



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

They Know We Are Christian_ - The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost - 7_3_2022

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

Last week, we had Vacation Bible School in our church and Kellie Herdade, who you saw she's our children and youth minister, she was so delighted because it'd been two years since we had real normal Vacation Bible School. And they had to do this modified VBS, and so she was super excited to finally have everyone here. And if you don't know what Vacation Bible School is, it's like this high-energy event that's held every single day of the week. And it's for young children to have them learn about the love of God and the Bible. And they do this with storytelling, with game playing, and with general mayhem and running around like crazy.

And the church is transformed into some sort of theme for the week. Sometimes it's like you're under the ocean or you're in ancient Jerusalem, or in this case they were taken to the mountains and the canyon. And the theme was Monumental VBS. And so each time that the kids come here, we also teach them these Christian songs and we give them little hand gestures to go with it. And then we do something pretty dastardly. We give them a CD. And they take it home and they make their parents play it at home, in the car. And the parents hear these songs over and over again. And then they try to go to sleep and it's this earworm going through their head. It's quite lovely what we do to the parents.

And so the theme for this past week, Monumental Love, the seam song, the verse goes like this:

My God is great
He is with me wherever
Our God is great
Our God is great
He's an awesome God
Bigger than my wildest dreams
Monumental love
Eternal hope for you and me

I love Vacation Bible School. It's such a simple concept, right? You have the experience of teaching children our faith. And having them learn the iconic Bible stories and singing songs and reminding each other that we do have an awesome God that is the eternal hope for all of us. And there's just something really rich about this. And it does some work on your psyche and your soul, no matter if you're small or you're tall.

Now, the other thing about Vacation Bible School is that it's not just for children. Any youth minister worth her salt knows that it is as much about the church youth as it is about the little ones. The youth actually make Vacation Bible School happen. We had about 50 kids, children at Vacation Bible School. We had about 30 youth who actually ran the whole thing. They're the group leaders. They're the storytellers. They're the game administrators. They're the little people wranglers. And no VBS works without this large group of 13 to 17 year olds. Kellie, she likes to thank them for their hard work by taking them on some sort of fun excursion so that they can relax after having volunteered their time, the whole week taking care of the kids.

So as I was leaving church this past Wednesday afternoon, I saw the church bus pull up and Kellie was driving it. It opened up and out poured all of these young people, these youth who had gone on what they wanted to do, which was the obstacle course. And they were all dressed in their swimsuits, because it was some really weird obstacle course that you had to wear a swimsuit in. And they were just laughing and they were saying how they had a blast and everything. And then Kellie comes out and she's got her own swimsuit on. And I was like, Kellie, how was the obstacle course? And she looks at me with that look that says, I am three times the age of these children and I just went on a freaking obstacle course. But I would do anything for these kids. And she does. And that was just one random week in the life of the church. It's just the church being the beautiful church.

The past couple of weeks have been hard for Christians everywhere, especially in the national eye. Christians aren't agreeing with each other. Christians are getting sound bites of all kinds. We have progressive Christians, Evangelical Christians, Catholic Christians, and we're not seeing eye to eye on some very important moral decisions. And depending on whose voice is being sound bited, fellow Americans are irritated with the Christian mouthpiece.

I saw a meme making its rounds that I think summed it up quite nicely, the bad press that Christians are getting. And it said this: "Contrary to popular belief, no non-Christian says, I know they are Christian by their love." And that meme was picked up by some Facebook group of pastors, they were all commenting and lamenting, oh my God, this is so true. Nobody knows us by our love. We need to change this narrative. They were moaning and they were like, we should be the

embodiment of love. We're failing as Christians. We are not good at this. We need to change strategy. Nobody understands what we're supposed to be doing. We're not good Christians. We have work to do.

And I thought, you know what? I think they need to ask me what they need to do, because I know what they need to do. they need to stop being embarrassed that they're Christian. There is nothing wrong with being a Christian. It is a gift to be one. It is not a burden. Beating ourselves up because we're Christian is actually contrary to the gospel. We're 21st century Christians. We don't have to be in church. There is no longer any societal pressure to be Christians as there was in the last century. You don't have to be part of a church to be part of a community. You can find community all by yourself. It can be virtual, it can be physical, it can be hybrid. You don't have to go to church in order to network. I'm going to tell you, LinkedIn does a better job than your parish directory. You don't have to go to church to figure out how to volunteer in your community. Just Google, volunteering near me and you will have a plethora of options. You do not have to be part of this faith. You don't have to come to church and you certainly don't have to be a Christian anymore.

That means if you are a Christian in July, 2022, it means something is happening to you. There's something beautiful that's going on with your relationship with God that brings you into a community of other people who practice the faith in this very ancient, modern way. And no one has compelled you or forced you to come. You're simply here out of the pure joy of being with an awesome God who, as the kids sang this past week, is bigger than our wildest dreams.

I think as Christians we've heard for so long repent, repent, reform, reform, reform that we forgot that being part of the Christian faith is a privilege. It's fulfilling. It's satisfying. You get to meet people who are like you and people who are not like you, and these people who are like handpicked by God to be in this wonderful unusualness that you call your Christian community. And each week you get to worship God. There's a person who said, I feel like every Sunday when I come to church, it's like a Broadway show. It's a big show.

And it doesn't really matter which church you go to. It can be a small church or large church, but what makes it so magnificent is you are coming to do this enormous thing. You're coming to worship God and you're using music and the word, and you're having Eucharist and you're gathering with your community. And all of it is happening every single week. And even more wonderful, you get to know and you get to share the good news, that the God of all creation is the God who in the midst of our difficulties and our conflict comes to us in flesh and blood and remains, and will forever be, a source of goodness of generosity and magnificence for all.

And churches are this lovely companion and cornucopia of human life with God. We work together. We pray together. We argue with one another. We believe together. We doubt together, alongside the God who resides with us in the Body of Christ. And no matter how the world sees us, it is a privilege to be part of this faith.

I bet that's how the 70 felt when they came home, after Jesus sent them out. And Jesus didn't quite give them a pep talk, did he? He was like, y'all, it's going to be tough out there. They ain't gonna like you. They're not going to fall head over heels with what you think and what you have to say. And nevertheless, The 70 returned triumphant. And even Jesus witnessed the culmination of God's hope, the end of the tyranny of Satan on humanity.

But here's what's interesting. The disciples are reveling in what they accomplished, right? They were like the demons, the scorpions, and the snakes. I was like scorpions and snakes. What kind of ministry do they have? Father Bill, don't ever make me do anything with scorpions and snakes. But even them, all of those things succumbed to them, yet Jesus says to them, I know it was super cool and measurable that you were able to go out and do things and accomplish things, but do not find your joy in that. Instead, rejoice that your name has been written in heaven.

And this is how to be a Christian in the 21st century. We are Christian and our joy isn't found in our works. It's not found in what we accomplish. It's not even found in whether we agree with one another as Christians. But our joy is found that our God wrote our names in the book of life. And I'm saying to you that it's time for you to rejoice in that. Your name is in the book of life. You can find deep satisfaction in that, and you don't have to be arrogant about it, but you can say, God has a claim on me and guess what, it wasn't you who decided actually to be a Christian, it was God who claimed you, God who baptized you, God who said, I need you to be part of this community, God who sends you, and God who takes care of you. And that is important.

You are a Christian along with all those other identities God has given to you, your gender, your race, your ethnicity, your nation, those things are never, ever to be denigrated. They are always to be celebrated alongside the fact that God makes people who are different from you. Pluralism was never about being ashamed of who we are. Pluralism was requiring us to honor who we are alongside honoring and celebrating those who are different from us. We, Christians, we don't agree with each other. We may not even like each other. We don't see things eye to eye, but for God's sake, the way that others practice their faith does not give you and me the right to shun our own faith given to us by God.

I love being a Christian. I came up with the top five reasons why I love to be a Christian. Number five. I love believing in a triune God. I actually am like delighted with this, because it bothers me to believe in a single God who then is very arbitrary and making all these decisions and dictatorial. And there's like nobody you can check in with. So like saying no, I didn't agree with that, but this triune God, they have to figure it out all amongst themselves. Three and one, one and three, I love that.

Number four. I am a Christian. I love being a Christian because I love getting to rejoice in other people's gifts, rather than being jealous and coveting them. I actually get really easily intimidated by other people's skills and talents. And then one day I was watching really talented people and I realized, wait a second, we're all part of the body of Christ. And that means their skills are actually building up the body. And they're for me to celebrate, not covet and be jealous about, since we all belong in the same body. And it's all for the goodness of the whole entire world. And so there's no reason to covet anything or be jealous about anything because what's mine is yours and what's yours is mine and it's all activated by the same spirit.

Number three. I love being a Christian because we get to be who we are and we don't have to be afraid of who we are. I am always sinning and I'm always needing to be redeemed, but Jesus rejoices in me as a person, not a Paragon of myself, but me. And you, you have been made in the image of God. You are the one that God's redeeming, so be you and rejoice in that.

Number two, I love being a Christian because the Christian faith seeks understanding. I adore this because I think very deeply about my life with God. And one of the most important things that I do actually with my very own life is I think about what God wants me to do and how God wants me to be, so I can love my neighbor and I can forgive and be forgiven and make sense of this very weird world that's very confusing to me and find some peace.

And the number one reason that I love being a Christian. The church. I love the church. I'm like mad, crazy about the church. And I know that the church gets a bad rap, but it is insanely cool to me. This is a laboratory of love. It's a laboratory for forgiveness for justice and community. Plus we have Vacation Bible School and we have really cool youth and really cool leaders who get to go on obstacle courses after helping little church family members learn about the love of Jesus. And it's all very simple and very ordinary and very holy, and it topples Satan each and every time.

What are your top five reasons that you love being a Christian? As one of your priests, I charge you to make that list this week. And I would be tickled if you would send it to me in the clergy, but for whatever reason, celebrate that you're a Christian and don't fret like that pastor's Facebook group. I think I should put a

counter meme up there and it could say something like this: non-Christians may not know that we're Christian by our love, but we know we love being Christian.

Amen.