



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Where Christ is Present_ - All Souls Day- 11_7_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.

On Friday night, I took my mother out for dinner with my family and we were at this beautiful Italian restaurant. And maybe it was the change of seasons. Maybe it was the fact that you could see the leaves differently and they're beginning to color. Maybe it was all of these things, but she suddenly had this frame of mind in which she said to me, "Your father is pheasant hunting today and he won't be home until late." And my mother is quite sharp, even though she's 87, she's an extraordinarily brilliant woman. And so, I was stunned when she said that to me. I put my hand out and I touched her arm and I kind of slowly just said to her, "Mom, he died in January," and she immediately blinked. And it was as if she had traveled in her mind back and suddenly she said, "Oh, that's right. Of course. I don't know what I was thinking."

I remember so deeply in that feeling of just watching her in that moment of confusion, I was wondering whether or not I should actually tell her differently. Because it was such a comfort to her to think that my father was coming home and that he would come home like he did when he was pheasant hunting. When he was alive, he would come back with birds and place them on the kitchen counter. Sometimes a deer. He was a hunter and fall was hunting season.

And that experience brought home to me something that I had been thinking about all through this past week, as I've been thinking about our readings today from the Gospel of John. And that is that as much as we need to hear the promises of God when we are faced with death or we're in the midst of grieving, what we really want, what we need is some form of presence. We want that person back. We want to feel like they are with us. And that is precisely what's going on in this reading today from John. In fact, the 11th chapter of John is one of the most important things that you could ever read in the scriptures.

And I invite you all today to take some time to go home and pull that out in your Bible and read it because it's an incredible story about the promises of God and the presence of God. Jesus receives word from Mary and Martha that his friend Lazarus is ill. And He delays, somewhat inexplicably. And when He comes, Lazarus has already died and He has an exchange with Martha who some say is the older sister. Martha and He discuss the promise of resurrection, but it is no

comfort to Martha. Martha wants the presence of Lazarus. Martha wants the presence of Jesus.

And so Jesus begins to make His way. And when Mary hears that Jesus is finally there, she leaves the mourners who follow her, thinking that she's going to the grave to weep, because that's what you do when you're observing a kind of death. And she runs out to meet Jesus and she falls at his feet and she says to him, if you were here, if you were present, my brother would not have died. All of us want that presence. We don't just want to hear the promise. And what makes grieving exquisitely painful is we all want that presence. And we know that it's not going to be present in the way we ever experienced it before.

But Jesus in today's gospel shows Himself fully present in three ways. And this is more than a promise, it's an actual manifestation of Jesus that goes with the grain of His incarnation. Jesus is first and foremost present when He weeps, and the moment in which Jesus meets Mary, and He sees everyone crying. And the Greek there is *klaío*, everyone is lamenting and crying out. Jesus goes to a deeper place. And the Greek there is *edákrusen ho lēsoûs*, Jesus wept. And that word, *edákrusen*, only appears in the New Testament at John Chapter 11:35. And it conveys not just lamentation, not just crying out, but a kind of anguish and grief that is profound. It has anger. It has frustration. It has fatigue. It is fully an experience of grief.

The only other time we see it in the Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible is in the Book of Job where Job says, my sign, my *edákrusen* comes like bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. So Jesus is present in grief, and this is good news for us because we all grieve. Grieving is the most human thing we do. And it's the most universal thing we do. There are many things that I cannot guarantee you in life. I cannot guarantee that you will be lucky in love. I cannot guarantee that you'll have a successful career, but I can guarantee that you will grieve. You will feel loss.

And that grieving will come maybe in a lost life or lost health or lost livelihood or a lost loved one, but it will come. And grief is not just a solitary event, but there is a kind of community that is built by grieving because everybody grieves. We are all connected in grief, we're only separated from each other by the time. Jesus grieved, which means Jesus is present in that community. Jesus is present to you. The grief Jesus experienced for Lazarus is the same grief that you have experienced for a lost loved one. There's only the distance of time historically, but in your own grief, Jesus is spiritually present.

The second moment in which we see the presence of Christ is in prayer. In that moment in which Jesus walks out to the tomb and it sounds a bit like the tomb that Jesus Himself will lay in. And that's probably done on purpose to remind us that Jesus Himself will be facing death and resurrection. And Jesus has the stone rolled away and He prays. And the purpose of that prayer, Jesus says, is to make

sure that everybody knows that God hears Him, and more importantly, that God sent Him the prayer Jesus gives is another instance of presence and that presence like grief creates a kind of community. And that is another instance for us and a reminder to us of how Christ is present. Christ is present in our prayers. When we come together and pray, when we come together as the mystical body of Christ that we hear about in our collect for today, Christ is with us.

The third moment of presence is in power, for Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. And that power to be transformed, that power to be changed, that power to be made new, that power to begin again, that resurrection power is not a promise. It's not a good ending to the story that you choose to believe. It's happening in real time and real place. It happens to Lazarus and it happens to us when we allow the power of God to be real to us. So Jesus is present in grief, Jesus is present in prayer, and Jesus is present in power.

Every time I do an African Bible study, there's a question that you're supposed to ask, which is to ask yourself how God is inviting me to change as a result of what I have read today in this piece of scripture. And with that in mind, I ask you to name what it is that God is inviting you to change as a result of this reading from the Gospel of John. Will you see Jesus in grief? Will you meet Jesus in grief? Will you see Jesus in prayer? Will you meet Jesus in prayer? Will you see Jesus in the resurrection power that only He can bring? These are the questions you and I have to wrestle with.

And the art I have for you today is from Jacob Epstein's incredible sculpture that was done for the New College, Oxford in 1948 or so. He composed it over 1947 to 1948. Epstein created this piece because he wanted to capture that moment when Lazarus is suddenly coming out of the tomb and yet still bound by his grave cloth. And from the beginning in the Christian faith from the earliest testimony of the church, that image of Lazarus coming forth with his grave cloth still around him, that was meant to convey to us, to the reader, that invitation to change.

Because all of us are called to resurrection. All of us are called to experience the presence and power and grief and prayer of Christ in our lives. And yet each of us in our own way can hold on to the old person that Christ has banished in resurrection. To the things that draw us from God, to the things we do that we shouldn't do, to the deal with death that we make too often, to the despair we feel, all of these things have to be shed. But notice here again, there is community because Jesus says to the others, unbind him and let him free. It takes a community. It takes a church to fully live into the resurrection that is Christ.

I have a student that I taught years ago. He is now a priest in Texas and has become a poet. And he has a poem that he wrote just a few years after he lost

his son. And it's called "Irreparable Loss." And this is just the little bit of it that I've excised. This is what he writes:

Some losses are irreparable.
The time is ruined.
The suffering cannot be redeemed.

There is no gain from this pain,
No view long enough to eventually say, "It was worth it,"
Nothing can compensate for what has been taken

And that's okay.
I do not want a salary for my suffering,
I want salvation from it.

I don't want magic, I want a miracle...
A new birth, a new beginning, a new day.
"Lazarus, come out!"

I cannot escape my past,
But I can be unbound.
I can enter a new time,
The time of salvation.

May you feel the presence of Christ on this day. May you feel the presence of Christ in all that you do; in your grieving and your praying and your steady, faithful walk to resurrection, for now is the time to be unbound. Now is the time for salvation. Amen.