



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

"Everyday Sacrifice" - The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost - 8/30/2020

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.

A few days ago I received the kind of message from a former person that I was, my earlier younger self. A friend of ours, of Claire and mine got in touch with us out of the blue, over Facebook. And he related to me a memory of an encounter that we'd had somewhere in the late 1990s when I was in my early thirties. And I am not sure exactly how old he was.

He was a struggling musician at the time. And he was trying to somehow make his way by busking on the street and bringing in some money through that and then selling a CD that he had cut. And this is what he wrote me:

"One summer night in the late 1990s, I was busking in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was probably about 9:00 or 10:00 PM, and I'd been out busking for something like 12 plus hours, I think. It was the end of the month, rent was coming due. I was short and I had just spent all day making almost no money. I was just finishing up, ready to pack it in when I heard a guy call my name from the street, I spin around and see Bill calling me from his car.

He yells, 'I'll go park and come see you.' So I despondently set about packing up my gear and meager tips while Bill parks. A few minutes later, he comes, my big, smiling, giant black Lab of a friend, glad to see me and reconnect. When he asks how I'm doing I proceed as any considerate friend would do to unload my winding sorrows about how hard life had been, which was a blind exaggeration and how broke I was, which was the absolute truth.

Bill puts his hand on my shoulder and says, 'Hey, can I give you some money?' Speechless moment. Fighting tears, but putting aside pride and embracing pragmatism, endure a moment of grace. 'Yes. Thank you.' Bill walks 20 feet to an ATM, takes out 200 bucks and hands it to me. I don't recall the rest of the conversation, but it was and is the best lesson in grace I have had from a living human. Bill, thanks for that. It stayed with me, even if I never said another word to you about it."

When I got this message, I was suddenly confronted with a young man that I was, and I was suddenly confronted with all these incredible memories of my relationship with Andy, my friend. He liked to call me the big, smiling, giant black Lab of a friend. And I really kind of resented that a little bit because I was

hoping for a better breed of dog because black labs always seem to be getting into trouble. And I kind of wanted to be like the wolf in his wolf pack or something like that. I don't know.

But we had a complicated relationship. In part because he was a partner in music with my wife, Claire, and they could make incredible, beautiful music together, and I was always a little bit jealous. Then when I saw him on the street, I remember exactly that moment in time. It was raining that day and he was really struggling. And I remember going to the ATM. And at that time, \$200 was actually a bit of money for us. And I was thinking to myself, I hope that Claire's going to be okay with this. And I gave him the money and drove him home.

And that offering of \$200, that small sacrifice that I made, it was so easy for me in that moment. It was so - it flowed out of me. I just wanted to do it, even though I wasn't in the habit of simply going to an ATM and taking out money and giving it to a friend. And I begin with that story, because I was reflecting on our reading today from the gospel of Matthew. And I really want us to see an incredibly important point in this scripture because when you and I read Jesus's words, "If anyone wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

You and I tend to lift up those people among us and in our history who have made the ultimate sacrifice of themselves for others. People like Alwyn Cashe, a soldier that has recently received the Medal of Honor, who went back and forth to a burning vehicle in Iraq to save his comrades and finally gave himself. Or Jason Hargrove, the bus driver in Detroit, who during the early days of the COVID pandemic kept on driving his bus until he himself contracted COVID-19 and died. Or the doctors who have given themselves completely and fully to the people that they are serving to their patients. Or the nurses who clean up after those doctors and patients so that they can stay and rest and be supportive. Or the caregivers who go day in, day out to the people that need their care. To the blue collar workers that are continuing to do their jobs, even though they're encountering danger, you and I tend to lift up people who have made ultimate sacrifices.

And when we do that, I think we start to build a kind of barrier between our own ordinary lives and the kind of transformed life, the crucified life that Jesus is inviting us to live. But I want to suggest to you that today's gospel has in it a strong invitation for you and I to actually live the crucified life and the powerful life of sacrifice, no matter where we are. No matter what God is calling us to do, because when I gave that small sacrifice of \$200, I had no idea that it was going to mean so much to my friend, Andy.

And that experience of transformation is one that has slowly built up in me, a life of service. And that service has not been difficult. That service has not been particularly heroic, perhaps, but I've given my all, when my all has been

demanded and it has somehow been an experience of transformation and grace through God and Jesus Christ. And the purpose of today's gospel is not to then set up some marble monuments of people that we would look on from afar and feel ashamed of our own meager steps, but rather to include us in this work of transformation, to look at our lives and the sacrifices demanded of us day in and day out where all of us make them, and to be transformed by those small gifts and gestures and grace that we give to one another.

For truly, that is what the gospel of Matthew seeks to do. The key verse in Matthew that we find early in chapter four reads this. It says that after Jesus had encountered and begins His ministry in Jerusalem, it says that Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." And that word "repent," *metanoia*, is not to be understood as a moment in which we hate our former selves in order to find ourselves anew, but rather than we are profoundly changed. *Metanoia*, the Greek is for a change of mindset. And of course that stands for a deeper change of dying so that we can live, but that death and resurrection is a movement into life and peace and joy, such as we could never experience if we stay enclosed within ourselves.

And all of us are called to be part of that transformation, all of us are called to lose ourselves until we find ourselves anew in Christ. Because when we are joined with Christ and when we somehow contribute and participate and follow His lead to a life of death and resurrection, a life of taking up our own cross and following Him, we find a strength and identity and love and power that we never knew that we could have on our own. We find the strength to be ourselves. No matter the opposition against us, a love, which is able to endure pain and suffering and continue to give. We find a peace which passes all understanding. We find the power to forgive and truly that is good news.

And that is what Jesus is inviting us to do today. To look at where we find ourselves and they look for the way, ways in which we can give ourselves and lean in to those invitations, to offer ourselves so that we can continue to follow Him and be transformed by living a crucified life, a life in which we are dead to the things that keep us from God and alive in Christ. A life in which the Cross of Christ is not just an exemplar, but also active and alive in our lives as the grace and peace that God gives us through His forgiveness.

There are three things I want you to see today in today's gospel. Three things about sacrifice that are really important for us to see and hear and claim so that we can know ourselves well and know exactly what Christ is calling us to be. The first is that our sacrifices, no matter how great, no matter how Christ-like, no matter how ultimate they may be, our sacrifices go with the grain of grace. In fact, I want to say that our sacrifices are an echo of the sacrifice that Jesus has given to us, not the origination, not the voice that is spoken, but echo that returns to Christ.

And this is important for us to do, because when we are thinking about our lives, in terms of sacrifice, we can sometimes have the tendency to think that what we are doing is able to somehow change who we are so that God will be pleased with us. We can make our sacrifices into a kind of atonement for our sins. But in fact, everything that God has done for us through sacrifice has been already, always accomplished through Jesus Christ. And this means that the sacrifices we make are an echo of what Jesus has already done. It means that they are expressions of the grace and a work of love of the life of Christ living already in us.

The second thing I want you to see in this passage today is that Jesus is not inviting us to develop a Christ complex, to become little Christs that carry little crosses and try to be just like Him, but rather a Christ consciousness. That we are able to see through today's gospel. Not that we must be Christ, but we must see Christ in all things and in every face. And that's a key thing because there are going to be moments in which we will be immersed in complex relationships. We'll be surrounded by difficult decisions and having that Christ consciousness will help us know what is the cross that God is preparing us to bear.

And the third thing I want you to see is that our sacrifices make more of us. There are many people that will ask of you sacrifices, and those sacrifices are often given to you by someone else because they want you to fit into what they think you should be or do or say. But in fact, the grace of the sacrifices God has given us in Christ is to invite us to a path where we'll become more of who we are through the offerings we give.

I am grateful for the opportunity I have had in my life to sacrifice. The opportunity I have had in my life to make my life an offering to others, because I know that it is through that action that God has made me a better human being, a better Christian. It is through those small steps of \$200 or other gestures, through those small ways my faith has been nourished, my life has been transformed. I know my God as Christ incarnate.

And you and I have to keep in mind, as we read today's gospel, that when Jesus says, "Those who want to save their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake will find it." When Jesus says that, He is promising us, not just death, but life, life eternal, life abundant, life that is joyous, life that is unending, life that is full, and life that is fulfilled in Him.

So today I'm inviting you to engage in a bit of personal inventory around your life. To think about the different sacrifices before you, the different offerings you have made in your past, the different things God is calling you to do now and in the future. And I invite you to see everything through the lens of God's grace. Because when Jesus invites His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him, He is truly speaking a word of grace.

I invite you to see and cultivate in your heart and soul a Christ consciousness so that you can see Christ in the all things. And I invite you to continue the good work of transformation that God has begun already in you from baptism and even before, when God imagined this day and decided it would be incomplete without you and me here and now.

Amen.

[End of Recording]