



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ has risen. Hallelujah! So thankful to be here with all of you.

I love my phone's camera, especially the filters you can use to edit imperfections. You can refine, or in some cases, remove any blemish, line, or inadequate lighting in the picture. I have more than on an occasion used this technology to make the captured moment look perfect. Or what about people worldwide who spend vast sums of money on cosmetic procedures to make themselves look perfect? Trying to erase the lines of life's experiences, to cover up and become some idealized version of themselves. Those external flaws can be covered up. However, what about those internal scars? The wounds of traumas great and small that we carry around with us, hoping to keep them hidden. We often think that exposing our wounds, our flaws, our mistakes, our vulnerabilities, well, makes us ugly. We doubt ourselves because we think our wounds are shameful.

But what if it were opposite? What if, like Jesus, our wounds made us beautiful and whole? Unfortunately, many of us do just the opposite, never revealing what is truly ailing us. The fear of judgment from others keeps us in a prison of disbelief and fear. Many will grasp at external fixes to cover up those wounds. Carrying that burden can be too much to bear, so we trudge through life trying to maintain the facade that all is well when inside we are broken.

Well, let me tell you some good news. Jesus shows us a way out of that futile existence to a life of real connection, not only with God, but with our wounded selves that is accessed through connecting with the wounds of Christ. I remember when I experienced the power of how God heals someone at their lowest point in life. I remember when I put my doubts aside and trusted what someone was telling me. This was the start of a new life of deeper faith, turning me in a new direction to share how faith in the Holy Spirit's power can transform one's life.

This brings me back to a time not too long ago when my own awakening happened, back to the summer of 2017. I was early in my journey of recovery from drugs and alcohol, and I entered the AA program. And part of that program is founded in being of service to others. To find self by serving others is their message that they keep repeating over and over again at many of the meetings. And, boy, did I need something to help me. I was looking and searching for answers about the doubts I had of ever finding freedom from those very

substances that I used to cover up all the things and traumas that had weighed me down throughout my life.

So at one of those meetings, I had overheard a new acquaintance I had made, and they indicated they needed volunteers at the Ronald McDonald House. If you are not familiar with the Ronald McDonald House, they provide lodging and support for families of sick and hospitalized children. So I approached him and I offered to help. Only knowing me for a short time, he asked if I had any special skills. Well, I told him I do hair and I can be friendly from time to time, but wasn't sure of how that would be of any help to anybody in a hospital. He looked at me, he said, well, I'll get back to you. So we exchanged numbers and I really thought nothing was going to come of it until later that night. I had an idea that maybe I could set up a pop-up hair salon and offer hair services to the families of the sick children.

So I presented my idea to my new friend and he presented it to the lead of the volunteers at the Ronald McDonald House. And they actually thought that this was a great idea since most of the families are far from home for long periods of time, dealing without any contact and dealing with all of the grief and suffering that comes with their sick children. And it was going to have some contact, some normalcy brought back into their lives. So maybe offering those hairstyles could help give them a boost to comfort them. And what I didn't know was that I was the one who was going to receive such a beautiful boost.

So with the encouragement of my new friend from AA, I moved forward and believed that something good would come of this. I set up my pop-up salon in a corner of the waiting room, and that's what I did. I waited and waited and waited, and I remember feeling very discouraged since no one had booked a slot to get their hair done. So I sat there for nearly three hours on a beautiful summer day. And right when I was ready to pack up and call it a day, the lady at the front desk told me one of the fathers of a little girl named Lindsay, who was suffering from cancer, he needed a haircut, he needed a break. So that's what he got.

When I met Dave, he told me he just wanted to feel normal since they had been away from home for nearly three months. Dealing with his daughter Lindsay's cancer treatment was so much to bear for him and his family. And as I was giving him his cut, we realized that we actually knew each other from when we were eight years old. We went to the same elementary school in New Baltimore. And I remember thinking, wow. And then I found out that wasn't the only thing in common. He was struggling with drug and alcohol addiction and was indeed in need of a meeting.

So that's what we did in that waiting room. We had an AA meeting. They say where two or more gathered, God is present. And what he did was he started sharing about the woundedness he felt, his vulnerability when he found out about

his daughter's diagnosis. The pain of watching her suffer was almost too much to bear. It literally broke him. He was so unfiltered about that weakness, but that he felt strength that he gained from admitting that weakness when he turned to God. And he showed me how sharing that vulnerability could open someone up to a new source of strength, that being Christ. I truly could not only see, but feel the power behind his trembling voice. And as he was sharing, I realized the problems that I was worrying about in my own life paled in comparison to what this man and his family was dealing with. I realized how precious life was and how if he could stay sober through all of that, then maybe I could as well.

After finishing his haircut, I shared with him that I knew of a wonderful AA meeting that was literally just down the street from the hospital. He was so overjoyed and relieved to find that out that over the next month, Dave and I would meet at that AA meeting. And he would share finally, ultimately, that his daughter, Lindsay, was on the road to recovery. And it looked like all of that pain and suffering was finally going to be relieved and she was going to be in remission and they would be able to go home. And an extra bonus was that Lindsay wanted to meet the man who gave her dad that much needed makeover. But I was so excited to tell her how meeting her dad gave me a much needed spiritual makeover. And that is just wonderful.

Looking back, I am grateful for that chance encounter at the AA meeting. It led me to the Ronald McDonald House where I discovered not only a way to give back, but also a deeper understanding of resilience. It reminded me that even in our darkest moments, there is hope and light to be found. Often in the connections we make with others, through sharing our vulnerability, we can break open and find a new source of strength. That being God's strength.

I hold onto those lessons I learned from Lindsay and her family, and I strive to be a beacon of support for those who need it. I am committed to being a source of encouragement and love just as they were for me. Life may bring challenges, but with faith, vulnerability, and community, we can navigate even the toughest of times, carrying the message of hope through revealing our woundedness with others.

This is what John writes in today's gospel. He shares what happened when Jesus invited the Apostle Thomas to not only see His wounds, but to touch His wounds, which are still present even after the resurrection. Think about that, how God did not cover up or filter out Jesus's wounds, but He kept those wounds for all to see after the resurrection, to show who he truly was. The scars were in plain sight for all to see who witnessed His return. They saw with their own eyes and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But on the other hand, the disciple Thomas, when told the glorious news that Jesus, their Lord, had returned, did not believe what he was hearing. He wanted

proof, to see with his own eyes. Not Jesus in the flesh, but His wounds as proof that it was truly Him. So when Thomas encountered Jesus, Jesus invited him in to touch those very wounds, giving him a revelation that it was not only Jesus but his Lord and God, and he immediately shouted with joy, my Lord, my God. Jesus quickly answered him by proclaiming, blessed are those who do not see and yet have believed. He was setting the stage for Thomas to evangelize with fearless enthusiasm so that those who could not see Jesus in the flesh could feel His presence.

This gave Thomas an affirming testimony about what he had witnessed on that miraculous day. This confirmation of faith was so profound and powerful for Thomas, combined with his bold nature. This awakened something new and different. His doubts were now transformed into a faith, well, I think a faith on steroids. And wow, the Apostle Thomas, he did just that. He shared the love of Christ with all he encountered. As he traveled east through Syria and landed somewhere, as records indicate, on the subcontinent of India, spreading the gospel to those in that region, those people still practice Christianity today, and they are known as the St. Thomas Christians or the Nasrani Christians.

Just think, the very disciple who had doubts about the resurrection carried the gospel of Jesus to start a church that still exists today. And even though he was martyred for his belief, his bold message of eternal life through Christ is celebrated over 2000 years later. Jesus revealing His wounds of suffering caused Thomas to turn in another direction, a new direction. He experienced, well, what I call a spiritual awakening, which is born out of sharing our suffering with one another and asking God to heal us, to have our trust in each other and ultimately in Him.

That is what Jesus did for Thomas and what Thomas did for those he evangelized to in Syria and India. He shared his experience of touching the wounds of Christ, exposing his doubts, and asking Jesus to show him a new way to life. To show us a new way, a way out of suffering, by revealing His own. Sometimes what others need to see are your wounds to share how faith and God's power can transform one's life. And we don't have to look very far for a shining example of this very thing.

Yesterday, people from all over the world attended the funeral of Pope Francis, honoring his life and legacy. His willingness to show his fragility showed the world an unfiltered vulnerability that gave those who were suffering a safe space to be touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. His own fragility was on full display, unfiltered. Pope Francis had distinguished himself from many of his predecessors through his willingness to publicly display that fragility and vulnerability, and this characteristic manifested in several ways.

Unlike his predecessors, who often maintained an image of unwavering strength, Pope Francis had not shied away from showing his physical limitations. He had been seen being pushed in a wheelchair right up until his death, meeting with others. Even when his physical body was weak, his spirit shined strong. His openness about his health challenges, even when it involved visible signs of weakness, sent a powerful message about the acceptance of human frailty. He broke down barriers by showing his vulnerability. He broke down the traditional image of the papacy as an institution of distance and being unapproachable. This fostered a sense of connection with the public, with the people. By displaying his own vulnerability, he sent a strong message for those who are aged or infirm are still valued members of society and should not be marginalized, but celebrated.

In essence, Pope Francis's public displays of vulnerability are a deliberate departure from the more traditional image of the papacy. This approach is seen as a way to humanize the papacy and his ministry, promote a message of compassion and acceptance. Connection through being vulnerable with people, that's what I think unfiltered vulnerability looks like. Pope Francis's life serves as a testament to the power of humility, reaching out, being unfiltered and vulnerable, sharing the light of Christ with those who have not met him in the flesh, but felt his presence through their shared experiences.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” is directly aimed at us. It emphasizes that true faith doesn't require physical evidence, but is based on trust in the testimony of others and the work and power of the Holy Spirit. This is a crucial encouragement for those who have not personally witnessed the resurrected Christ. I feel that is what Christ calls us to do as Christians: to be living examples of Christ's redemptive and transformative power. When the Holy Spirit touches one through connecting with Christ, I believe it is our responsibility to share that with others who may have their own doubts, meet them where they're at with the spirit of love and understanding, whether in a children's hospital's waiting room or maybe even right here at church.

What a blessing that is to be able to share this with others. And I can genuinely say I now relate to what Thomas experienced when his doubts were transformed into an exuberant faith, full of hope and enthusiasm. I pray to God for the strength each and every day to give me the ability to live out and share that strength with others who are seeking a new way. Just like when Thomas touched Christ, our wounds of doubt can be healed when we become vulnerable and admit we doubt or are even in need. I can now know what it is like to be fully authentic to others, but most importantly to be loved by Christ, His perfect love, to live unfiltered and fully present in each and every moment.

The beauty of faith is that it invites us to be authentic and genuine, to shed the need of perfection and to embrace our true selves. Just as Jesus retained His wounds after the resurrection, we too can wear our scars of life proudly, knowing

that they are a testament to our journey in a world that often demands perfection. We are called to be a countercultural force, one that celebrates imperfection and encourages others to do the same. When we share our burdens and our stories, we create a space for God to heal, not just ourselves, but all those around us. Each time we reach out with love and understanding, we extend the grace that Christ has shown us.

Just like Dave shared his unwavering faith, which created a space for my own spiritual makeover, leading to a profound and deep connection to God, this is the essence of building a community, coming together in our imperfections and supporting one another and pointing each other back to that perfect love of Christ. We all have a role to play in this beautiful tapestry of faith where every thread, every story, every scar contributes to the larger picture of God's love and mercy.

Let us be mindful of the power of our testimonies, our unfiltered vulnerability. Put away those camera lenses and filters and just let the world see you for who you really are, as God sees you. Just like Dave Thomas and Pope Francis did. Without it, I believe there is no real love and no real faith. And so as we continue on this journey of faith, let us embrace our doubts, share our struggles, and celebrate the victories, no matter how small. Let's be the kind of people who invite others to encounter Christ through our authenticity and vulnerability.

In closing, I encourage you to reflect on your own journey. What doubts are you carrying? What scars tell your story? How can you use your experiences to share the love of Christ with others? Remember, you are not alone. We are all in this together, united by the grace of God, called to be his vessels of His unfiltered love in a world that desperately needs it.

In Jesus's name, amen.