



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, Rector**

**The Second Sunday of Lent (Year B)
3 March 2024**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I want to ask you a serious question, but before you answer, I want you to take a moment. Maybe close your eyes; take a deep breath; and look into yourself.

What do you hope for? What do you really desire?

Allow for Silence

For what do you hope?

Let me first acknowledge – these are not the hopes and desires of the ordinary world. Quite the contrary. The megaphone of society is screaming in our ear that there is no hope! Save yourself for all is lost! So, your best bet in this unforgiving world is to work unceasingly, stockpile your wealth, and, when you can, eat, drink, and be merry. Then, at the last, if there is a God, and you have believed rightly in Him, you may find rest from your labors.

But for today – good luck.

What the world promises is not hope.

It is existence. It is survival. It is, at its best; fun or exciting, maybe even exhilarating. Most the time, however, it is simply banal and exhausting and profoundly lonely.

And yet, our hearts continue to yearn something more. Listen to yourselves! In spite of the noise and pitches we hear every day, our hearts yearn for simple connection, lasting peace, glimpses of beauty, and for steadfast love. We continue to hope for a life – and a world – that is at one with itself and right with our neighbor.



So what are we to do?

Well, as I see it, there are really only two options: you can give in or you can give up.

Yes, on the one hand you can *give in* to the world. You can cede the profound yearnings of your heart to the hopelessness of the world. You can make consumption and survival your life's goal and pursue all that your wealth can provide. For a fortunate few, a disproportionately high number here in this community to be sure, the results will be pretty good. You'll live a good life with fun adventures. But it will come at a high cost. You will spend less time with the people you love and the true joys of your heart. You will be perpetually anxious about the work to do, the things you have, and the security you don't.

For everyone else who *gives in* to world, the cost will be just as high – you will spend less time with the people you love and the true joys of your heart; and you will be perpetually anxious about the things you have and the security you don't. You simply won't live as good a life or have as many fun adventures.

But that's the way of the world – work hard, worry often, consume what you can, and, if you're lucky have a bit of fun.

But there is another option – you can *give up* . . . that is, you can *give up* on the ways of the world and take up a new way of life.

That is what Jesus offers!

Born of an unwed mother, an immigrant from birth, a simple carpenter by trade, Jesus proclaims that there is hope in this world – it's just not where we usually look.

Whereas the world trains you to be a 21st century ox (or a beta version robot) in order to maximize your profitability; Jesus gently whispers, you are not made in the image of an ox, to toil your life away. Rather you are made in the very image of God, to bless all that is good in the world, to create good with your own hands, and to rest in the eternal changelessness of God.

Whereas the world trains you to pursue pleasure wherever it may be hiding; Jesus encourages us to pursue one another – to seek after the lost in our society, to heal the broken, to lift of up the weary, to tend to the dying, and to gather up the children . . . to be co-creators in the world of the world for which our very hearts yearn!



Whereas the world trains us to meet a threat with a hammer, an insult with a curse, and a slight with bitterness; Jesus invites us to meet our enemy with love; the stranger with friendship, and our neighbor with affection.

Rather than giving into the world, Jesus invites us to *give up on the way of the world* in order that we might take up our cross and follow him.

And what he promises is profound – this cruciform way of life, the way of life marked not by consumption or power, nor by pleasure or wealth; but by kindness and mercy, connection and care, generosity and sacrifice – this cruciform life will lead to unsurpassing peace, profound joy, and a community of affection to accompany you along the way.

It is this cruciform way of life that enables Jesus live a most remarkable life – to find brothers and sisters in a house full of strangers, to be between a woman and a stone, to free a tax collector from the chains of greed, to place the bread of life in Judas soiled hands, and to greet Peter with a three-fold invitation of friendship restored.

So, what are we to do? How can we find such freedom?

Of course, we cannot, in actuality, “give up” on the world. Nor does God want us to ... But we can keep the world in its place.

- **Step 1 Be present**

I cannot say emphatically enough how transformative and how profoundly good it is to be part of the community of Christ. Here we learn that strangers can, in fact, become brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters.

Here our children encounter of a community of care and affection unlike any sports team or ensemble will be.

Here we are reminded who we really are: beloved of God and a blessing to the world.

Here, through words spoke and sung, we are encouraged to lay day the burdens and way of the world and to take up again the way of life and of peace.

And all it takes is presence.



- **Step 2: practice generosity**

To say that Jesus' way is the way of love is to state the obvious; so let me say it another way – at the heart of Jesus' new way is generosity, an unfailing willingness to share the gift that one possesses with strangers along the way. While it is tempting to focus on the power of God revealed through Jesus actions, it is even more important that we take note of the choice – in ever place, with the leper and the prostitute, with the pharisee and the tax collector, with the man born blind and the woman with a perpetual hemorrhage, with Judas and Peter, the revelation is not so much the power he shares, but the choice he makes – the choice to care, the choice to stop, the choice to give, the choice forgive, the choice to love.

His is, at its heart, a life of generosity. If we want to experience the complete joy that Jesus wishes us to know, we will have to learn his way of generosity.

Be present, Practice Generosity.

- **Step 3: take the next step**

Finally, wherever you are today, I invite you to take the next step. If you are new to our life, or find yourself on the edges wondering what the water is life, I encourage you to dive in and be intentional about our life on Sunday morning, to become part of the community and body of Christ – and if not here, than somewhere – wherever your heart is enriched.

Perhaps the next step involves the risk of generosity – then take the plunge and give. And I'm not just talking about financial giving – though there's no way to give up on the world without becoming financially generous – but the generosity of Jesus was more than financial generosity. It was the generosity of his heart.

So find a place to give your heart. Not a board to serve, but a community. Perhaps that community is here, where our kids and parents and elders yearn to know again that God's love is real for them. Perhaps it's with the Carstens Literacy Initiative where the willing minds of our children are eager to learn with you as their mentor and guide.

Wherever it is, take a step further into the more excellent way of Christ – for every step we take invites us, forces us in fact, to lay something of the world's lies aside. And with every step further in, we will come to experience a bit more of the unsurpassed peace of God, and a bit more the abundant life Jesus promises. And our hearts will be happier for it!