



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

**The 7th Sunday after Easter (Year A)
21 May 2023**

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

Amy Sweeney, our senior warden, who is also not only senior warden, is also one of our two junior youth leaders... So, she and Paula Labadie, also a former senior warden, have spent every week this past year with our Junior High kids. And let me say, because they spend every week with those kids, those kids want to be here. They genuinely want to be here. It's not about the content, though the content is good. It's at the heart of it, our kids are yearning for relationships of meaning.

And they experience it here. They experience it with Paula. They experience it with Amy. So, last week I saw a picture of my boy Sam, and I think it was Chase. I know it was Chase, Lisa's oldest son. And I think it was Bennett in this case: the three of them on the sofa in the youth room together. It was just a joy for me as a father. And I hear from other parents. I hear from Lisa: a joy for us as parents to see our kids enriched by their experience, which is, if you will, a three-dimensional experience for them, an experience that they have with their peers, an experience that they have with their elders, and an experience that they have amid all of that with Christ. And so just echoing your passion, Lisa. Thank you.

Years ago, when this strategic plan began to emerge in our life, our leaders had the wisdom of identifying a core To Excel in Love with three priorities, Christ-centered, community-focused, future-driven. And it was an imminently wise union of priorities, a priority that we, ironically, see this morning in this lesson from John. This lesson, to give you a little context, is taken from what is effectively what is referred to as the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It's this long, long prayer of Jesus on the night of his arrest. So, Thursday night, just before what we would call Maundy Thursday. It's during that supper that he offers this long prayer and address to God.

And during it, we see these three fundamental priorities: Christ-centered, community-focused, future-driven. I just want to draw your attention to them ever so briefly before I drill into this last one before us. "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the son may glorify you." Here in this final



night of Jesus' life leading up and culminating in not only His death, resurrection, but eventually His ascension, we see the glorification of Jesus. What do we mean by the glorification of Jesus? We mean this awareness, this emerging awareness that the person Jesus of Nazareth is one with God: one with God as to become known as the Messiah, the Christ.

“Glorify your Son. May the world see that this life is the life of your son. That this way of being is the way of the Messiah, the Christ for the world.” We are to be a community that is Christ-centered, centered on this unique way of living and loving the world and our neighbor. The way of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. He goes on to say, it's the last sentence, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one, as you and I are one.” At the heart of the life of Jesus, at the heart of the identity of the Messiah, the Christ, is union, we might say communion, with God and with one another, that they may be one as you and I are one.

At the heart of the Christian community, the body of Christ, we are called to be a community, to draw others into this fellowship of grace and affection, this fellowship of love for the world. Do visitors and friends that come and join us on any given Sunday experience a true and vital community of God, a community of affection and grace? I continue to commend that to you and to us as one of the most important things that we do. I said at the beginning of the service, use the summer as a time to build fellowship and connection. It's not just a slogan or a tactic, but a fundamental task of the church - to be a community, to be one as Christ and the Father are one, and to draw the world into that fellowship of grace and care so that our neighbors may know the joy that we experience ourselves, that I experience amongst you and I witness for my son and my daughter amongst us all.

And then finally, the element of future driven. “They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you. For the words that you gave to me, I have given to them.” Christ passes on the task of love, the task of proclaiming God's grace, the task of offering God's forgiveness and affection on. He passes that task onto his disciples, onto his community, so that that message of grace and love, God's message of blessing and affection, may continue for generations to come. That continues to be our task: to not only absorb and receive the blessing of God for ourselves, but to make sure that our children and our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren and the great-grandchildren that we will never know, the love and affection of God. As I was thinking about this morning and what stewardship looks like, I was thinking back to my childhood and times with my grandmothers.

Both my grandmothers were native Hawaiian. My mother's mother was raised on Kauai, the garden isle, where flowers were abundant. As a child I remember affectionately going out and picking flowers. The plumeria tree in our front yard was prolific, so that was easy. Also, at the sides of roads, picking



flowers to make leis. And then we would come home, and we would sit on the floor. The flowers would be laid out before us, and she would gently teach me to thread the needle, the long 12-inch needle that's used for making leis, and we would just string together. And as a young child I would just make a single strand. And as I got older, she would teach me how to make more elaborate leis from these simple flowers that we had collected.

My father's mother would take me shopping and we would buy poi and we'd come home, and she'd teach me how to turn what we bought into poi for the family. And she would teach me about why we keep it out at the center of the table, so that anybody who comes can be fed. Anytime that they're hungry, they can take some. It's part of being a family. It's part of being Hawaiian. She stewarded. They stewarded gifts for me by taking time for me, to share their wisdom and their knowledge for me. We are stewards of God's love for the world. We are stewards of God's love for the world that are not here. We are stewards of God's love for the world for the children that are here, to help them know and understand not only the fullness of God's love, but the beauty and joy of being part of God's community.

Why we wear red on Pentecost; why we sing the doxology now and then, learning the words of an old song that few sing still today; why we stand or pray in the ways that we do: all these things that are part and parcel to being a community, any community, from lei-making and poi-making in Hawaii to Christ-making here in Grosse Pointe. This campaign, on the one hand, the strategic plan on the other, is about excelling in love for the world. It's about being Christ-centered, remembering that Christ and His unique love stands at the heart of our lives. It's about being community-focused, building up the community of God's grace in the world. It's about tending, stewarding for the future, God's love for the world. Amen.