



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Beloved, please be seated.

I have always liked science. I find ethical experiments to be interesting at least some of the time. This interest may or may not come from an early experiment that I did at the age of seven. The tools for the experiment consisted of one seven-year-old girl, a larger than medium dog, a pinwheel, and a pair of roller skates. It had something to do with the speed at which a pinwheel might spin if the dog ran while the child held onto the pinwheel and the dog all while wearing roller skates.

At the conclusion of this experiment was a child with seven stitches across her right brow, two angry parents, a somewhat crushed pinwheel, and thankfully a dog that was unharmed. It was the day before Easter, and my mother was annoyed that I'd be sporting this large bandage over my head while wearing an Easter dress. And I will say that I am convinced to this day that the pinwheel absolutely did spin faster.

I tell you this story as a way of introduction. Hi. And also to tell you that really not much has changed since those days. I would absolutely do it again with the right dog and the right equipment. And my own ideas and my own thinking have gotten me into a little bit of trouble, maybe a lot of trouble more often than that day in Brooklyn.

Many years ago, I called a good friend of mine and I asked him to share his recovery story with me. I had been white knuckling sobriety for a couple of weeks, and finally on that day, I was ready to listen to someone else. It was obvious to me that my own ideas about what alcoholism was or was not were not doing me any favors. Before that day, I would just laugh it all off and say, oh, not a problem. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm not like my mother, or at least a dozen other people I could name.

But after listening to my friend, I took myself to a noon meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and admitted for the first time that I was an alcoholic. I did it with my arms, crossed, my teeth gritted, and I was mad as hell. And to make matters worse, I had to come to believe that God could restore me to sanity. God and I were not on the best of terms back then, but we were at least speaking to each other. And like many of us who are recovering from our families of origin, I was

slowly correcting the misinformation I had received about God over the years. I was lovingly told to quiet my mind, to listen to God speak for a change, rather than to project all of that garbage onto God.

Well, you can rightly assume that something good happened because here I am. It wasn't always easy and I wasn't always quiet. I still don't listen well, but I am grateful to have my life today. I am especially grateful for the people who told me to listen and to hang on tight. Pinwheel and roller skate crashes are nothing in comparison. And I know now that God was using all sorts of people in my life to get me to a place of healing, and I needed every single one of those people. Most of all, I needed Jesus.

In our lessons for tonight, we have Jesus telling His followers and some others who are curious about Him, that He's willingly going to continue this walk to Golgotha and embrace all that awaits Him there. He's told them that He is going to die a horrific death. I am certain that they were afraid and may even have tried to convince Him that there's a better way. Nope. Nope. Not at all. In John's gospel, the cross is where Jesus is glorified. It doesn't make any sense, and the symbolism of it all is insulting and horrible. Jesus, in an act of violence and irony, will be crowned as King of the Jews while people mock Him and torture Him. His crown will be heavier than any crown of any king anywhere. His throne will be a cross of torture.

A seminary professor of mine once said that the story had to be true because there was no way that anyone would make it up. It's too unbelievable. It's too ridiculous. It's too awful. No one from anywhere would claim that the Messiah or any king and savior would die in such a way, let alone be glorified by that death. It was a shame-filled way to die. And yet, despite what the world or the Empire thinks, it is exactly how Jesus will be glorified.

Paul tells us that the message of the cross is foolishness. God has turned it all upside down and has made the wisdom of the world foolish, and instead has made that which is shameful and absolutely unimaginable the symbol and the way for the world to be saved. The Son of God who deserved all the good that could possibly be had, instead took on the sin of the world because God so loved the world and God knew that we needed an intervention of Godly proportions. Left to our own thoughts and deeds, we will often choose the easy way or the more valued way. God wants us to choose instead the way that will break us open so that we might love as Jesus loves.

And if we needed any more evidence about the insanity of this story, look at those who were chosen to keep the story alive: women, fishermen, a tax collector or two, and even the thieves who were crucified with Him. These are not the kind of people who commanded audiences, certainly not people who would be listened

to or perhaps not even trusted. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

There's a lesson in that for us too. As we experience the narrative of this week, we will notice that it has slowed way down so that we might experience it fully. We need to be reminded of the events of this week before we go rushing off to Easter, as wonderful as that is. We need our hearts to kneel in the dust of Jerusalem, and we need to see the world around us with open eyes, open hands, and open hearts. Jesus carries the cross to give life to the world, and when He tells you and I to take up our cross, He isn't telling us to take up something for our own reasons or for our own sake. The story of my sobriety only becomes my cross to bear when I reach out to help another in their sobriety. Until then, it's just my personal experience. And I only get to keep the gift if I can share it with another and help to shoulder their cross.

And that is perhaps in part what we all need to learn this holy week. The cross of Jesus remains for us a symbol of our own sins, but also the sin that surrounds us. War, occupation, poverty, slavery. All of these issues continue in some form in our own world and in our own lives. And there are those who would have us believe that success is to be achieved at all costs, no matter who we might step on or step over along the way. There are those who would tell us that Christianity is all about blessings and material signs of God's favor, especially for the US. They would laugh at a weak Jesus who hangs from a cross or ignore Him entirely.

But you and I know differently. We know differently, don't we? Their Christianity is one that confuses the wisdom of God with the wisdom of self-promotion and success. A suffering Jesus does nothing for their religion. But we know that when we instead walk with Jesus that the way is sometimes dark, filled with pain, violence, and loneliness. We know that we are to be broken open, to give of ourselves to others in ways that help them to carry their burdens, whether we do that in soup kitchens, 12-step rooms, kitchen tables, prisons, hospital beds, or the streets of our cities.

That's what it means to carry our cross. In God's world where human wisdom is foolish, everyone is our neighbor, and no one is illegal. In God's world where human wisdom is foolish, spiritual, emotional, and physical violence are not committed against any of God's children. And if we need reminders about who God's children are, it's every single person. In God's world where human wisdom is foolish, God becomes human, and we are beckoned to follow a suffering crucified Messiah.

As Jesus takes up His cross for us this week, may each of us find ways to take up the cross for another. Thanks be to God for the foolishness of breaking into our

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history and our lives to teach us that we aren't nearly as smart or as wise as we might think.

Amen.