



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Come, Holy Spirit, and enkindle within us the fire of your burning love. In your most blessed name we pray. Amen.

Please be seated. Good afternoon, friends. I am delighted to be here with all of you today. This past week, I presided and I preached at the memorial service for a dear friend of mine, a priest, someone who's just two years older than me, someone who taught me much of what I know about congregational development and leadership. His memorial service was held in the city in Kansas where he successfully planted a thriving church in the mid-'90s, and that church is alive and well today, St. Margaret's.

Mark was an insanely gifted man who, on the flip side, was almost incapable of asking for care or help, assistance, and sometimes even love. He gave and he gave. He was a stunning priest with consummate pastoral care skills who never seemed to quite trust the rest of us that we would be willing to love him as much as he loved us. It was maddening and saddening.

As we prepared for Mark's memorial service, as I gathered stories that would sum up a portion of his life, what I realized is that it wasn't just me who he held at a distance. There were so very many of us for whom he cared, who wanted to be more connected with him, more helpful, more present. And while I respect his decision to do many things on his own, I'm bummed that he chose not to invite more people to be with him as he battled cancer valiantly and amazingly for more than six-and-a-half years.

And I couldn't help but think of Mark as I reflected on the leader of the synagogue coming to Jesus and asking Jesus to lay His hand upon his daughter who has just died so that she may live. How he risked making his needs known. And the woman who has hemorrhaged for 12 years, she has been bleeding and ritually unclean for most of her life, how she reaches out, thinking to herself, if I but just touch the fringe of His garment, then I will be healed. I will be made well.

And I think on these people, how they asked for help, how they risked asking for assistance, and they both violated norms and customs. A leader of the synagogue could have risked all of his standing by going and seeking out Jesus, to seek out one who is known to consort with tax collectors and sinners, yet he asks. And the woman is unclean, and just the notion of touching a man with her malady in that

day and age violates all the norms and customs of the day, and yet she does. She risks doing. Each asks and Jesus answers and a community of care is created. A community of needs and gifts and talents and longings comes together. A community that eventually changes the world.

As a young person, I hated asking for help because I didn't want people to think that I wasn't up to the task. And this carried on later in life as I began to wonder if I was good enough to be trusted with the responsibilities given to me. If I asked for help, would people think that I didn't know what I was doing? If I didn't have all of the answers, would they think that I was a fraud? Ironically, it was my friend Mark who told me to stop answering every single question posed at a vestry meeting. I was confused. If I know the answer, why wouldn't I answer? "Because," he wisely said, "if you always have the answer and are always trying to prove that you're good enough and smart enough, then there will not be space for other people to develop their own gifts and talents. Be quiet, Bonnie," he said. "Leave some space for others." It worked.

And my hunch is that parents do this a bit with your children as they grow and mature. Sometimes, hard as it might be to just watch our kids, letting them figure things out on their own, making small mistakes, and teaching them when to go it on their own and when to stop and when to ask for help, waiting to step in until they ask, all the while enabling them to develop those muscles and to learn that it's okay not to know everything, and it's okay to ask for help. It's okay to risk depending a bit on one another. When we risk asking for help, we allow our vulnerabilities and our needs to be seen, and when we fail to ask for assistance, we wind up intentionally or not creating a wall behind which we hide.

In the next few minutes, we have some baptisms with Ethan and Theo and Sierra. And we have opportunities to do this thing called church, which promises, we make promises in front of everyone in the flesh because being with each other matters so very much. It is in this thing called church, it is all about the relationships. And in a world where AI can write your paper, AI can decide that your resume is not good enough, and AI can make you think that you don't need anyone, we know that our God was born in a barn, and Jesus Christ is human and divine, but human with needs and wants. And we who dare to follow Him cannot be people who ignore or dismiss our humanity.

We are human. We bleed, and we need, and we long to be loved. And when we ask, will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these people in their life with Christ? I invite you to say, we will, loudly, and then back it up with all of your heart and all of your soul, even if you do not know the person. That's the point, that we don't stay strangers. That we get to be the church that the world needs. That we get to be the people of God, broken and flawed, who will still show up for each other and trust each other. Because friends, we are all God's

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got. And our world needs us to need each other. And together with God and each other, we can do more than we can either ask or imagine.

Amen.