



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.

One of the great blessings of having this beautiful project behind me going on is that it brings us into contact with the workers who are doing the work. And one of those workers is Ken Katz, who is one of the great people in this area in art and preservation. He's really magnificent. And he is nearing retirement. And so as the Buildings and Grounds Committee was thinking about the scaffolding we needed to put up, we wanted to make sure it was really secure because we didn't want this to be Ken's last job. And so we put up this beautiful, massive scaffolding and we're taking care of some other things that we should have been taking care of, and it's been quite wonderful.

But we also made the discovery that Ken has a group of very young artisans who are following after him. He has people in their twenties and thirties and early forties learning the trade so that they can pass on that incredible gift that they bring in restoration. And the first time I went up there, I encountered some of them and we became friendly and then they began to take their breaks in the reception area. They saw that we had cookies and candy. And John Buhl was manning the desk. And so they would come down and visit.

And then of course when you hear the conversation, the clergy wander out. And Pastor Manisha wandered into the reception area and two of the young people working for Ken are two women. And they may have come back from a Catholic background. They had never seen, it seemed, a woman who was a pastor and priest. And so they immediately just glommed on to Pastor Manisha. And then they said to her, we want to show you our work. And she said, no.

And I happened to hear the commotion and I went out into the reception area. And I just assumed that Pastor Manisha was saying no because she just didn't want to go. Because I tend to view women through the lens of my own wife, Claire, and Claire is one of the most physically adept athletes I've ever met. She's kind of the Sporty Spice version of women. And I tend to imagine that all women can throw perfect spiral passes, for example, just because Claire can.

And so I thought that pastor was just trying to be formal and so I said, no, you've got to – come on, Pastor. Let's do this. Let's all do this. And so she relented and

she started climbing the scaffolding. And I got up ahead of her and I was very excited. And the women were shadowing her and I suddenly realized this was terrifying for Pastor. And I could see her going and the women came alongside and one said, it's okay, mama. It's okay. We can do this. And they got all the way up and showed her everything. And Pastor, to her credit, made it all the way up to the top to see the work they were doing. And I'm just going to pause there and invite you to congratulate her on that one thing.

And we came down the stairs and into the reception area and I was trying to get out of the hole I was in and I said, you know, you were so brave. You were so brave. She said, what do you mean? It's because you were taking on so much more. For people who are able to climb things easily, it's not very brave to climb scaffolding. But you did that in part because you bonded with those women. And one of the women said to Pastor something that was incredibly beautiful. She said, it is such a privilege to work in a church, in a place that is alive. They spend so much of their work in large scale museums or in other public spaces in which they don't feel that heartbeat of whatever makes us living. It's so wonderful to be in a place that is alive.

And over the past few days, I've been thinking a great deal about that sense that we are alive in this church. It's not just because we are growing as a church. It's not because of numbers. It's because we are a church in which everyone is welcomed and everyone is beloved, and everyone is transformed. That threefold activity that we do, welcoming, loving, and inviting people to be transformed, those things are kind of like a heartbeat, a systole and diastole that makes this place living. What makes us alive is that we proclaim the Christian faith in word and deed. What makes us alive is that we are people who follow Jesus and we try to become disciples. What makes us alive is that in a world in which there is so much brokenness and so much violence, and so much opposition, and so much dissociation, and so much idleness, we have come together to somehow be a witness to the world around us in a powerful way.

I thought about this living being called Christ Church Cranbrook this past week. None of us could go through this week without being deeply affected and troubled by the environment we're living in these days. None of us cannot be affected by what's going on in Minneapolis. None of us cannot be affected by what's happening to us in Davos. None of us can be unaffected by the incredible ways in which we are living through things that no one should have to live through. And if you're not somehow offended and upset by what has been happening this past week, you haven't been listening or watching. And yet the church somehow is alive because it follows the gospel. And by living through the gospel, we provide a way for the world to see a life together in Christ that is a witness to God.

I was appreciative of Prime Minister Carney in his speech at Davos, in which he quoted Václav Havel. But I found myself thinking about a 1990 speech that Václav Havel gave when he was becoming the president of the Czech Republic. This is what he said when he was talking about the transition that he represented: "We live in a contaminated moral environment. We fell morally ill because we became used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore one another, to care only about ourselves. Concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility, or forgiveness, lost their depth and dimension, and for many of us, they represented only psychological peculiarities or they resembled gone astray greetings from ancient times.

What makes this church alive is that we consider these things – these things like love, friendship, compassion, humility, and forgiveness, we consider these things not some kind of gone astray greeting from ancient times, but the life we live together. And what we do as Christians is we create a kind of place where we are formed by our relationship, based upon the gospel and by living that out, we shine a light in this world, we show what the truth of things are. So yes, Luna, the artisan was right. This is a building that is alive. Thanks be to God.

And now all of this is a way to get into our reading today from the gospel of Matthew. Matthew is celebrating and remembering the start of Jesus's ministry. Jesus quotes Isaiah, which we also read today. In that passage from Isaiah, Isaiah speaks of a physical return to the Promised Land from exile, and when Jesus quotes Isaiah, He is also saying not just that there would be a physical return to the Promised Land, but that there was a kind of existential journey that all of us are on as human beings. We all have the opportunity to return from exile and move home based upon our transformation in Christ by listening to His words, "Repent for the kingdom of God has come near."

And Jesus goes to the disciples where they are. He finds them as fishermen doing the work that keeps the food on the table, and He tells them and invites them to make a decision because Jesus has already made a decision for them. He says to them, "Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of people." Jesus bases that call on his prior decision to work with those people to create this Kingdom of Heaven as His disciples. And that is astonishing. It's magnificent. It is the gospel. The gospel comes to us with a Christ who loves us and invites us into transformation, A God who loves us and comes to us where we are, and invites us to make a choice to follow Him.

That is the gospel in a nutshell. That is what makes the church. That's what makes this building a living being. It doesn't matter the physical journey you go on, it doesn't matter that Jesus went to where they were or, if like Pastor Manisha, you climb a scaffolding to tell workers that the work they're doing is holy. What matters is in that relational exchange, God in Christ comes to us and announces

the good news of the Kingdom of God, and invites us to follow Him and to be transformed by Him. That is what makes this building alive.

In every generation we have the decision to make of whether or not we will craft our lives around discipleship to Jesus. As much as we have inherited an incredible church that has been going on year after year since 1928, each year is an opportunity for us to make a decision to follow Jesus, to remember Jesus's love for us, Jesus's invitation for us, the fact that Jesus loves us and to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God and to be transformed. And Christ Church Cranbrook isn't just a physical building. What makes it alive is that in every generation there have been people who have stepped forward to lead and to be disciples.

The art I have before you today on the front of your bulletin, is from a wonderful artist named Frank. The title of it is called "Seven Generations." What Frank is referring to is a Native American saying that the best decisions are those that are made with seven generations in mind. Not just the short term but the long term, not just the immediate but the enduring. But as he does so beautifully, you see through every little portal, there is a chance to renew that thinking and to move things forward another seven generations.

Søren Kierkegaard said that no matter how much one generation can learn from another, in this, every generation begins afresh. In this every generation is at the beginning, and this is the human factor of all things. It is passion. And by that he means discipleship. By that, he means responding to the call of Christ. By that, he means what keeps this building alive.

On this day in which we celebrate the next moment in leadership in this church, the next generation that comes to be, the work you and I are called to do, we have an opportunity today to reaffirm our discipleship to Jesus. And my question will be what will be your answer?

Amen.