



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.

We are living through a catastrophe, a national catastrophe. Rather than an earthquake or war, the catastrophe we are living through is moral and spiritual. Over the past two decades, the heated rhetoric so many weaponize on social media, has increasingly bled into physical acts of intimidation, violence, and murder. This past week, events reached a tipping point with the murder of Charlie Kirk, a prominent conservative social influencer. I have received numerous calls and emails from parishioners who have been deeply affected by Mr. Kirk's death, and I have seen on social media the millions of young people who he inspired and who now feel as if they have lost a member of their family, an older brother of sorts, who encouraged them to speak their minds and to speak their truth.

I have been affected as well. I am filled with grief for his young family and for our nation. And so before I say anything further, I want to make clear where I stand on Mr. Kirk as a child of God. And I speak as a priest to those who are grieving. Mr. Kirk is now resting safe and secure in God's loving arms. He is wrapped in God's perfect love, joy, and peace, and I pray that God will share that love, joy, and peace with his grieving widow, with his children, with his family, with his friends, and with his followers.

We are living through a chapter in our national history in which there is a politics of contempt. In this politics of contempt, a destructive dynamic is stoked on social media and highly orchestrated events, which portray our own side as aggrieved and innocent and our political opponents as evil, guilty, and worthy of scapegoating and destruction. This politics of contempt has inspired violence because when you have made your enemy into a monster less than human, murdering them becomes imaginable.

This politics of contempt thrives on either edge of the political spectrum. It is not a "you" problem. It's not a "me" problem. It's a "we" problem. It infects our reality and rhetoric at every level of discourse, whether online, in print or in person. There is no place in the Christian faith for a politics of contempt. Today I invite you to join me in resisting it. Today, I invite you to join me in creating and maintaining a politics of redemption. This politics of redemption does not shy away from conflict, and it is dedicated to open dialogue across difference. But

instead of retreating into echo chambers of like minds and voices, the politics of redemption seeks to speak the truth and love, and is built on the foundation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today, the best way for me to begin building this politics of redemption is to speak freely about where Mr. Kirk and I disagree. Engaging in this free speech is necessary because open dialogue is necessary in any politics of redemption. It is also a way for me to recognize that Mr. Kirk died while defending the freedom of speech as a Christian duty and a constitutional right. As a practicing Christian, Mr. Kirk advocated for positions I find hard to square with my own understanding of the Christian faith. Mr. Kirk was a Christian nationalist. He believed Christians should control the nation by exerting power over seven areas of influence: government, media, education, business, arts and entertainment, church and the family. He was hostile to the LGBTQ community and he opposed marriage equality and transgender rights by exercising highly effective boycotts against companies and municipalities that supported policies of inclusion.

He believed that in heterosexual marriage, men should exercise headship over women and their children, and that women were called to submit to their husbands as helper and nurturers. He defended the Second Amendment of the Constitution as an inherent right and strongly opposed any gun control measures because these kept law-abiding people from defending themselves and preventing what he called tyrannical government.

I am also a practicing Christian. I am not a Christian nationalist. I believe that the scriptures are clear, that the nations are not judged by the religion they espouse, but by the justice and peace they preserve and the values they maintain. On this, the scriptures are clear. Surely the nations are like a drop in the bucket. They're considered but dust in the scales. So we read in the book of Isaiah chapter 40, "A good nation is not defined in terms of the God they name but on whether or not that nation follows guiding values that reflect God's character. You, O Lord, are kind and forgiving, rich in loving devotion to all who call upon you." So we read in Psalm 86, "All the nations you have made will come and bow before you, O Lord. They will glorify your name, for you are great and perform wonders. For you alone are God."

Nations, in other words, are not ends in themselves, but means to an end. And that end is the Kingdom of God. This is a consistent belief in the Christian tradition. Therefore, I believe the main tenet of Christian nationalism is false. Efforts to create pride of place for the Christian faith and to marshal Christian beliefs to preserve the nation at the expense of maintaining God's justice goes against the grain of the scriptures. Unlike Mr. Kirk, I believe it is right to welcome the LGBTQ community in our church. My inclusion does not reflect any loss of

faith or confidence in traditional Christian teaching. Rather, it represents my understanding of the implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Here again, I will appeal to the scriptures, although there are passages where Mr. Kirk and others cite as authoritative, I believe that the main message of the gospel is one of inclusion. In Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. So we read in Paul's letter to the Galatians, "For all of you who are baptized in Christ, have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ. If you belong in Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to his promise." In this passage, Paul makes it clear that the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone. Moreover, throughout the history of Christian thought, there is the clear and consistent teaching that the scriptures must be read through the merciful lens of Jesus, the Son of God.

Finally, the history of the Christian Church has repeatedly shown that the church goes astray when we try to draw lines and limits around God's infinite love and grace. I also disagree with Mr. Kirk's views on heterosexual marriage. Mr. Kirk would likely have appealed to passages in the scriptures like Ephesians 5:22 in which Paul writes, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." In response, I would invite him to read the verse that comes immediately before the passage, which states, "Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ Jesus." On my reading, the takeaway of this passage is not that there is a social ideal contained in the gender hierarchy Paul names but that the paradigm for all marriage is the mutual love and submission to one another in Christ.

Finally, I disagree with Mr. Kirk when it comes to the Second Amendment. I do not believe the right to bear arms is an inherent right on par with the right to free speech and free expression. I also do not believe that the more than 500 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States offers any protection against tyranny. On the contrary, I believe the widespread accessibility of guns is a contributing factor in the more than 286 mass shootings that have taken place in our country so far in 2025. I believe that responsible gun ownership should be licensed and monitored carefully by the proper authorities. At the very minimum, the same safety standards for owning and operating a motor vehicle should be applied to owning and operating a firearm.

I have briefly and frankly, listed points at which Mr. Kirk and I disagree. There are other points of disagreement, which while I'll set aside for now. If Mr. Kirk were alive today, I would welcome the opportunity to read the scriptures together and to debate these topics as fellow Christians. Sadly and tragically, he is not. I also believe that Mr. Kirk would've welcomed this debate. By all accounts, Mr. Kirk sought out those who disagreed with him. He believed in open debate and

engagement across difference. His commitment to free speech was grounded in his Christian faith, and rightly so. Liberty of conscience and the right to free speech is an outgrowth of the inalienable rights we believe that we have been endowed with by God, so the Declaration of Independence states. There is, in other words, a clear connection between the Christian tradition and the right to free speech.

Nonetheless, if we had talked, I would question the rhetoric he employed, which created a climate of intimidation and endangered those living lives he had difficulty reconciling with his faith. I would also have invited him to wonder if the logic of his arguments was bent towards maximizing clicks and viewers rather than consistently following the implications of his starting premises. I would encourage him to follow St. Paul's commitment in the letter to the Ephesians to speak the truth in love. But I would protect his right to speak freely. In a just society, the right to free speech protects our liberty of conscience as the voice of God within us. And this includes saying what many consider awful and offensive things. The only limits on free speech should be the uttering of specific threats or the obvious acts of endangering others, like shouting fire in a crowded movie theater, as a famous Supreme Court Justice put it.

And so it is that I have issues with Mr. Kirk's understanding and representation of the Christian faith, but I do not question the sincerity of his Christian beliefs. So far, I have only spoken of his guiding principles, but by all accounts, he put his faith into practice as best he knew how. Mr. Kirk did nothing to deserve his murder and assassination, and what happened to him is tragic. The grief his family and friends have experienced is profound, and they have been in my prayers. His death has also filled me with grief over the bloody and broken politics we now practice in this nation. His death is truly a catastrophe, a sudden turn for the worse that brings ruin. The Greek roots of the word catastrophe make this clear: *kata* meaning down, and *strophe* meaning turning. However, in every catastrophe there is an opportunity to pause, to reflect, and to reset. I pray this may be so for our sake and for the sake of our children.

Today, let me offer two further platforms on which we need to build the politics of redemption. In addition to speaking the truth and love, a politics of redemption is built upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian tradition believes that through the resurrection of Jesus, God has defeated forever the power of sin, death, and the grave. Jesus now reigns in Heaven at God's right hand and nothing opposes Him. This means that Christians do not believe in a universe in which there is a cosmic battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Evil has already been defeated. The power of the Devil has been broken. We say with Paul in 1 Corinthians, death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

God, therefore, has defeated evil and sin and death, and violence. As bitter, divisive, and tragic as our current conflicts may seem, these conflicts do not recreate on a human level larger cosmic conflicts on a spiritual level. Human conflicts are just that, human. And if they are human, the resurrection being real, this means that our enemies remain our neighbors and future friends. God in Christ will reconcile all of us, whether we like it or not, in due time. We cannot treat those who oppose us as less than human, as worthy of contempt because they are God's beloved, as we are.

The second platform is found in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, because this speaks perfectly to the politics of redemption we are called to practice. Here we meet Jesus, who is practicing table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors, people who are deemed impure and beyond saving. The Pharisees and scribes complain. In response, Jesus shares two parables about a lost sheep and a lost coin. In both parables the righteousness of God is likened to universal redemption. The joy of Heaven, Jesus says, is incomplete if anyone is missing. Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners because they too have been called into right relationship with God.

Jesus is always drawing the circle wider and seeking to include everyone. We can practice that politics of redemption by remembering that each of us has been sought out by Christ, who like a good shepherd and wise woman has come searching for us. As I prayed about what to say today, my imagination kept traveling to the last published work of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* It was published in 1967. King wrote this book while he was in seclusion on the island of Jamaica. The movement he had led seemed imperiled by increasing violence and hateful rhetoric, and the unity he had worked hard to cement to create a broad coalition was cracking. King remembered remarks he made at a conference in Atlanta, Georgia that year, and he used a transcript from his address as the book's guiding thesis, and this is part of what he wrote.

"I have decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love, for I have seen too much hate. Hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it because St. John was right. God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality."

Today then I invite you to practice this politics of redemption. Practice your Christian faith by picking up the shattered pottery of our country and gluing the shards together with love and compassion. Join me in praying for God's comfort for all who are grieving and traumatized by the past week. Join me in deescalating the rhetoric of cosmic conflict that so many are speaking today. Join me in defending the rights and freedoms that make for a just society. Join me in staying in relationship with our friends who are grieving deeply right now, particularly those friends that disagree with us.

Join me in drawing the circle of this church wide by seeking out all who are lost, last, and least. Join me in speaking the truth in love. Join me in modeling in our small way in this church, a better way to live together. Join me in inviting all who have ears to listen to the voice of Jesus, our Good Shepherd and Prince of Peace who tells us to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Amen.