



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The Reverend Chris Harris

"Come to Me" - The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - 7/5/2020

Lessons for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

"Come to me, all of you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I don't know about you, but that line from today's gospel is music to my ears today. After these past four months, I confess that I am very weary. I'm very weary of a lot of things. I'm very weary of being stuck at home. Very weary of staring at screens all day. I'm weary of not knowing how to greet one another. Can we shake hands? Can we do a simple hug? And weary of people who cross the street when I walk towards them on the sidewalk. I'm weary of families, unable to be at the bedside of their loved ones, weary worrying about the future, the economy, jobs, frontline workers, small business owners. And I'm weary of our politics, which rather than find a way to unite this great country in this historic challenge in front of us, we instead have found another way to divide us.

So yeah, this gospel today is music to my ears, but I have a confession to make. When it comes to turning things over to God, when it comes to letting God bear my burdens, I don't know if I'm really that good at it. Turn it over to God. Let go, and let God. It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? I've given that advice to others, yet somehow I still struggle with it.

I suppose I may be a bit like the Apostle Paul in the letter we just heard. I know better, yet somehow I manage to forget my faith in the moment of truth. And I probably shouldn't be too hard on myself. I grew up after all, like many of you probably being told that when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. So when it does, I double down on my efforts. I work harder. I get up earlier. I stay up later. I neglect my family, stop going to the gym. I try to become the master juggler who keeps all the balls in the air, never looks to break a sweat.

In fact, I can get so busy trying to hold it all together that I can even forget to pray. Running so hard to keep from falling down, I sometimes leave God behind. Do you know that feeling? Have you ever been there? It's a scary time, isn't it?

Because relying on yourself and your own efforts means that you're really alone. In fact, I can get so wrapped up in trying to manage my burdens, I not only shut out God, but I can shut out all of those who are trying to help me.

But then by the grace of God, inevitably something happens, whether it's through exhaustion or fatigue, at some point I collapse into my favorite chair, right on the front porch as if to catch my breath. I turn off my phone. I close my eyes. I listen to the breeze. I hear the birds, the distant traffic, and somehow my mind slowly drifts back to God. And I am reminded that I am not alone and almost as suddenly it hits me, why did I try to go it alone for so long? What was I waiting for?

Like Paul, I feel like such a fool having to relearn this basic lesson over and over that when it comes to all my worries, all my doubts, when it comes to my perfectionism and my pride and my anxieties and my fears and my need for control, the only way to win is to lose. Let all the balls I've been so desperately trying to juggle just fall and in the process fall into the waiting arms of God. My true peace awaits.

That's the lesson I seem destined to have to relearn again and again, that God can't catch me until I let go. And whenever I do, slowly but surely, things open up. Serendipity is suddenly everywhere to be found. God seems to put me right in the right place or put the right people just in front of me. Alternatives that I had never considered suddenly seem so obvious. Things that I thought were so darn important are finally put in their proper perspective and life begins to feel a little easier and somehow through it all, I start to live again. My soul begins to sing.

So how do we turn things over to God? And maybe more importantly, how can we make that into a habit rather than a last resort? Being stuck at home these last few months, I've been giving this a lot of thought and trial and error, and here's what I've come up with. I think Jesus of course has it right. The first thing we need to do, come to me, come to me, find your porch, your easy chair. Maybe it's a walk around the block. Maybe it's meditating in the garden, but find your 10 or 15 minutes of time with God each day.

Maybe it's early in the morning. Maybe it's before you go to bed. Maybe it's both. Just make sure that it's one on one time or you can stop talking and stop planning. You can stop worrying and stop checking your email. Don't reorganize your to-do list. Don't read a book. Don't listen to podcasts. As we just heard in the gospel, the point isn't to become experts, but to become like children again, to come to God with a child's mind, open and impressionable.

And as you come to God, I find it helpful to remind myself that I am worthy, begin where the Bible begins, that you are made in the image of God. You are all each of us God's image bearer. So no matter how big the mess we've made of things, no matter how out of control our lives might seem, no matter what anyone might

have told us in the past, we are worthy of God's abiding absolute love. And that means that our problems are worthy as well.

And do we believe that all the time, or do we say to ourselves, "Other people have it way worse than me, I think I'll keep these things to myself"? Or, "I'll just handle them on my own." Don't do that. If they're bothering you, they're bothering God because they're holding us back from being the person God made us to be. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise, don't let anyone tell you it's a first world problem. What's your issue? If it's an issue with you, it's an issue with God because it's in our way to being that force for love and compassion that we were made to be.

The next thing I do is remind myself the very next thing the Bible tells us, that being made in the image of God means it's not good to be alone. You're made for community, we're made to share each other's life, to share our burdens, to offer encouragement and support, to have a shoulder to cry on. Long before the pandemic, loneliness was an epidemic in this country. So remind yourself that no matter how wealthy, no matter how powerful we think we might be, no matter how on top of things we think we might feel, true strength comes not from our ability to be autonomous but from our courage to ask for help, the courage to be dependent.

And I realize that may sound a tad un-American this morning, given that it is Independence Day weekend. But remember, we're not celebrating our independence from one another. We celebrate our independence from tyranny and our historic embrace of an idea that an imperfect people could come together in all our differences, in all our diversities, in all of our brokenness. That an imperfect people could come together to build a more perfect union where there would be liberty and justice for all. And when all means all, that starts to look a lot like the Kingdom of God to me.

The next thing I do when I try to turn my burdens over to God is to practice patience. That's the fruit of the spirit we celebrate today - patience, letting go of our deadlines and our timetables, and to try to lean into God's time, kairos time. Let go of our need to bend reality to our liking and instead be present, be present to the reality that is right in front of us. Being patient allows us to be present so that you can see the blessings in our midst, the ones that we've been taking for granted far too long, the ones that we completely miss because we're so darn busy. Being patient means to slow down, to be grateful, to see each day for what it is, a gift.

Finally, as I began to put my burdens down and I began to feel the weight being lifted, as I take off the world's yolk, I realize I'm not done yet because the feeling of gratitude and joy so fills me. It so swells within me. The connection to God so inspires me, so energizes me, so fills me with a holy imagination for what's possible, I want nothing more than to share it with anyone who will listen. To give

away whatever amount of peace and joy that I've been given, that's the yoke of Christ.

And is that still work by the way? Sure. Sure, it is. Loving and serving others is still work, but unlike the ill-fitting yoke of the world, this one has been made for us. Being yoked with God and one another, being a force for love and compassion in the world is a far better fit than trying to do life on our own. Resting in God's love is a far better fit than a life of nagging, self doubt, and shame. Receiving God's forgiveness and then sharing it with others is far easier than a life chained to endless resentments, loving whoever God has put in front of us today is far less complicated, far less stressful than trying to control tomorrow.

I saw this all play out just the other day when a parishioner emailed me in the midst of all of this, she was venting her frustrations about the stay-at-home order and how she missed coming to church and seeing all her friends. She even named some of them in the email. She mentioned Bill who always came up to me at coffee hour if I was standing alone. She mentioned Sue, who always greeted me with a big smile and a warm hug, John, who I always had wonderful discussions with about the sermon and on and on.

And as I was sitting on my porch as I read this email, I must have been having a God moment of my own because I immediately wrote back and said, yeah, this does pretty much suck right now. But here's an idea. Why not call each one of them and tell them personally what you just wrote me, let them know how much they bless you and how much you miss them. That is, rather than resist and grow angry at the reality of today, why not surrender to it and be present to the people God had already put right in front of us? And as you might expect, her response was equal parts "oh my gosh, that's a great idea," and "why didn't I think of that already?" So, where is your porch? Where do you go to be reminded? Can we commit a little time each day to come to God? Can we try to lay down our burdens long enough so that our souls might rest so they might sing once more?

Amen.