



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

In the name of the loving, liberating, life-giving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

So the candidates for the presiding bishop of the National Episcopal Church, they were announced this past week. And for the first time, all of the nominees are members of Generation X. We have some Gen Xers in the room? Amen? For those of you who don't know Gen X, we're not the biggest generation. We're probably most easily described as the children of the baby boomers' first marriage. And did I mention we were a little cynical sometimes? Our parents were card-carrying members of the "me" generation. We became known as latchkey kids. We learned to be self-reliant. Never had much faith in government or leaders. Our college degrees didn't get us more than a "muck job," as we called them. We were told social security would go bankrupt before we ever had a chance to retire. None of which surprised us in the least.

So yeah, my generation, we developed a certain reputation for cynicism. But I'm starting to wonder if it gets worse with age. Because every once in a while when I'm at home, I make what I think is a very insightful, interesting comment. Maybe slightly acerbic? Maybe? And my husband Joe will say something like, Chris, what has happened to you? You used to be so optimistic, so happy-go-lucky. I don't know, maybe he's right. I do think life has a way of changing us. Over time it adds up.

Can you remember a time when you were more optimistic? When you were filled with nothing but hope and possibility? When you were open-minded and confident? When you were trusting in strangers? Saw the best in people? Lived like there were no tomorrows? And then life happens. Things don't go our way. Our plans don't work out. We lose our job. We don't make the team. We get some bad news and bit by bit we become a little more pessimistic. People hurt us. We're lied to, betrayed, let down by those we thought we could count on. And over time we become guarded. Learn to hide our feelings. We become suspicious of others and slow to trust.

If you're a parent, perhaps you've seen this arc play out with your children, right? They start off so innocent, so trusting, so carefree, living totally in the moment, able to find joy seemingly in just about anything. But then life happens. They develop self-awareness. Their ego starts to form. They become aware of what they have and what they don't have. All of a sudden, the world that seemed so

abundant starts to feel a little scarce. They learn to compete for our attention. They start to grab before they ask. They become master manipulators. They learn exactly what buttons to press to get what they want. Of course, I'm not talking about my own children here. Not at all. Read that on the internet.

But of course, none of this should come as a surprise, right? It's the opening story of the Bible, is it not? Right there in Genesis, we see how the first humans lived, lived in such harmony, a state of perfect trust, perfect openness and love. They'd wake up every morning in that garden, excited about the day, confident in God's love, secure with one another. Hopeful, thankful, generous. And then life happened. They get deceived. They put their trust in a snake instead of God. They become ashamed and embarrassed. They learn to be guilty. They become aware of their nakedness and their vulnerability. They become fearful.

And so they start to cover up. They start to hide. They start to hide from one another and they start to hide from God. Later that evening when God comes to visit, God asks, where are you? Where are you? God doesn't ask because He can't find them. He knows they're hiding. He asks because He wants them to know that despite everything that happened, He still longs to be with them. He still longs to walk with them once more.

But I think God is also inviting them, inviting them to some self-reflection to notice what's changed. What's changed in them, what's gone missing? Where are you, God asks. Where's your trust? Where's your confidence? Where's your openness? Your honesty? Where's the real you? Where's the you that I made in my image? The peaceful you, the trusting you, the positive, hopeful, confident you. Where did that person go?

Today is good Shepherd Sunday, as you heard, and I think it's a good day to remind ourselves that God is still asking us that very question. Because to some degree or another, we are still hiding. God, the good Shepherd, who knows us by name, who calls us each by name is still looking for us. Where are you? Where's the real you? The you before the loss, before the disappointments? The you before the hurts started to pile up, before the breakup, before you were let down, before you were mistreated, before you were told over and over that you don't measure up, that you're not good enough. Where's the you that I made before you got lost, before you started to feel the need to protect yourself and pretend to be someone you're not? Where's the you before you felt the need to hide?

Joe and I used to rescue greyhounds when we lived in San Diego, former racing dogs. And one of the ones we adopted, we named him Enzo. He was beautiful. A gorgeous black and gold brindle coat, kind of like a tortoise shell cat, if you've seen those. Absolutely stunning. Muscular legs, beautiful eyes, just an extraordinary one-of-a-kind creature of God. But he didn't see himself that way. He had lived his whole life on a racetrack in Mexico, spent his non-racing hours in

a cage, abused, mistreated. Rewarded when he won but punished when he lost. And when he couldn't compete any longer, when he couldn't run as fast as he once did, the track operators, they would just cut them loose, leave them to die of neglect and starvation.

By the time we got him, he had lost all sense of self. All he could do was hide. Always his head was down. He trembled when you came near him. His tail, always between his legs. It was like he was always expecting the worst. He winced when you went to pet him. He pulled away when you tried to hug him. So we worked with him, gave him all the love we could, but it was slow progress.

One day we decided to take him to a dog friendly beach. It was on a small island so the dogs could run off leash. We walked him down to the water's edge, unhooked his collar, and it was like he just came to life, like his spirit was suddenly free. His head was raised up, he stopped shaking. His tail started to wag and he ran. Ran faster than I'd ever seen a dog run. He ran in the water, he ran on the beach. He ran circles around dogs as they were running with this huge smile on his face. Big, long tongue wagging in the wind. It was as if he had been transformed. But as I look back on that day, I realize he hadn't been transformed. He hadn't been changed. He wasn't different. He was just free. Somehow that beach, somehow that beach helped him to forget for a moment at least what life had done to him. And it gave us all a glimpse of the real Enzo, the one that God had made, the one that had been there all that time, hidden under all that stuff. He wasn't changed. He was restored, renewed, resurrected, if you will.

That's what God wants for all of us. That's what the Good Shepherd comes to lead us back to. God didn't create us to be fearful. Go through life disappointed, depressed, our heads down, fearful. He doesn't want our gifts, our creativity, our imagination, our passions, our capacity to love, our capacity to be loved to remain hidden, not under a bushel basket, somewhere. God made us in his image. He tells us that we are a masterpiece. Each of us marvelously made, an original blessing. He wants us to come out of hiding to shine once more.

And there's a small issue, a little thing known as free will, which only means that we have a part in this. Not even a big part, not even a hard part really, but it is a part and it's basically this. We have to want to be found. God gives us free will so that we would have the power to choose. We could keep doing life our way and see how that works out, see how big of a mess we can make. Or we can choose to try it His way. The Good Shepherd comes, calls us by name and will never stop, but we have to listen. We have to hear his voice and we have to decide to turn.

We have a new class on Thursday nights called The Way of Love, where we are learning about various spiritual practices that can help us make better choices. And the first one, the one that kicks it all off, is that decision to turn. To stop moving in the direction we've been going, to stop relying on the stuff that we've

been giving our time to and to turn our lives in a new direction. And it's not a one-time thing. It's a choice that we have to keep making again and again and again because the world never stops trying to deceive us. Always trying to pull us back, always trying to get us off track, but we get better with each other. We get better with practice.

In fact, we practice it every Sunday right here in our worship. In fact, we just practiced it a few minutes ago. Did you notice? When the gospel procession came down into the congregation, what did you all do? You turned, right? You turned. It's not about respect or good manners. You turned your body as a reminder that we all desire to turn our lives into the direction of God, into the direction of the voice of the Good Shepherd. And that decision to turn, by the way, it begins by stopping to reflect, to reflect on the question that God has never stopped asking. Where are you? Where are you? What have you been hiding behind? What have you been putting your trust in? What have you been giving your time to? What do you dwell on? What are the negative messages you can't seem to let go of? What are the false narratives that live rent-free in our heads? What are we doing spending so many hours staring at screens?

Is it the voice of the Good Shepherd? Is that what we're listening to? Or are we being deceived once more? And if you're not sure, if it's hard to tell, just look at the fruits. Is it life-giving? Is it liberating? Does it help you to lift your head up? Does it bring you peace and contentment? Does it give you confidence to be you, to let your light shine? Does it fill you with love? Does it fill you with so much love that you just want to share it with the world? Because if it doesn't, if it doesn't do those things, it's probably not God. If it doesn't bring you more love, more compassion, more mercy, more peace in your life and in the world around you, it's a good bet that we're being deceived once more.

The Good Shepherd comes to mend what was broken, comes to find what's been lost, to free the you that's been hiding and all we have to do is turn. You don't need to be perfect. You don't need even to work hard. You don't have to become an expert at anything. You don't have to prove yourselves. You don't have to be special or grand. All you need to do is to listen and when the Good Shepherd asks, where are you? All you need to say is Lord, here I am. Here I am.

Listen to His voice. Hear Him call you by name. The Good Shepherd is coming even now, calling us back to walk in His garden once more, to turn toward Him. Let Him be the shepherd of your life. Follow Him and lie down in green pastures. Walk beside the still waters where you will find yourself, find yourself once more. The real you restored, renewed, resurrected.

Amen.