



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

**Homecoming Sunday
13 September 2026**

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

It's hard in the midst of a grand story, as we've just heard, to hear all the parts. We gaze upon Jesus at his departure and sing with joy with his disciples at his ascension. We might easily miss some of the story that had proceeded. And yet the 40 words that Jesus first speaks to his disciples are a wonderful and remarkably concise summary of the gospels themselves. So, hear them again for just a moment.

"Thus, it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem."

With these few words, Luke provides us a rich and comprehensive summary of the gospel that is the good news of God. In some way, every story that has come before this, that is the entirety of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and now ascension points to or reflects the truth contained therein. A suffering love, dying to oneself, repentance and forgiveness of sins.

But they mustn't be viewed simply as a last gasp lesson, hoping we might just get it this one last time. Rather, within them, we will see God's enduring promise. We will receive a final, not only gift to the disciples, but a gift to all who wish to learn from Christ's life. And we will see the eternal hope we have as a human people and society within those simple words. An enduring promise, a final gift and an eternal hope. The promise, of course, may be the easiest to see and to hear. The first good news contained in this summary is that God has both committed to and in Christ affected this very love. God has chosen to suffer out of love for the world, to lay down his life in humble vulnerability rather than to take up arms and destructive defiance or defense costly as it is.

Jesus allows Judas to go out into the dark night that will only lead to sadness and despair. And yet he has promised and revealed that though heartbreak and death will come, life too will return. It always will. Death may win for a day, but life will have the final victory God promises. So, Paul writes later, where oh death is thy victory, where oh death is thy sting.



It is a promise by God to meet our brokenness, to meet our death both literal and figurative with life, to meet our sin with mercy and new opportunity. This is the promise that these words contain, a promise made real in Jesus and open to us every day. And yet the fullness of these words may not be the promise which has been made complete, but the gift which we continue to receive and explore throughout our lives. You see, these words are a final gift to anyone who wishes to know and to live in a loving relationship of any kind. If you want to know the beauty of marriage, explore the truths herein. If you want to know and experience the lasting joy of a family, explore these same truths. If you want to know the beauty and truth of friendship, you must explore these same truths.

If you want to be part of a loving and enduring community, you must be exploring these same truths. For these four things, suffering love, dying to self, repentance and forgiveness of sins are at the heart of all loving relationships, all friendships, no matter how close and how intimate they may be.

Friendship you see is made not simply by spending time with one another. There are countless millions upon millions in fact of examples of people working and living beside one another for a lifetime who remain as strangers for all time. Proximity and time are essential but not complete in forming a loving relationship. No, the first thing that characterizes a true and loving friendship is the capacity to suffer out of love for another. Consider anyone who has loved you. Seriously, for a moment, recall to your mind and to your heart right now someone who has truly loved you.

Perhaps a mother, a teacher, an age-old friend, or even a stranger, a nurse who may have cared for you. Is not the heart of that love contained in the gift of suffering for you, the suffering love they offered to you. That is the beginning of true friendship, the capacity to suffer out of love for another. And that begins with a capacity to die to oneself. For every act of suffering love, the nursing mother at three in the morning, a dad working a second job and missing the soccer game, a soldier overseas, a medical volunteer at your side or a teacher working throughout the weekend. Every act of suffering love begins with an individual choosing to put down their self-desire out of care and attention for the needs of another.

If we wish to love another, we must at some point die to ourselves. We must let our own desires and needs be put to the side in order that we might love them, in order that we might love one another as Christ himself has loved us. We cannot begin to know true friendship without suffering love and dying to oneself. And yet no friendship becomes an enduring friendship if it doesn't also have the capacity for one to repent and another to forgive. Consider again, any one of those enduring friendships of our lives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends, college mates, whatever it may be. I guarantee you not even one of those enduring friendships has not endured some hurt and some



heartbreak, some failure of one or another to live up to the ideal or to the needs that we all have from and for one another.

And so, the characteristic that is needed, the quality that is needed to make that an enduring friendship is the capacity for one to repent and in humility to apologize and return and the capacity for another to receive in forgiveness the humble friend who has broken our heart.

There is no way for a loving relationship to be an enduring relationship without the capacity for repentance and forgiveness. Sometimes that forgiveness looks entirely ordinary. It is the patience that reads a book while we wait for another to return. It is the humor that makes light of something that if we otherwise paid too much attention to it would drive us nuts and out the door. It is the letting go of things, the recognition that that thing is not going to be the thing that defines our relationship. All of those are simple ordinary expressions of forgiveness and grace that we offer to one another.

Of course, at times it is greater in appearance. It is the willingness to re-embrace a loved one after hurt has cut to the very heart. But without it, ordinary or extraordinary, any loving relationship will become a past relationship, or it is forgiveness that gives a relationship endurance and an enduring character. But let me say, forgiveness is not spiritual forgetting. It is not as if we forget all these things and lay them in the dustbin and cast them out never to be thought of again. In fact, forgiveness is something that endures within us because that story remains, but we have now relegated that story of hurt to the side in order that we might retell a new and old story at once, the story of love that binds us and holds us together.

No relationship has the capacity to become an enduring relationship without the capacity for repentance and forgiveness. And so therein lies both the gift that God gives to us in these words to let us know the secret to a loving and enduring relationship, but also the hope that we have. If we have a hope as a society, if we have a hope as a community, be it a community as intimate as Christ Church or as broad as Grosse Pointe or Metro Detroit or even beyond, we must find the capacity to sacrifice, to suffer, to die to ourselves, to repent of what has broken and to forgive the harms that have been inflicted. If we have a hope as a society, it is in the capacity for us to learn these four truths both personally and collectively. Jesus parts from his disciples in glory, but he parts from them with a wonderful gift.

May we learn the truth embodied within them, the truth of God's promise, then the gift that he has given.