



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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

Mother Teresa summed it up this way: The problem of this world is that we have forgotten that we belong to one another.

The African ethic of Mbuntu puts it this way: I am through you.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu says it like this: My humanity is bound up in yours.

CS Lewis: I find the Christ in me by seeing the Christ in you.

The poet E. E. Cummings: Losing through you what seemed myself, I find selves unimaginably mine.

All of that spiritual wisdom, all of the great faith traditions describe human salvation as fundamentally mutual, something that we can only work out through one another. They all say it different ways, but it all points to the same truth. And that truth is this: that we would be one. As Jesus says to the disciples in His final prayer before He goes to the Cross, as the Father and I are one, that you would be one.

This oneness, it is no less than the dream of God. It is the world reconciled to one another. It is the great commandment made real. It is the peace that passes all understanding. It is the day having finally arrived as foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, when we beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks, and study war no more. That is the dream that made me a follower of the One who lived it. And it is the dream that I hold on to in weeks like this, when I'm asked to make sense of the senseless, when I am forced to process that which no one, and certainly no parent should ever have to contemplate

I can't help, but notice the irony that this dream of beloved community that feels so distant in the face of such tragedy is also the one that our children see most clearly. Unrestrained by our prejudices, oblivious to our cultural and our racial divisions, unaware of our political divides, unconcerned about what side of the town they live on, or the shape of the family they live with, our children are free to see one another through God's eyes, to see one another just as children, kindred spirits to run, to play with, to laugh and to cry with. Jesus said it was the children that the kingdom of God truly belongs, perhaps it's because it's

children who show us most easily what it looks like when we belong to one another once more.

I saw this firsthand on Thursday when our girls had their last day of preschool. I was standing outside the lawn, waiting with the other parents for school to let out. And one of the teachers came out and she kind of told us, you know, it's going to be just a few minutes more because the children were saying their goodbyes to one another. Oh, and if there are a few tears, don't worry. They're tears of joy, she said. Well, a few minutes later, the first little boy came out, Axel. And before he could make it to the stairs, he knelt down sobbing. And then my little girl, Elena came running out with tears down her face, and one by one, they were just beside themselves, holding hands, holding on to one another, not wanting to let go.

And I admit it kind of took us parents a little off guard so we decided we would give them a little more time. So we moved them all over to the playground where just as quickly their tears turned to joy. And their affection for one another, it was contagious. It gave the parents, us watching, the courage we needed to go up to one another and introduce ourselves and ask for a text number or an email so that we might arrange a playdate. And yes, the day will come when they won't want to go to school, I'm sure, but for now, every one of those kids, they saw their school, they saw their teachers and their classmates through the eyes of God as a place where they belonged to one another.

Wouldn't it be something if we all saw the world like that? A world without suspicion or guardedness, without hidden agendas or judgments, a world where we could just so easily open our hearts and so readily embrace one another. A world where we were not held back by fear or doubt, but totally free to lose ourselves in each other. Thoughts and prayers, they are a good place to start, but Christianity, Christianity is a way of living, a way of living that would dare to change the world, to make God's dream a reality on earth as it is in heaven.

So how do we reach the lost? How do we bridge the gaps that divide and overcome the barriers that separate? How do we create a world where we study war no more? Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest who runs the largest gang rehabilitation program in East Los Angeles, he says the place to start is kinship. After years of trying to end violence through service programs and police interventions and peace agreements, he discovered that the only reliable way for the shooting to stop was by investing the time to build trusting, authentic relationships one boy at a time, one young man at a time.

And it wasn't going to be about scaring them straight about the evils of gangs. It turns out they were scared plenty already. They didn't have fathers. They didn't have big brothers to guide them. They had little sense of home or community or

hope. What they needed to find was a sense of connection, where they would stop blaming the world and discover their worth, not in belonging to a gang, but belonging to one another.

And it wasn't about making a difference or being a hero as well. That just makes it about us. And it wasn't even about serving because serving them kept that separation in place, service provider, service recipient. Belonging to one another means bridging even that distance. For Father Greg, service was merely the hallway, a place to start, but just a hallway that leads to the ballroom, the ballroom of kinship, where there is no more us and them, just us.

So how do we reach the angry and the hopeless, the lost and the lonely, the easily despised and the readily left out? How do we build community with the demonized so that the demonizing would stop, and with the disposable so that the day would come when we stopped throwing people away? For Father Greg, it meant going to the margins. Not to serve only, but to stand - to stand with and to stand long enough until the margins are no more.

And that is exactly where Jesus takes the disciples today. Before His Ascension, He takes them to Bethany, because Bethany was the home to the marginalized. The name translates roughly to something like "house of affliction" or "house of misery." Bethany was outside the city walls where Jerusalem would send the poor and the sick. There was a homeless shelter there and a hospital for lepers. It was built outside of the site of the temple, so that those coming into worship wouldn't have to see the poverty and the desperation.

And so it's not surprising that the disciples upon arriving look around and ask Jesus, is this the day that you will restore the kingdom? Is this the day? Is this the place? Is it now that the suffering and the hopelessness will end? But Jesus has something else in mind. He brings the disciples to the margins because that's where He stood with the lost and the lonely and the readily left out. It's where He broke bread with the demonized and the disposable. And it's there that He passes the baton in the hopes that we would as well. Be my witnesses. I've taken you this far. I've shown you the way. I've shown you the people to whom you must go. It's your turn now. As the angels say to the disciples still staring up into the sky, why are you looking to heaven? It's your turn now.

Where are the margins of our life? Where are the Bethanys of our time? Homeless in Detroit, families in Pontiac, Ukrainian refugees in Romania, where we recently sent a delegation. Absolutely. But before we all go marching off, we might want to take a page from the disciples and begin by listening, listening to the Holy Spirit and discover, perhaps, that the margins are much closer than we think.

Do we not know somebody suffering from loneliness that could use a friend? Do we not know someone who is grieving, who could use some extra comfort? Can we think of somebody who's lost a spouse or a partner recently and no longer sure if they fit in? Do we know somebody who's bullied at school or at work or abused at home who could use an advocate? Is there a disgruntled family member or a classmate that we might take the time to try to understand? An excluded coworker or fellow parishioner that we might take the time to include? Are there youth struggling in nearby schools in need of a tutor? Or a teen who would love to have a big sister or a big brother to confide in?

Who can we invest our time in? Not to save, not to fix, not to solve. Not to be a hero, not to make a difference, but to stand with, to walk alongside in the hope that doing so might make us different as well. Who might we lose ourselves in and in so doing find our yet unimagined self, and discover together what it looks like when we belong to one another once more.

That is the place that Jesus sends us. That is the hope to which our eyes of our hearts have been enlightened. It is the world we are each called to help usher in as we walk out those doors. Because Christ Church Cranbrook, it's not the place we go to, it's the place we're sent from, to work for a world where we would be one until the day comes when we beat our swords into plowshares and study war no more.

Amen.