



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

**"Don't miss out" - The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost - 11/08/2020**

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

My grandparents were married for more than 50 years. And as far as I know, they spent that entire marriage on opposite sides of the political spectrum. I remember one election, my grandfather coming home and kind of jokingly saying to me, "Well, Christopher, I did my civic duty today. I went out to the polls and as I do every election, I canceled out your grandmother."

My grandfather was a Republican. He came from a family of Danish immigrants for whom assimilation was an important value. He loved his country. He volunteered to serve it in the Navy. And he believed in its institutions and its traditions. My grandmother, she was a Democrat. She grew up during the Depression, came of age during World War II, both were experiences that had left her with a burning compassion for the poor. She believed in a safety net and thought that if we could defeat Hitler, why couldn't we also win a war on poverty?

Their different life experiences had somehow shaped their values and their differing politics yet somehow never managed to get in the way of their relationship. I don't know about you, but after this past week, after these past several months, I find that refreshing. At a time when surveys tell us that nearly half of Americans see members of the other political party as not just unfavorable, but as a threat to the nation, I find it heartening indeed, that relationships like my grandparents can point us to a different possibility.

Have you known people like that? Maybe in your own families, maybe in your own marriages. Have you ever wondered, how are they able to grow closer despite their differences? How are they able to come together at a time when the rest of us feel like we're coming apart? Research by moral psychologists might give us some clue. According to them, it turns out that liberals and conservatives really aren't all that different. Because they both share innate moral foundations, values like fairness and compassion, loyalty, liberty, honesty, and so on.

And that was certainly true in the case of my grandparents, my grandmother shared my grandfather's love of tradition and institutions. She sang in the church choir. She was active in the war effort, supporting her country. And my

grandfather shared her compassion and her sense of fairness. And while nobody would ever accuse him of being a paragon of politically correctness, as an elementary school principal, he was known throughout the district for treating his teachers and his students like his own family.

Of course, being married for as long as they had been, they didn't need moral psychologists to tell them what they had figured out for themselves. Because they had built the trust needed to disagree without being disagreeable, they could be gentle with one another. They could needle one another and joke about their politics because they trusted that at the end of the day, they were both big-hearted people who just wanted the best for their family and their communities and their country.

I don't know about you, but I find that to be good news. That, despite everything that we hear daily about our divisions, I find it to be good news - that that could be true about all of us as well; Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, moderates, and libertarians. According to the research by moral psychologists, we all share the same basic moral foundations. Where we differ is just how we rank them, which ones we put first.

Do you find that to be a comforting thought? It fills me with hope that despite our differences, despite our divisions, which we will continue to have, it fills me with hope that we do have common ground. We do have a place to start. And this really shouldn't be anything new to us, right? As Christians, the foundation of our faith is that we are all made in the image of God. No matter how different we might see the world, no matter how much different we might actually be, we are each God's image bearers.

And what's more when we come together, when we come together, despite all of our diversities, in fact, in their diversities - when we come together and all of our shapes and all of our sizes and all of our colors and all of our differently ordered values. When we bring them all to the table, all to this table behind me, we can show the world a more complete picture of God. In short, we need each other if we're going to be the body of Christ.

And while I know that, and I know we all do, I would be lying if I didn't tell you that my anxiety hasn't gotten the best of me on more than one occasion over these last several months. Not just because of the pandemic, not just because of the unrest in our streets. Not because I've been hearing over and over again, how this is the most important election of a lifetime, or that it's a battle for the soul of our nation. But because I knew going in that, like the bridesmaids and today's parable, after waiting and waiting for this election to finally be over after the last ballots are finally counted, I knew as well that like these bridesmaids, half of us would be left out of the party. Half of us would be left feeling perhaps like we're knocking on the door of a country that no longer recognizes us.

Earlier this week, Father Bill sent a letter to the congregation where he recalled the gentleness that Republicans in this congregation showed Democrats four years ago. And he expressed confidence that no matter how this election would end, that we would be gentle with one another once again.

Our gospel today reminds us all to stay awake, to remain vigilant because the kingdom of God breaks in when it's least expected. It comes in the middle of the night. When things are at their darkest, when things seem most hopeless, when there's moments of loss or grief or confusion and fear, that's when the bridegroom comes in and the door to the wedding banquet opens and the kingdom of God breaks in. If - if we are awake to it.

It occurred to me that practicing gentleness with one another, showing one another grace, taking the risk to trust each other's motives is an important way, if not, the way to stay awake, to keep our lamps lit so that we don't miss out on the greatest party of them all.

I learned this lesson of gentleness at my own wedding banquet. Back in 2013, the Supreme court had just ruled allowing gay marriage. And so Joe and I were the very first in line to get our marriage certificates, to get our marriage license. We were on the news. And we just knew that this wedding was going to be more than just about us, that it was going to be a chance for the community to come together and to celebrate this moment of history that everyone had worked so hard for.

So we gave up on the idea of invitations and RSVPs. We just flung the doors open as wide as we could. And they came. Joe's family from Michigan, my fraternity brothers from college, clients from Joe's hair salon, my law school buddies. They all came and we filled the Episcopal cathedral to capacity. It was picture perfect in so many ways. But despite all of the joy and the celebration and the more than 700 who came, I carried with me that whole day, a lingering sadness about the one who did not.

My stepmother, who had known me since I was a boy, she happened to be Mormon. And I knew her religion had strong opinions against what we were doing, but I had hoped that somehow her loyalty to family might overcome, but it didn't. And I will never forget how betrayed. I felt that someone I had grown up with - someone who had been there for every graduation. Someone who drove me to the movies on my first date, who taught me how to drive couldn't bring herself to be there.

I waited several months to cool off before I called her and I did my best to be civil. But it didn't take long for emotions to take over and the conversation degenerated into an episode of CNN's Crossfire. It became a debate over politics in the Bible and the legitimacy of our respective religions and all of that.

And I have to admit I was anything but gentle, but after hanging up, I made the decision to stay open, to be vigilant.

We let more time pass, sent flowers on Mother's Day as I normally did, sent cards at Christmas and Easter. I did a lot of prayer and I stopped debating and I started to listen. And in time I came to understand that she was being loyal to family. It's just that she had been trying to honor her own father who had died just a few years before. And her faith was the legacy that he had left her. How foolish I had been. By not coming, she wasn't dishonoring me. She was doing her best to honor him. And while I didn't agree with her decision, I could now understand it. I no longer mistrusted her motives or her values.

A couple of years later when our twin girls celebrated their first birthday, we decided to invite my dad and my stepmom to join us in Disneyland for the first birthday party. I sent them an invitation with no strings attached, no expectations, no pressure. It's just a free and open invitation, come if you'd like. And she came. And when we saw each other through the crowds near the entrance, I suddenly understood those characters in the gospels who rejoice at the finding of the lost coin or at the lost sheep or at the return of the lost son. As wonderful and memorable as our wedding was, it was the moment she picked up those girls and held them tight that always brings a tear to my eye. Because that was the moment the kingdom of God broke in. That was the moment that we stepped together into the true wedding banquet.

And if this sounds like a tall order for our divided nation, if that seems impossible, given this election, look no further than our veterans that we celebrate this week. Our men and women represent every corner of the country, our service men and women represent every shade of humanity, native born and immigrant, rich and poor, Christian, Jew, Muslim, and non-believer - and yes, Republican and Democrat, all of them finding a way to rise above their differences for a cause greater than themselves. And in so doing, make visible those same threads, those same innate moral values that bind us all to one another when we let them.

So as we move on from this most recent election, as some of us celebrate while others grieve, where can we practice gentleness? Where can we with God's grace begin to heal? Who are the people in our life that could use some grace and some understanding? Where can we be instruments of peace and risk trusting each other enough to uncover our shared values and our common humanity? How can we stay awake to the opportunities to come together, to reconcile, and in so doing, not miss out on the greatest party of them all.

Amen.

[End of Recording]

