



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

"More Than We Deserve" - The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost - 9/20/2020

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who's brooding over us as a mother over her children. Amen.

When things don't work out for us, when things don't go the way we had hoped, it is annoying. It can be disappointing. It can even be heartbreaking. And this year, I think we're all learning in spades that life is filled with disappointments and life is filled with inconsistency. Some of them minor, some of them life changing. And to make sense of it is a logical game sometimes of futility.

In May while we were all under a stay-at-home order here in Michigan, Father Bill hosted a webinar and it was called Rebuilding the Economy Post COVID-19. And there were many prominent businesses owners who spoke. Many of them were parishioners of this church. And we also got to hear from Paul Glantz who is the CEO of Emagine Movie Theaters. You remember movie theaters, right? And he was sharing how his company was trying to figure out how to deal with a stay-at-home order that eventually they hoped would be lifted and how it was fairing in his industry.

And I was so heartened by his vision because he was working super hard. He was making sure that all of his employees had healthcare and benefits, and he was thinking of ways to open up and they believed that it would happen in August with masks and social distancing and reduced attendance. And that optimism that he carried, that everything was going to be okay and people wanted to return together.

And you know what? I believed him too. I mean back then in May, the church was online fully, and we weren't gathering together or meeting in person. And so I held onto his hope, the church and the theaters would be open soon. And we did open the church in July, save this weekend, and it is September 20th and there's still no movie popcorn.

In our women's spirituality group that meets every Wednesday at noon on Zoom, we're doing a book study in our Season of Theology in November. So every month we have a different season and in November we'll hit the season of theology. And we're going to look at a book called *A Language of Healing for a Polarized Nation*. It's written by three authors. One of them is Wayne Jacobsen. He was the author of *The Shack*. Another one is a male pastor. And the third coauthor is a female pastor and speaker.

And I've learned a lot from Father Bill and Father Chris in hanging out with them that you can do more than just read and talk about these great books. You can actually invite the authors. And I thought, oh my gosh. How cool would that be? We're going to like reach out to her. And I looked her up and I sent her a nice message and I was like, we would love to have you come to our Zoom and talk to us. I thought it would just be super cool because we all need a language of healing as we move through this election season, through the season of racial tension, through a season of public health crisis.

I didn't hear back from her. And I began to think, okay, fine. Whatever. Guess we don't need you. I mean, sometimes we're on the winning side of things, but other times there's no popcorn for us. And I've been wondering about how we handle inconsistencies and disappointments and injustices. And even though all of these things are part of being human, right? I mean, none of us get everything we want. Many of us don't even get everything we need. And yet when these inconsistencies or disappointments or, or things that we didn't expect or shouldn't happen, happen, we're still stunned. We're still surprised we're still dismayed. Sometimes we're even outraged because things should happen a certain way. And when they don't, we don't know what to do.

It's an ancient problem. In the Bible text this morning, voices are raised and tempers are flaring because of three words. I think they must be the three most popular words passed, "I love you." And these three words, well they've caused revolutions and war, and the words are, "It's not fair." The vineyard workers in the gospel story who toiled the whole day under that hot blazing sun sweating and expecting the promised daily wage were outraged because there was no difference in their pay from the ones who just worked for barely an hour. It's not fair.

Or what about the Prophet Jonah? By the way my pandemic movie recommendation of the week is a cute rendition of Jonah. It's family friendly and for adults who like cartoons, it's adult friendly too. It's the Veggie Tales version of Jonah. And it takes the great classic tale of God versus human, or in the Veggie Tales rendition, God versus asparagus, and tells the whole story of Jonah being a prophet, and part one of when he's in a whale and gets stuck there. And in there, that movie, is actually my favorite song that's ever been sung, In the Belly of a Whale by a gospel choir. And it's called Praise the Lord, He is the God of Second Chances.

But the second part of the Jonah story, it's difficult because Jonah has to go to the Ninevites and the people of Nineveh were engaging in evil acts. They couldn't tell their right hand from the left. They couldn't tell what was right and what was wrong. They had no moral compass. They lived life so poorly and they

were so inhumane to each other and to their animals, that destruction was inevitable for them.

And yet God spared them. Jonah reluctantly visits them and tells them of their doom. And God seems to have a soft spot for people who don't deserve things. At some point, you and I who believe in God, we have to come to terms with the fact that we have an intrusive God who meddles in our lives and the lives of others, so that we can never quite figure out how things are going to turn out. And I think it's the reason that Jonah would rather have died than spend a minute in this world with this kind of relentlessly merciful god. God's intrusive meddling, it's unpredictable, it's definitely for the undeserving, and it's dangerous.

No wonder it drives us crazy. And I mean that kind of crazy when you are doing all the right things, you are being righteous, you are putting your nose to the ground and you are working as hard as you can. You are following directions, you are paying your taxes, you're doing everything right. And all the persons who don't and take shortcuts, or just flat out do the wrong things seem to get the good things too, or even worse, get better than you. That's enough to drive each one of us crazy. And it's enough to be maddeningly disappointed with God.

And I noticed that when people get something that they don't seem to deserve, in my humble opinion, especially second chances, grace doesn't seem amazing. Grace is like this blunt instrument that hits you between the eyes really hard while the undeserving dance around you, because they just dodged a bullet. But let me ask you. Do you really want to live in a world where we all get what we deserve?

We're Christians, so we don't. We want a Savior who's going to give us life, even though we deserve death. So why is it that we grumble when the same grace is extended to those who are deemed undeserving to us? Maybe our mistake is to be resentful when we encounter this dangerous grace in others and forget too easily how that dangerous grace saved our own hides. I mean, think about Jonah. He was so irritated and angry that the Ninevites got away with it, but it was that same grace that saved Jonah, that when God said go to the Ninevites and Jonah headed in the very opposite direction.

If God tells you to go somewhere, my advice to you is if you do the exact opposite of what God tells you, you better know that it's grace that's saving you from being a whale's breakfast. So why do we hate it when God spares others that we think aren't worth it?

In this season of heartbreak where nothing is turning out as expected, do you find yourself grumbling when good falls on your foes, your enemies, the

undeserving? Why not do this? Remember that you too are a recipient of this dangerous grace and that maybe you would be better served rejoicing that we have a God who shows mercy to all, even to animals.

As I was finishing up this sermon - confession - late last night, I got a notification that I had a Facebook message. So I went and lo and behold, guess who it was? It was the author of the book, *A Language of Healing for a Polarized Nation*. It was Arnita Willis Taylor. And I had already grumbled against her. And so my expectation was this is late, she didn't really pay attention and she's just going to give me the brush off.

And I opened it and she said she would be honored to come to our women's spirituality group. And at that moment, That joy that I felt, even though I had wronged her and thought ill of her, that something good happened, and I was undeserving of it, that joy filled me and I messaged her back. And I said, today you are my experience of God's grace.

May you rejoice whenever you encounter God's dangerous grace, especially when you receive it and when those deemed unworthy by you receive it too.

Amen.

[End of Recording]