



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

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. Please be seated.

When we celebrate great institutions, they can seem as if they have been fixed in stone, in part because so many of them are made of stone. They can seem like they have been here for so long that they are inevitable. They can seem as if they are as dependable as a calendar or a clock. But every institution began in a founding moment. And founding moments are never moments that are routine, they're never moments that are inevitable, they're never moments that you can count on. Founding moments usually happen in the midst of volatility, uncertainty, in the midst of chaos, and in the midst of ambiguity.

And Christ Church Cranbrook is no exception. This institution started because George and Ellen Booth and Samuel Marquis, the first rector, believed that a church could respond to the challenges they faced in their day. Keep in mind that this area in the 1920s was experiencing profound immigration. This area in the 1920s was experiencing profound inequity due to industrialization. This area in the 1920s was beginning to experience the kind of dehumanization that happens through routine industrial work. And they believed that a church could be the answer. This church began just a few years after the Great War in which so many died for so many years. And in the midst of that volatility, in the midst of that uncertainty, in the midst of that chaos, in the midst of that ambiguity, they decided that the proper response was to found a Church.

Gerald Arbuckle, an anthropologist that lives in Australia, wrote that institutions forget their founding vision's founder. And by that he means that the founding vision is not something that you simply enshrine and you say, thank you, father, thank you, mother. But founding moments always happen in that beautiful creative chaos and necessity and crisis. And so when we remember a founding moment, we remember not merely the fact that this church has been here through thick and thin, in good times and in bad, in the midst of challenges this church has persisted because it is the church's nature to persist, so we believe as Christians. But we understand and embrace our own founding moments when we are faced with volatility, uncertainty, with chaos, and ambiguity. And certainly those four words describe our reality as well.

So to remember your founding moment as a congregation is not merely to remember the good things that have happened and to be thankful, although it certainly involves that. It means remembering the faith of our founders. It is remembering their incredible inspired act of founding a church to deal with all

these difficulties that they were experiencing. Their confidence in God that a church would be the answer to the problems they were facing, that whatever we were facing as a nation, whatever we're facing as a region, whatever we were facing in our lives, that the church would be the way in which all of those difficulties would be addressed and healed, through the presence of a congregation like ours.

We remember that because each generation has its own founding moment. And you and I are faced in a similar context of volatility, uncertainty, chaos, and ambiguity. And it's my hope and prayer today that we will say the same, we believe that this church is the answer, this church is our first act, this church will enable us to continue to be the people of God in the world.

On Founding Sunday it's good for us to ask ourselves the question that our founders asked themselves, which is not what are we supposed to do, because what we do as a church is pretty much the same as many other churches. We hold services. We baptize babies. We engage in service. We have study groups and programs. We gather people together and we reach out to those in need. But every church does that if they're worth their salt. And on Founding Sundays, it's also important for us to not merely notice how we do things, which is excellently. We do excellent work. Whenever we do anything, when our choir sings, it is excellent. When we do a wedding, it is excellent. When we do a funeral, it is excellent. I know that sounds strange. When we do any service of celebration, it is excellent.

But that only speaks about how we do things, it does not answer the question why, and churches need to ask why we do what we do. And to answer that question today, I did a little bit of research and I found a speech that George Booth gave in 1927. And Booth gave it at the founding of Cranbrook School for Boys, which we now know has continued to multiply, and he gave it one year before the founding of Christ Church Cranbrook. And it was meant to be the why, his answer to the why of why he was doing all this work, he and Ellen. And he wrote this:

"I can only hope that what has been accomplished and the work not yet begun may be to the glory of God and be a blessing and useful service to all who follow. We have blazed a new trail. It will be largely the work of others to extend, to widen, and to improve."

There are three things I want you to see today in this incredible remark by Booth. The first is that he speaks about the glory of God. And that's something that is a little more embedded in our tradition. We actually speak of the glory of God every Eucharist when we sing the Doxology, which comes from the Greek doxa, meaning "glory" when we say holy, holy, holy. But glory as Booth used it was

meant to imply the greatest thing that could ever be achieved by a human being. He's drawing from a classic confession called the Westminster Confession, in which the first question is asked, what is humanity's destiny and purpose? And the answer is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

So to glorify God for Booth meant placing God above all things. It meant placing God at the center of all things. It meant not letting go of the things that would be definitive of who you were in your identity and holding fast to that destiny you had as a Christian. And not letting anything stand in its place, whether it be career or any kind of desire or any kind of accumulative wealth. For Booth to live to the glory of God meant sharing what he had and giving to others, and to giving it all so that he might know that glory of God in him.

And one of the interesting things about glory is that when you look at the New Testament, Jesus is identified as the glory of God, and the glory of God is identified with Jesus. We see this in the Gospel of John when Jesus says that He will be glorified. It happens not at the resurrection, it happens at the moment Jesus is hanging on the cross, that moment of sacrifice, because God hallowed that suffering and transformed it by being present. So glory in the New Testament doesn't just mean giving your greatest and your best to God. It means realizing that God has come to baptize and transform your humanity through Christ.

And finally, in glory, there is a sense in which it is the opposite of a scarce commodity. That's the issue in today's Gospel, and that is the issue when the disciples argue with one another as to who is going to be at Jesus's right hand and left. And that is the issue when the Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Glory is not a scarce commodity. No one gets more glory than others, but the glory of God is yours in Christ. You have been given something infinite, and we need, in a time of volatility and uncertainty and chaos and ambiguity, to claim that glory for ourselves. So one way we can live into this founding moment is to name that glory and to give thanks to God for the presence of Christ Jesus, for the opportunity to come together and worship, because in that worship we are healed and renewed and we find our purpose.

The second thing I want to raise up for you today is that beautiful line, "To be a blessing and useful service to others." I love the fact that he mentions useful with service because oftentimes, I don't know if you've ever experienced that, people want to do nice things for you and you're like I don't need quite that, but if you ask me I can give you something that would really be helpful. But standing behind that orientation, of course, is the love of neighbor. And standing behind that service and that blessing to others is the key to our dignity. It does not matter how much money you have. It doesn't matter whether you are a benefactor. It doesn't matter if you can give only a little bit, there is something

that is transformative when we serve and give to others. We are transfigured with the love of God. It doesn't matter how little we can give. All that matters is that we do give and we find our salvation in giving. And for us, that service has meant everybody is welcomed in this church. And it also means that in this church everyone is loved and everyone is given the opportunity for transformation.

And, finally, in this incredible beautiful witness by George Booth, there is a focus on the future. A trust in the future, a belief in the future, confidence in the future that though they were facing those challenges of volatility, uncertainty, chaos, and ambiguity that God was in charge and God could be trusted. And that meant building for the future. And that to me is something we have to keep in mind more than ever these days. God called Booth and Marquis to be people of the future because the future needed them. And God has called us to be friends of the future, to build and provide for those things and people that will come after us, and to trust God in the midst of the challenges of this day, that God will find a way. And that God will use us and bless us as He used and blessed our founders.

The piece of art I have for you today just to contemplate just a bit, is from the tapestry that is on your bulletin. It was purchased by Booth in the early 1920s and it has an interesting journey to us. It was initially commissioned by an Australian businessman and it was done because he saw it at a fair that he went to and he had it done. But of course, the minute it was complete, it was 1920, and keep in mind Australia had lost so many souls in World War I. And so the image of the tapestry is of David handing over the plans of the temple to Solomon. It's from 1 Chronicles 28, it's the moment in which David has revealed that God has told him that he has shed too much blood, and that someone else had to come and build the temple.

And so you see King David at the center with all of his armor, holding onto those plans for the temple. And he's giving it over to the boy-king, Solomon, who is not ready to reign but he's receiving the plans and he's receiving the instructions and all the attendants and all the soldiers and all the treasures. And all the people who are celebrating David's mighty acts, all of them are weeping because they know they will not live to see the building of this temple. And yet, David gives the plans. Even though he's been told he cannot build the temple, David trusts the future.

And this tapestry Booth bought in the early 1920s, when it came through to Detroit, and when they founded this church and picked out the soil and got it opened up and began to build, that tapestry hung before them as a kind of promise in the future. And it now hangs in our library and I ask you all to take a moment and visit with it.

“Founder’s Day” - Founder’s Day 9/24/23

What is the “why” that you need to ask yourselves on this Founders Day? What is the “why” for what you do? What is the “why” that allows you the will to do and the know-how to accomplish something? May God bless this congregation and may we find our way into that future through the glory of God as a blessing and service to others.

Amen.