



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***What Have You Been Waiting For The Fourth Sunday of Advent 12192021***

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

So I come to you on this final week, this final Sunday of Advent, this final end of the season of waiting and preparation and expectation. And I come to you today with a question. And the question is this: what have you been waiting for? What have you been waiting for? And notice, I didn't say who, right? I think we all know who we're waiting for. I'm interested today in what is the difference that the coming of Christ makes in your life? What is the hope you have on your heart? What is the healing you need to feel and to experience? What is the promise you're hoping to be fulfilled?

And I think we hear a pretty good answer today, don't we? We hear Mary's answer. We hear the Magnificat, as we call it. But if you ask me, you could just as well call it the gospel according to Mary, because it is her good news. It is the song in her heart. It is what she has been waiting for.

So what does she say? She says, how blessed am I that God would look with favor upon me, the lowliest of servants? In other words of all the people in this world, of all the people He could have chosen to bring His Son into this world, He chose me. Me, a young girl, unmarried, no money, no property, no job, no stature of any kind, no education, no credentials, no status symbols, no brands on her clothes, no membership in the right clubs, no followers on social media. He chose me.

That is good news to Mary. And so words can't contain it, right? She has to sing it out loud for all to hear. And she sings it not because she's proud, not because she thinks she's above anyone. No, quite the opposite. She sings it out loud because she knows that if God could reach down to the person on the bottom of that world, on the bottom of her culture and society, if God could go to the bottom, then that means there is no more bottom. Maybe there never was. She knows that this is good news, not just for her, but for everyone, because if God could choose her, then God could choose me. God could choose you. God could choose all of us. And indeed God does. God chooses all of us to help bring His redemption into the world.

And that's good news for Mary because she knows things we're about to change. She knows the old hierarchies, the old pecking orders are about to be undone. They're about to be overturned. They're about to be scattered to the four winds. She knows that the day is coming and is indeed already here, and the high and the mighty, and the rich and the powerful, the elites and the VIPs will be revealed to be the truly poor.

If that's all they have, if that's all they're hanging their life on, she knows that the day is coming and is indeed already here when those who think they have so much, when those

who appear to have it all, if that's all they've got, then they are the ones who need our prayers. They are the ones who need our compassion. They are the ones who need our gospel. That's what I hear Mary telling us this morning. That's what I hear her waiting for. That's the song I hear on her heart. My question for you today is what's yours? What's the song on your heart? What have you been waiting for these last four weeks? What's it all about for you? What does the coming of the Lord mean in your life?

So I have a little exercise and it came to me at a conference I was at. I was invited to speak at a big evangelism conference and was told to come a day early to do a kind of a pre-workshop with the presiding bishop, Bishop Curry. And he got us all into a big room. And he said, without any warning, without any preparation, without any introduction, now turn to the person on your right, introduce yourself, and share the gospel in 30 seconds. I'm going to time you. And we're like, wait, wait, what? This is an Episcopal conference. Did you not check the door? Right? What is that? There was a survey didn't you see the survey, Bishop? Episcopalians invite somebody to church once every 23 years on average.

And I know when some of you hear that, you hear 23 years., Chris, 23 years? I don't know. That sounds just a little bit pushy to me. That seems just a little forward. We've got that British DNA, right? We're very polite. We're very well-mannered and that sort of thing. And I know a lot of you think, Chris, I'm all with you on evangelism, but I'm with St. Francis on that. I like the St. Francis style of evangelism.

Do we all know what that is? St. Francis famously said, or at least it's attributed to him as having said, preach the gospel always. Always. Use words when necessary. As Episcopalians, we kind of like that, that's more our style. And we preach the gospel around here often with our lives, with our bodies, and with our service in the community. Don't we? Amen. Absolutely. He's right, but still is there not a time for words?

Because after all, if you're living the gospel with your life, if you're preaching the gospel with your life, aren't people going to occasionally ask you questions, aren't they going to say, how is it that you're able to forgive those people after what they did to you? How is it that you can love that person after what they've done in their life? How is it that you can invite people from a foreign country into your home? People that you don't even know, people who speak a different language? How can you invite them into your home? What is going on with you? What is going on in your heart? What would inspire you to do that? Or in my case, Chris, what happened to you? You used to be a lawyer. What happened to that Maserati you used to drive? They're going to ask you questions and when they do, that's a time for words, isn't it?

And I'll tell you another time I've noticed for words. A couple of years back when I was recently ordained, a parishioner took me to lunch and she was a bit elderly. And she had grown kids and her grown kids had grandchildren by that point of hers. And she was a bit distraught because none of them were going to church, despite the fact that she had raised them in church, they had been confirmed, all that stuff. In fact, her grandkids, they weren't even planning to have them baptized and it just broke her heart.

It just broke her heart. And she wanted to know, she asked, Chris, I just need you to tell me, what can I tell them? What words can I say to my family so that they might love the church as much as I do, so that they might come back? And I told her, I don't think I can give you those words. I think those words have to come from you. They have to come from your heart. They have to come from your life, your experience, your relationship. It's a song that only you can sing. And so we worked on her song, what God had done in her life, how her faith had kept her going when she wanted to give up, how Jesus had given her the courage to keep going when she thought it all had been lost.

So that's what I want to do today. And I'm going to give you three tips, which is three more than the Bishop gave us that day. Okay? Tip number one. Don't try to give the right answer. Don't try to give the textbook answer. Don't reach for a book of common prayer and scan to the back in the catechism because it's there. But don't look for the right answer. It's not about the right answer. There is no one answer when it comes to. It has to be the one on your heart.

Secondly, someone once said, and I wish I could remember who, but they were quite right and quite wise. And they said for the gospel, for the good news to be good news, it needs to speak in opposition to the bad news of your life. Yeah. For the good news to be good news, it needs to be the antidote, the solution, the salvation for the bad news of your life. You might want to start there.

We did this exercise at my house at a dinner party on Thursday. And I realize after saying that, probably none of you are going to want to come to my house for dinner. But we went around the table and we asked people, what's your gospel in 30 seconds or so, and I heard all kinds of things. Hope, forgiveness, unconditional love, community, God. Jesus reminds me that I'm not alone in this world. Beautiful stuff like that. Everything was different. So that's what you have to think about, what is it for you?

And then my last tip, number three. If this gets you too tongue tied, if this is too hard, well, first of all, don't think of it as the gospel. Just think about it as what does Jesus mean to you? Try that. Yeah? Don't make it too high and mighty because that is the gospel at the end of the day. And then at the end of the day, if you really get lost, just talk about love. God is love. So when in doubt, talk about love. That old thing, if you can't preach like Peter, and if you can't pray like Paul, just tell them about Jesus, the God who loves us all. All right?

Can we do this? We did it last night. Everything worked out fine. Everybody came away, they had a good time with it. I've told the ushers to lock the doors just in case. Choir, you good? Clergy, you're not exempt. You at home, if you're on your own, preach it to the dog, preach it to the goldfish. If you guys are sitting way in the back, all by yourself, because you're doing social distancing, no problem. Text it to somebody. You're not off the hook either.

Turn to somebody. If it's someone you don't know, introduce yourself. Decide who is going to go first and then in 30 seconds or so, share what the coming of Jesus means to you. What have you been waiting for? Okay? Take a deep breath. We can all do this. We've been

coming to church a long time. I heard some beautiful stuff last night, you guys. On your mark, get set, go.

How did that go? Give yourself a hand for doing that, by the way. Now you can do it again in 23 years, right? Just kidding. Just kidding. It gets better as you practice it, trust me. And you'll notice something that when you share your gospel with somebody, I've noticed in my own life, you're sharing it with yourself as well. You're re-evangelizing yourself in a way. And I don't know about you, but I could use that from time to time. So look for those moments. And I can't do that to you without sharing mine. So I'm going to close with this.

You want to time me? Just kidding. I'm going over. Trust me. Here's the good news for me right now. That almighty God, the creator of creation itself, eternity beyond understanding and beyond measure, ruler of all things knows me. He knows me and He knows you. He knows you and He knows all of us. And He's known us all our lives. He's known us before we were born. He knew our face before it was stitched together in our mother's womb. He knew our name before we were born. And to this day He knows every hair on our head. And that God loves us, loves us more than we could ever know, more than we could ever imagine.

And what's more, I didn't have to do anything to earn that love. It's a gift of grace and there's nothing I can do to wreck it either. There's nothing I've ever done and nothing that I can ever do that could separate me from that love. And when I believe that, when it goes from here and it starts to go here, when I start to really believe it with my being, when it starts to become who I am in those beautiful blessed moments, it changes everything, doesn't it? It gives me the courage I need, the love because I've been loved. It gives me the ability to forgive because I've been forgiven. I don't have to keep score on people anymore. I can let things go because God doesn't keep score on me. It gives me the courage I need to face this world because I know no matter what this world throws at me, even death itself, that God will always have my back. Always, eternally.

But there's a catch. There had to be a catch, right? And that catch for me is this, that whenever I go out those doors each week, I go out those doors and I don't know what it is, but this world we live in, it seems to do nothing but want to pull me back down. It seems to take every opportunity it can to tell me, Chris, no, no, no, you're not good enough. You don't measure up. You're not lovable. It tries to feed my doubts. It tries to stoke my fears and it sometimes works.

And so I have to come back here each week. I come back here because I need you and I need you. I need you and you and you and all of you. I need all of you to remind me when I forget it. I need you to encourage me when I want to give up. I need you to catch me when I stumble, because I will. I need you to pick me up when I fall, because I'm going to. And if you can do that for me, I'm going to do that for you. And if we can all do that for each other, things really start cooking, don't they? Because now when we go out those doors, we're not going out alone anymore. We're going out as the body of Christ. We're going out those doors as a force to be reckoned with. We're going out those doors as a people changed, who can change this world on earth as it is in Heaven to bring God's reign here, God's mercy, God's forgiveness, God's love here on earth.

As we say in the Lord's prayer, "On earth, as it is in Heaven." That's what gets me out of bed in the morning. That's my good news. That's the thing I've been waiting for. That's the song in my heart. And I want to encourage each of you in the weeks to come, as we go into Christmas, as we go into Epiphany, don't be afraid, shine your light in the world, sing your song. Sing the song that only you can sing, because I guarantee you, there are people in this world who need to hear it.

And remember if you ever get unsure, you're not quite sure where to go first, you're not sure what to say, just remember that even if you can't preach like Peter, and even if you can't pray like Paul, you just tell them about Jesus, the God who died for us all, the God who loves us all.

Amen.