

**The Community of the Reconciliation**  
**Sunday June 8<sup>th</sup>**

*We can only transform the world to the extent that we ourselves have been transformed. – Richard Rohr*

Why are we Christians? Why am I a Christian? Why are you a Christian? Please think about that for a second. Why are you here in church? Why do you identify yourself as a follower of Jesus Christ?

I asked Christopher for a chance to speak to you today because I want to share my own answers about why I am a Christian and what vision that stirs in me. As many of you know I have been through a discernment process over the last 18 months or so to try and work out if and how I am called to ordained ministry. What some of you may not know is that the first stage of that process was that my calling was affirmed by all of you at St. Philip's. On your behalf, Christopher and the parish council were asked to affirm my exploration of priesthood before passing on to diocesan and provincial processes. It has become clear to me in the last year that this calling is deep in me and over the last few weeks I have decided that it is time to go to school in September and work towards the academic credentials necessary to pursue this path.

I am in front of you today because it is from this place that I feel sent. Over the last two years St. Philip's and Victoria have become my home. This community has shaped and nurtured me in ways I never could have expected and which have transformed me and helped me understand better who I am in Christ and what I am moving towards. Because of this, I have a profound sense of connection with all of you and today I want to share with you my vision. I want to share what stirs in my heart and invite you to bear it with me in hopes that you knowing what I'm up to, crazy though it may be, will allow us to continue together in communion even if we are separated physically. It might also serve as a last minute opportunity to realize that this good-natured but obviously deluded individual is going off into the world representing this community and maybe you had better do something to stop him.

My vision is called the Community of the Reconciliation. It is all about church but only partly about weekly worship. It is all about transformation and incarnation.

I wish I had more than words to convey this conviction. I wish I had some way to sound like less of a sound bite. Words like transformation and

incarnation are used so much that when they refer to something really radical it is easy to miss the power in them.

Why are we Christians? Well, I think it has to do with what we understand the Gospel to be. Just what is the good news that is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are many different answers to this but mine is that the Gospel is about transformation and it is about incarnation.

These two things are related. Quite simply, we are transformed so that we incarnate God. I think that what Jesus invites us into is a path of transformation where who we thought we were passes away and we become more and more who we really are. This is a process of becoming, incarnating, literally manifesting the Spirit of Christ in our own bodies. Jesus, the man, incarnated this Spirit fully and completely and we are invited to no less a journey. John says in his Gospel, that the revelation of Christ in Jesus gives all of us the opportunity to become sons and daughters of God.

Our minds should be blown away by this. We do not feel like we could ever do such a thing but that is the mystery. There is a divinity in us that is just waiting to be embraced and cultivated and opened to. The work is in the opening. Over and over again in the Bible we have stories of life taking root where it seems like no life ever could grow. In the womb of the old lady Sarah, God brings life. In the womb of the old lady Elizabeth, God brings life. In the womb of the virgin Mary, God brings life. Even though it seems like we could never be sons and daughters of God, God is just waiting for us to open to that possibility.

The Community of the Reconciliation is about living our lives and doing church in such a way that we are *relentlessly intending* to open to God's work of transformation in us; bringing more and more of our life into line with who we are in Christ.

Christopher does us all a great service at St. Philip's. Over and over again he is inviting us to believe that we are more than we think we are, that there is a deep, inner, hidden, reality of the presence of Christ at the centre of your being. We must hear this story over and over again because it is so hard to believe. It is about becoming aware of the fact that we are loved. We will forget. But that is what religion is for. Re-ligere. To reconnect, to re-member, that who we really are is lovable.

The Community of the Reconciliation is a vision of living ourselves into a new way of thinking. It is about experiencing the love that is already there and then doing the work of re-connecting and re-remembering. It is about

embodying our intention to be open to God in church and in our lives. It is about wanting to believe that there is more to life even though we are surrounded by death and decay.

I really want to emphasize this. It is about wanting to believe. I have a strong conviction that we must rescue the church from being a place of certainty, where believers meet, to a place where we welcome all those who just want to believe. To paint a picture of the church as a congregation of people who have arrived is doing nothing more than avoiding being open to transformation.

This begins my acknowledging that we ourselves doubt. Every single one of us does not fully believe. We do not trust fully in our life in Christ, we hedge our bets, we have places of security that we don't want to let go of. All of us. Priests, pastors and ministers included. All of us needs to re-connect and re-member.

We are caught living as though reality is just like the material world. It is a place of limitation, scarcity and not enough to go around. This is where all violence begins. The vision of incarnation is one of abundance. The Bible tells us about living water. A source of life that never runs out that is constantly being offered to us in a still small voice. But we must be open to being transformed to hear it and see it. What else is Jesus' death on the cross, followed by his resurrection, but a window into another way of seeing things? Once and for all the lie that our well-being must be sustained by winning, by being right, by being strong, was shown to be false. There is something greater, something abundant, a great love that holds the world and will never be defeated by oppression, fear, and death. This is the reality that Christopher points us to every week.

But we must experience the love of God. We cannot just think ourselves there. Unfortunately, we seem only to experience God's love when we can no longer convince ourselves that the work we are doing on our own is enough to make us feel ok.

This is where the Christian journey starts. With love. With startling regularity, over and over again, stories of saints and mystics and prophets, all contain a similar theme. The world they built for themselves crumbled. The castle of power, control, self-esteem or security shattered and they found themselves falling to their certain death. But, just when the darkness was about to swallow them, they were caught. By no merit of their own, without earning it, God caught them. And God catches us too. We just need to recognize it when it happens and then keep remembering it.

The fruits of transformation are incarnation. Transformation is hard, it hurts, and that needs to be made clear. We are not here as Christians to avoid pain. Living as though something we want to believe is true is the scariest thing in the world. We will resist it with all we have.

And so we have a choice. God loves us so much that he honours whatever decision we make. If we choose the life of safety and security and sticking with the things that sort of work then he will honour that. We are free to not be transformed.

But what would help people make a decision for life? We all have doubts. We want to believe but it seems so unbelievable sometimes. We know that there is pain and fear and anxiety in letting go. Well, it would be a lot easier if there were a group of people who were all doubting but who had decided to come together to support each other on the way. That, for me, is Church. That is the Community of the Reconciliation.

Church is about a group of people coming together to do the hard work of transformation together so that they can incarnate, literally embody, Christ. The church *can* be the body of Christ if it does this but I don't know if it is Christ's body if it doesn't do this.

Why bother with transformation? Because we can only transform the world to the extent to which we ourselves have been transformed. We are transformed so that we can absorb the pain of the world and proclaim the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am a Christian because I want to incarnate the Spirit of Christ as we see it in Jesus. We symbolize our faith with the cross. This is our destiny, to be transformed enough so that we can be at peace with absorbing the pain of the world onto ourselves instead of transmitting it. *Pain that is not transformed is transmitted. I am a Christian because I want to say with Jesus that "The pain stops here".*

This is a direction and not a destination. None of us will get there completely. But we participate in the kingdom of heaven, we participate in eternity whenever we choose to empty ourselves for the sake of love. The Life That Never Goes Away fills us in those moments and we are one with God. We are participating in the pattern of the universe that God revealed to us in Jesus and it is this that transforms us to be able to do it again and more and deeper.

This is a journey of each of us as individuals and as church. We must find practices that allow us to participate in this self-giving love.

I want to suggest that we need to engage this journey with as much of us as we can possibly bring to bear. We need to relentlessly seek relationship with God. It is the hardest thing we will ever do but it is the only thing that really matters and it is the place of great joy, what Paul calls the peace that passes understanding.

Spiritual practice. We need to have corporate and personal spiritual practices. Choosing a life in Christ is the hardest thing anyone can ever do. We practice sports, we practice our work, we practice art, we need to be involved in personal spiritual practice. This means something that works in moving us from our small egos that believe in the scarcity of the world to that part of us that is fed by living water. It is by definition hard. It is by definition unappealing to that part of us that is addicted to the world. That part of us doesn't want to die. It will give us all the reasons in the world not to. Spiritual practices are all practices of presence. It is what is meant by prayer. Jesus retreats from the world and prays in the wilderness. He instructs us to withdraw and pray to our father in secret. We must practice being present. We need to find something that helps us do this. Anything.