and brought out the character that was already there. That's why some of our civil rights leaders are also veterans because they took the lessons from their struggle, and the courage from their struggle, and they kept on fighting even when the war was over.

If you want a church, you've got to fight for it. If you want safer communities, you've got to fight for them. If we want equality in this country, voter rights, voter participation, voter protection, civic literacy, we've got to fight for it. If you want spiritual growth and all the blessings of the Lord, you got to fight for it.

I know it's rough. I know there's trouble, but you've never been this way before. Don't get discouraged. There's people who are willing to fight today. There are people who don't want the easy way. There are people who are not fascinated by fancy things or limited by luxury. There are people who are willing to take the risks.

There are people who are willing to stir up the pot. There are people willing to fight the good fight. Frederick Douglas said, "Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters."

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did. It never will. And if we're going to have freedom, we've got to fight.

You know, every now and then you have to tell the Devil, this means war. Sometimes things can go on and rage on a long time in our lives, a long time in our homes, and I dare

somebody to go home today and say, Devil, this means war. You've been building your kingdom all over this land and Satan, I'm going to tear your kingdom down.

I remember in our church experience, we used to sing “Onward Christian Soldiers Marching As to War with the Cross of Jesus Going on Before,” but let me go onto my seat now with this last point. If we're going to claim the full of the unknown, we must continue to follow God. The ark was before them, they were told to stay about two cubits or a thousand feet behind the ark, but to follow the ark, nonetheless, to have a sense where the ark was not common, to have a sense that what is holy is holy, but yet to keep on following God, to keep on doing it God's way.

Freedom is not an open highway, but it is a thin margin between a vast ocean of responsibilities, obligations, implications, and complications. And if the responsibilities are not taken and the obligations not kept, and the implications appreciated and the complications clearly understood, both the freedom and the free will be lost.

I'll give you a translation of that. You got to do it God's way, especially in the Promised Land. You've got to follow God where God leads you. This was not the way they had chosen. There were some that never would have left Egypt. There were some who never would have stayed in the wilderness that long. There are some that would have never gone to the Promised Land. But the consolation of the struggles that they had to endure to gain the opportunities that were before them was, is that God had brought them to where they were. And let me tell you something. The will of God will not lead you where the grace of God will not keep you.

Don't ever forget that. God's leadership meant that it wasn't always going to make sense, but they were going to follow it. You know, the Devil will mislead you and make you think that there's no real goal, that there's no real standard. That's nihilism. There are people who believe there's no right, there's no wrong. And if you call them on their behavior, they'll say, well, look what the other person did. There is no standard. Nobody's right. Nobody's good. And if you think like that, any road you take will get you to your destination. But God said there is a right way. There is a pathway. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, a holy place where the Most High dwells. It's good news.

When Jesus gave them the beatitudes, they had never heard of that before. They had never been there before, but it was the right way. When he said, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace makers. Blessed are you when you're persecuted for righteousness sake, when people say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake, pray for your enemies. Do good to those that hate you, pray for those who despitefully – love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who despitefully use you. All of that didn't make sense, but they followed him anyway.

You know, I love Luke 24 when the woman gave the report of the empty tomb and when they went to the disciples. There is a translation of that that says it sounded like nonsense to

them. And, you know, our life in Christ oftentimes sounds like nonsense to the world, but nonsense is the basis for those miraculous things.

Maybe miracles are another way of saying nonsense to the world. The miracles that Joshua promised that God was going to accomplish seem like nonsense to the world. The things that God has promised us seem like nonsense to the world. Our sacerdotal exercises, our life in Christ together seems like foolishness to the world, but I thank God for the nonsense of the gospel. I thank God for the nonsense of His will and His way.

It's nonsense that allowed the children of Israel to break the bonds of servitude in Egypt. It's nonsense that allowed us to defeat the Nazi empire and the Third Reich. It's nonsense that allowed us to fight until the wall in Berlin was torn down. It's nonsense that ended apartheid in South Africa. It's nonsense that allowed us to have a victory of a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Have you ever been to Montgomery, Alabama? Do you plan to go to Montgomery, Alabama? Do you know anybody in Montgomery, Alabama? I didn't think so, but yet Montgomery, Alabama became the center of the universe.

Montgomery, Alabama started a fire of freedom that is still burning in this country to this day. I'm telling you what seems like nonsense in the world is new life in Christ and it's the victory that never ends. I don't know about you, but I'm reminded of a seminary conversation that I had when a man said, "You know, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is simply metaphorical. It was allegorical, it was symbolic, and we must keep in mind that as we go forward and glean from it, learn from it." But an old man stood up in the back of the class and he said, "I don't need a symbolic metaphorical and allegorical resurrection. If I'm going to have victory over my sin, death, hell and the grave, I need a real resurrection."

Only a real resurrection will raise up my mother and my father who gave their life in love, only a real resurrection will raise up the spirits of the civil rights workers that were slain in the dusty highways and ditches of the South. Only a real resurrection will lift up the spirits of those who yearn for freedom, work for freedom, serve for freedom, sacrifice for freedom.

I don't know about you, but on Sunday morning, a long time ago, we serve a God that got up from the grave, and that's the God I will follow. That's the God I will serve until God calls us into His Promised Land. God bless you. God keep you in the hope of the unknown.

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