



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

I speak 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.

On Sunday night as I was preparing to preach this sermon, I was taken by all of the conversations and all of the arrangements that were being made in this area to see the eclipse. And this made me curious. And I began to wonder at what point in the history of thought did eclipses go from being a portend of danger and of difficulty to being a kind of way of engaging in wonder and in hope?

But somewhere along the line it began to shift. And I was thinking about how it happened and I came upon one of the pivot points at which this happens. It happened in 1919 when a young obscure physicist named Albert Einstein wanted to prove his theory of relativity. The world had just been at war and he somehow was able to reach out across the broken communication to two British astronomers. And he asked them to position themselves in South America and Africa to observe a coming eclipse in 1919. And Einstein believed that Newton's theory of gravity was totally linear and totally bilateral. That actually the way the world worked, the way that existence worked, the way that time and space worked was in a relationship of relativity. And that included even light, so that when light would pass by a large object, it would bend.

And so they went and they stationed themselves and they took pictures of the eclipse. And they noticed that the stars appeared in different places than they normally would at night because they had worked their way around the sun. And on your bulletin, there is a picture of the original photograph that was published in a journal, and it has this message of how a moment of revelation of an eclipse could change everything. A new theory of relativity. And it happened in this great moment of reconciliation when two nations who had been at war generated two scientists who came together, and they did something that helped us understand ourselves better.

And that was initially my way of thinking about today's gospel because the resurrection is a revelation of a new kind of relativity. The resurrection is something about the way existence is working in our midst that we often don't notice, and that is hidden in plain sight. The resurrection is as real as everything that is represented in the theory of relativity. And yet unlike science or knowledge, what holds everything together through the resurrection is love. And that is what I think Jesus is trying to teach us when He says to the disciples that he had opened

their minds to the scriptures so that they could read the scriptures and see that the Messiah was to die and be raised. That rhythm and that lens and that relativity, that relationship of resurrection changed how they knew themselves, how they understood their identity. It changed the very nature of existence.

And I had in mind a poet named Rebecca Elson, who writes this beautiful poem about starlight that ends with the following lines:

“Bring us all so close we ignite
The bright spark of resurrection.”

But of course, things never go quite as we plan. And on Tuesday I was called in to see my mother who was dying. And after only a little bit of struggle, she died peacefully and beautifully at 10:05 on Tuesday morning. And I questioned whether or not I should maybe take this weekend off. But I realized that this message of resurrection is for me, it's something I have to embrace. And my mother raised me to be resilient. My mother got up off the floor many times in her life and began again. I am her son and I will honor that.

I also want to be before you because I have a deep belief in the resurrection that is changed even from being with her through death. Because the resurrection isn't just a revelation of existence, it's the practice and hope and power that we receive when we see through death into life. And I know that though my mother has died, she lives. She lives because He lives. And He lives fully and she lives in Him. And I know this because He lives in me and He lives in you. And that is as much the new theory of relativity that Jesus reveals in the resurrection.

And I might get a little weepy and I might get triggered, and I might go through all the stages of grief. And one of the things you have to live up to as a priest is that you get to be a Christian in public. But I believe you can handle it, and I believe we can handle it together. And this is what God has called me to do, to be that Christian in public and to grieve in public so that when we grieve together, we grieve fully. So she lives because He lives. And because she lives in Him, He lives in me. This is my hope. This is my belief. This is something I'm willing to stake my life on.

And it has changed my way of being in the world. I no longer want to be known as a preacher of the cross. I want to be known as a preacher of resurrection, of declaring to this world that though there is death, death is defeated by Christ and there is life. And though there is hate and estrangement, the love of Christ embraces all. And though there is difficulty and disease, Christ has brought these things to end. And He will reign forever and He will wipe away each of the tears from our eyes as we will be with God forever, because that is what the resurrection entails, and that is what God ordained, and that is what God has done.

Now, I want to pick one piece of that incredible, beautiful, peaceful experience that my mother gave to me as she died and to see that as a way of maybe moving a little bit further into today's gospel. In today's gospel, there is this incredible opening moment where Jesus comes in and says, "Shalom, peace be with you," which is the normal greeting, but when someone comes to you who has been dead, maybe you need to say it a little more emphatically. They were all freaked out. And they thought He was a ghost, as any of us would do because this is scary stuff. It's unexpected. It's not part of our framework. And so there is this kind of bizarre, beautiful moment of play in which Jesus asks for a piece of fish and eats it in front of them and proves that He is fully human and fully God still.

As my mother died, I was surrounded by all of her caregivers. And it was an incredible revelation to me that they had been so impacted by her life, that they had so fallen in love with this woman who I love so much. And they were in pieces, they were all weeping. And what I didn't know at the time is that none of them had actually seen someone die. That's something that I've known fairly well, they had not seen before. And they didn't tell me that until they had actually beautifully dressed her body and put makeup on her before she went to the morgue, because they wanted her to be beautiful as she was.

And after the morgue left with her, I looked and I saw these matryoshkas, these huge nesting dolls that my father bought from trips that he made to Russia. He was one of the first commercial pilots to be flying in and out of Moscow after glasnost. And he would go down to the Red Square and buy these enormous nesting dolls that were on sale and bring them back, as many as he could fit in his bag each time.

And I looked at the caregivers. And I said, you know, I want to give you something of my mother's that she treasured. I want you all to pick one each. They each picked a matryoshka and they were so happy to have them. And they were so moved, how beautiful they were, and all of them of different themes, some religious, some cultural. And then they were astounded. I said to them, you know, they open up. And they said, you're kidding. I said, no, no, you just have to pull on them. And they began to pull on each one and it got smaller and smaller and smaller from this size to just the size of a grain of rice. And each of them began to just set them up beautifully, like children. And one of them who had been weeping the most was dancing every time she got even one smaller, she just couldn't get over it. She was just so amazed.

And I suddenly got that play that happened in today's gospel, that moment in which Jesus eats a piece of fish. It was a moment of play. It was a moment of reconciliation, but also recreation. To recreate means more than going up north and getting on a boat. When you recreate, you play, you become yourself. You become recreated by this time away. And that all goes with resurrection. One of the images that has been sticking in my mind for the past year is the end of The

Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe when Aslan is raised from the dead. And before he goes to battle the white witch and claim his kingdom back, he gathers the children around him and he says, children, we must play. And this great lion becomes like a kitten and they romp together and they fall together in a pile, giggling and laughing. This is the laughter and play of recreation and that is part of resurrection. And that is part of what it means to be followers of Christ through His resurrection.

There's also something else in that image of the matryoshka. Every time they pulled apart the outside, they got to something smaller on the inside. And this is also evident in today's gospel. The more that we go through resurrection, the more the layers are stripped away, the more all of who we are is redeemed. All of us go through this process of resurrection. And resurrection includes not just the outside of us, but the inside of us, every layer of ourselves. And this goes with the grain of what is happening in resurrection because as the ancient witnesses testify, Christ's resurrection represents the completion of His incarnation in Bethlehem. Just as Christ assumes all of what it means to be human, so all of what it means to be human is transformed. Christ has come to redeem everything that you have experienced and that I have experienced and that my mother has experienced. And the work of resurrection is to redeem the whole, all of us.

So all of this we have. A revelation of new relativity, a recreation of our life together, a redemption of all that it is to be human. That is what it means to be people of the resurrection. And it also means in the midst of death, something more. And it is my hope and my belief and my witness. I want us to be a church where none of us is afraid to share our joys and our sorrows, in which none of us are ashamed of our joys and our sorrow because it is in being a community of resurrection that we truly offer something powerful to the world around us. So let that be so. Let that be our prayer. Let that be our practice. Let that be the power we share and our witness.

Amen.