



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Welcomed, Loved, Transformed_ - The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost- 9_26_2021

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Please be seated.

If you all have been going to church for a while, that is to say, if any of you have had any kind of immersion in Christian culture, you know that there's a certain saying that gets handed around, which is that priests always preach the same sermon. They actually never really changed their message. They only change the way they say it.

And I find this saying, this axiom, I find it very insulting and off putting. But in fact, it's 100% true, quite frankly. When a priest prepares to give a sermon, rest assured, we spend days and nights in prayer. We want to make sure that whatever you get is baked fresh that morning, hot and ready served for you with ingenuity and creativity and a bit of humor and touchingness. But in fact, oftentimes we do preach the same sermon.

And so over the past few months, I've been listening to my colleagues and myself, and I've actually tried to identify what is the sermon that Father Chris is preaching? What is the sermon that Pastor Manisha is preaching? And what is the sermon that I'm preaching? And so I'm going to tell you what they are. You can agree or disagree, I don't care.

When Father Chris preaches, his sermon circles around the radical welcome of Jesus. He sees the gospel most clearly when everybody is welcome. And that of course resonates with his life and his welcome to the church and his experience of acceptance and love by the church. And so Father Chris's sermon always touches upon inclusivity and acceptance because the greatest message that God gave him is that he, as he was made, was God's creation and beloved.

And when Pastor Manisha preaches, it's always, always about the love of Christ, the unconditional suffering, humble, beautiful love of Christ, which is infinite and is overwhelming. It covers a multitude of sins and it is able to transform people. And so when Manisha preaches, that is very much her own story, her own journey to be overwhelmed by God's love for her in Christ, and to share that love with others and to experience the sacrifices entailed in that love. That is the message and sermon she preaches.

And my sermon is about transformation. My sermon is that whenever you are experiencing in your past, whatever wound you're carrying in your body, no matter how bad your life has been, there is a today and a tomorrow that is better than what you are experiencing today. You do not have to be imprisoned by that past. You will find the strength to love. You'll find the strength to forgive. You'll find the strength to begin again. No matter how bad the blow is, no matter how deep the wound is, nothing is outside of God's transformation. And that of course goes with the grain of my life in which God presented God's self to me as the power to let go and let God; the power to surrender that I might live; the power to be born again, and to be made new, and to experience all of those things, those joys that I thought only other people could have. And that is my sermon.

Now I bring this all up before you today because in many ways, those three sermons fit together incredibly well. And if I were to somehow capture the essence of Christ Church Cranbrook, since its founding 92 years ago, it would be this: that we are a place that welcomes everybody, and a place that has learned that when the church stands against inclusion, it usually errs. And so we often make up for lost time and lost opportunities by welcoming everyone.

And if I were to speak about the power of Christ Church Cranbrook, it wouldn't be the resources that we bring to bear, although those are often considerable. It would be about the love we share - about the love that is so powerful in our lives. The love that bears with one another, the love that bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things, and endures all things. That love is not only shared here in our community, but it also spills over into the wider community.

And if I were to speak about the most important thing we do here, it would be the work of discipleship, which is more like a birth than going to the gym because discipleship is being ready to give birth to new things. And all of these things, this welcome, this love, this transformation, all of these things have been part of us from the beginning. And it depends upon us each day to make the part of us now.

So I know that today, some of you are struggling with welcome, and it's my privilege and honor to say to you that you are welcome in the name of God and Jesus Christ. We are delighted to have you here. And you are welcome just as you are, just as God created you today. And I know that some of you are struggling with love, whether it's to experience love in spite of things, whether it's to show love to another. And it's my joy and privilege to tell you that you are loved by Jesus infinitely, no matter what you've done, no matter what has happened to you, no matter what you might be ashamed of, God loves you through and through and would stand by you anytime.

And for those of you who are struggling with transformation, those of you who are struggling, say, with a resentment you cannot let go of, or a hurt that

continues to plague you, or a fear that imprisons you, or an obstacle in your way, or an unhealthy relationship that you're trying to shed. God has brought you here to this day and this time and this place so that you would know the power that comes from God. And that power is greater than anything we can muster in and of ourselves. It's often revealed in the moment that we let go and let God be God in our lives.

Now all of this goes with the grain of what we celebrate today as a church. And on your bulletin cover, I have a small picture that I want to just take a little bit of time to look at, and I will somehow try to sum it up because when we are welcoming others, when we are loving others, when we are transforming as ourselves and others, when we provide the conditions in which people and lives are changed, God is present in God's spirit, and there's a kind of anointing that goes on.

And on that picture, you have this moment in which David is giving the plans of the temple to Solomon because David has been told, and we read this in 1 Chronicles chapter 22, that he has shed too much blood and that Solomon will build this temple. And offstage from that image, as beautiful as it is, there was also an anointing of the spirit. And so Solomon the king has been a recipient of an anointing by the Spirit, and that anointing is making it possible for Solomon to receive the plans of the temple.

This beautiful tapestry was constructed in 1902. George Booth purchased it in 1922. It was the first thing that he placed in this church. Can you imagine the donor of the church placing a tapestry in which someone is giving away the plans of a temple to another, which was meant to symbolize the generosity of George Booth and the vision of the founders? But just as important, there is in it a kind of spiritual message that goes with the grain with the spirit, there is an anointing that happens. And whenever we preach a good sermon, whenever you experience the transformation, welcome, and love that you have come to seek in this place - whenever that happens, there's a kind of anointing, a kind of carrying on of that spirit.

Do you see what I'm trying to say today? You and I are stepping into that place of foundation. You and I are stepping into that place of anointing by the spirit. And in a few minutes, we're going to begin to have an anointing that will go with baptism, but the anointing I'm speaking of is fundamentally one that comes through Jesus and is always ahead of us.

It's always slightly ahead of the church. Which is why we have in our reading from Numbers that moment where when the spirit comes, it doesn't just rest on 70 people. It's found everywhere. And when that spirit comes, so we read in the reading we have from James, it's something that goes beyond and attaches itself and transforms sin and brokenness and sickness. And it always surprises us, which is why Jesus tells His disciples to not tell the person who comes up and

gives witness to the spirits anointing in their lives to tell them to stop because the spirit will always surprise us.

So today we celebrate the founding of this parish and it's our opportunity now to step forward, because the point of a sermon is to take our little lives and to put it in the place of God's larger life. And that's an invitation to you to step up and put your little life in God's larger life. It's an invitation to you to experience the spirit and to be anointed. And today I have a special way of symbolizing that I've asked a few people who represent all of the different ministries of the church to be anointers at the end of communion.

They're going to stand before you, and maybe they can stand up here so that we can all know that we can look for you. They're going to be holding nard in their hands, and they're going to invite you to come forward. They're going to place some oil of nard on your head and they're going to say to you, remember who you are and remember whose you are, because on a day of founding, the church begins in you.

Amen.