

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Please be seated.
- Speaker 1: [00:06](#) Today we dedicate parents in the congregation to the nurture of young lives in the church we celebrate today the life of Vera Marie Rhodes, daughter of John and Kathryn Rhodes and little sister to Sylvie. Jesus said, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles themselves like this child, they are the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus, through his example, taught adults to love children and the church must do the same. We will love this child through affirmation, kindness, warm words, accepting arms, example and patients. Parents are the key and the rest of us are called to help them and giving to their children what they can. Now People of University Christian Church, do you promise to live so that Vera knows that she is loved by God and her church? And do you promise to welcome her with open arms and hearts into our community of faith? If so, please say with God's help we will
- Speaker 2: [01:15](#) and vera brings with it this morning, friends and family, I would simply invite you to stand right where you are. Please, all of Vera's family and friends and I would ask in this moment, will you promise to give the very best of yourself to the love and the nurture and the growth of Vera and her parents and be the very best example that you can be? If so, please say with the help of God, we will. Thank you. You may be seated and to John and Kathryn and I would ask now, do you promise to give the very best of yourself to vera and to Sylvie, raising them in the life of the church, telling them and teaching them what it means to be a child of God? If so, please say with the help of God, we will. Well, I come with me for a minute. I want to show you off for a second. Oh my goodness. Yep. They'll be right back there.
- Speaker 2: [02:18](#) Good morning, church. I want you to meet Vera. Isn't she perfect? Actually, she's not. Mom and dad will tell you that sometimes she wakes up in the middle of the night screaming. She even poops in her pants sometimes. Sometimes when she gets a little older she's going to get squirmy in church. She may even be disruptive, but you know what? We're going to love her anyways cause none of us are perfect, right? But yet despite her imperfection, although she's about as close as you can get, I think we are loved and adored as we are not as we should be. Right? And she stands this day as a reminder to us and to mom and dad and to big sister Sylvie and to each and every one of us that we are to give the very best of ourselves to her and to mom and dad who may get sometimes a little stressed and

impatient when she poops her pants and wakes up screaming in the middle of the night.

Speaker 2: [03:31](#) That's what it means to be church. That's what it means to be a community of faith, to be reminded and to love each other in spite of our imperfections. She is checking you all out. She does not know where to look. Some people err too. What do you think about this, Vera? But there's people up there too. You see him? Yeah. Want to go back and see mom and dad. We are blessed by you and by your family, by Vierra and on this day we celebrate that blessing. Oh look who's back. We joined with me in prayer, please and now Vira may God bless your mind that you might think while being a person of faith and may God bless your ears, that you might hear the cry of the poor. May God bless your eyes, that you might see the good in every person. May God bless your hands, that you might embrace others in love, as well as be embraced in other's love and may God bless your feet, that you might be quick to run, to serve God in the common and in the everyday moments of life together. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Speaker 2: [05:00](#) Well, good morning church. It is good for us to be together in the presence of God and in the presence of one another to celebrate all the goodness in the graces that are all around us and especially welcome to those who are watching us this morning on Facebook or through our live stream on our website or listening on Kay TCU. We are glad that you are here and know that wherever you are, you're a part of us and we are together as one. I am glad that we can use that technology as a way to expand our base to widen the net, grow the circle technology are great in that way. And I want to let you know also have another piece of technology that we are now offering and that is a new listening device for folks that are having a hard time hearing. Maybe if you have hearing aids that you can plug in directly to our, through our wifi system directly into the um, into the sound system.

Speaker 2: [06:02](#) I don't know how that works. Um, that's way above my pay grade. But there is a card that an usher will be able to give you that we'll tell you how to download that app to put it on your cell phone. You can also see Jack Stuart who is our technology person, uh, up in the sound booth there. And he will help you get connected. Uh, the reports that I've heard have been very outstanding and so folks are using that technology as a way to make sure that they can hear this is a beautiful room and it's great for music but not always great for the spoken word. And so this is one of the ways that we are making sure that we are

indeed inclusive to everyone. So we are in the middle of a sermon series. I am walking us through, uh, each of the core values that our leadership has adopted and agreed that we as a community of faith are gonna try to live into.

Speaker 2: [06:53](#)

Uh, these six core values are sort of the, the DNA. Maybe you could say the foundation, the bedrock of our community, of faith, of all of that. We are of all that we do. We started a couple of weeks ago talking about each of these, we talked about discipleship, we talked about curiosity, we talked about inclusivity. Next week we're going to talk about compassion. I'm very excited about that one. I can hardly wait to hear what I'm going to say. And then the following week we're going to wrap it up with generosity. This morning we are talking about vulnerability and the story that we're going to use to get into this subject to this idea is one that appears in all four of the gospels. We have as many of you know, four accounts of the life and Ministry of Jesus, Matthew, mark, Luke and John. And what's interesting is this story appears in all four of those gospels, but yet it's slightly different in each one.

Speaker 2: [07:49](#)

In fact, in a not even where it takes place in the life and Ministry of Jesus. For instance, John, who will be hearing from this morning places this story in Bethany at the House of Mary and Martha and Lazarus on the Sunday evening before palm Sunday, the night before the triumphal entry. The other gospels have it after the triumphant entry in the midst of what we now know as holy week. Some other differences about the stories that John is the only one to name Mary as the one who anoints Jesus. The other gospels just sort of leave her nameless and refer to her simply as a woman. One Gospel in particular, uh, suggests that she is a woman with a checkered past. The other main difference is that in the other versions of the story, the woman anoints Jesus's head. But as you will hear in this story, in John's Gospel, Mary takes Jesus's feet in her hands and places very expensive perfume on them and then wipes her his feet with her hair. What I love about this profound story is that Mary is so vulnerable and this incredible story, this encounter is so intimate and because of her [inaudible] vulnerability, it becomes this holy and sacred moment. I invite you to listen to this story from John's Gospel.

Speaker 3: [09:25](#)

Okay.

Speaker 4: [09:28](#)

At the reading today comes from John Chapter 12 verses one through eight Europeans reading six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had

raised from the dead there. They gave a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took out a pound of costly perfume, made of pure Nard and anointed Jesus's feet and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume, but Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one who had, who was about to betray him said, why was this perfume not sold for 300 Denari and the money given to the poor? He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it. Jesus said, leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. The word of God for the people of God.

Speaker 3: [10:34](#) [inaudible]

Speaker 2: [10:41](#) so just about every conversation that I've had, whether I'm talking to groups or to individuals, when I present these core values, when I begin talking about what we have articulated and agreed to live into this one is the one that people find the most intriguing, the one that they have the most questions about. Yeah. When I asked what is the one that catches your attention, this is the one that they talk about vulnerability. It's not that they're opposed to it, it's just that they're curious about it. And since curiosity is one of our other core values, I say good job, well done.

Speaker 2: [11:24](#) Vulnerability is, I think many of us would agree somewhat of a popular topic these days, largely in part because of the work of Brenae Brown. Bernay is a scholar, she's an author, she's got a PhD, and she teaches at the University of Houston in their social work department. She's written a number of bestselling books including the gifts of imperfection, daring greatly. And because of all this, she has become sort of the the leading authority on the topic of vulnerability and courage and worthiness. Topics like shame and how all of these limit our ability to emphasize and belong and love, empathize, not emphasized. By the way I messed that up a couple of years ago she spoke at a Ted Conference on the power of vulnerability and it was a brilliant ted talk and it went viral. In fact, if you go now it is the fourth it is received and watched the fourth highest of all of the Ted talks that have ever been seen 24 million times.

Speaker 2: [12:36](#) It has been viewed about 20 of those by me and I recommended highly. There is a saying in social work that we are to lean into the discomfort to lean into the discomfort, but

she is the first to say, that's not me. That's not the type of person I am. She says I'm more of the person that would say knock discomfort up by the side of the head, push it aside, move it over and get all A's. That's the type of person that she is. Maybe some of you know someone like that. Maybe some of you are someone like that, but in her research she came upon something that fundamentally changed her perception. It changed the way that she lives, the way that she loves, the way that she works, the way that she parents, what she came to discover is that connection, the connection that we feel amongst one another.

Speaker 2: [13:37](#)

That's why we're here. And I don't just mean why we're here at church, although that's a big part of it, but I mean that's why we're here on this planet that is humans. We are hard wired for connection, to be connected with other people, but there is this thing she discovered that unravels connection and that is shame, shame, shame ultimately is if you break it down, the fear of disconnection, it's that we're afraid that we aren't good enough, that we aren't smart enough or thin enough or rich enough or beautiful enough and we aren't blank enough and I'll let you fill in the blank because we all have our lists. We all have our words. Shame is that name of that voice that's in the back of your mind that's constantly asking, is there something about me that if other people see it, I won't be worthy of being loved, then I won't belong.

Speaker 2: [14:43](#)

I'm willing to bet that we all have that voice from time to time. Now, the antidote she says of this shame, that sense of I'm not good enough is what she identifies, what she refers to as excruciating vulnerability, excruciating vulnerability. In other words, we have to allow ourselves to show up. We have to allow ourselves to show up and she said that there are people that when you interact with them, you know that they are fully there, that they have shown up in the fullest sense of the word they they live with these sense of, of deep connections. She calls these people wholehearted people and she says of these people who live wholeheartedly, they have a few key attributes, a few values that they hold sacred. The first, the first is the courage to be imperfect. The courage to be imperfect, to be able to say I don't have it all figured out, that my life is not perfect.

Speaker 2: [15:53](#)

In fact, sometimes my life is a bit of a mess, but somehow, and I think this is increased significantly with social media, we have been conditioned to believe that we have to be perfect, that we have to have all of the answers that we have to have life all

figured out and buttoned down. And as a result of that, we are losing our tolerance for vulnerability. Now the problem of course, is that we live in a very vulnerable world and this need to be perfect. It's killing us and especially it's killing our children. Number of years ago, I went to stay with a friend of mine and we're sitting around, he has kids about my kids' age and we're sitting around the dinner table and, and I asked him, no, excuse me. He asked me a question and I responded and I said, oh, that sounds perfect. And he said, Russ, can I see you in the other room for a minute?

Speaker 2: [16:59](#) And so we got up and walked in the other room and he says, I want you to know we don't use that word in our house. And I said, what did I say? Did I swear again? I didn't mean to swear. What did I say? What did I say? Sometimes it just comes, comes out. He says, no, we don't say perfect in our family. We don't use that word. You see, he recognizes that perfect is unachievable and he does not want his children to grow up thinking that they have to be perfect and therefore constantly striving for the impossible that he says is impossible. And so instead he current encourages his children to work towards excellence. Excellence is achievable. Perfection not so because nobody is perfect. We don't use that word around here. Rests. He said, you know, we have been taught to believe that being vulnerable is a sign of weakness and saying simply, I don't know, somehow has become a sign of incompetence, but I want you to imagine if you're at work, if you're work and the leader of your organization, maybe it's your CEO, maybe it's your boss.

Speaker 2: [18:19](#) Maybe it's you were to walk into a meeting and to say, at some point, you know what? I'm not sure what to do next and you may know more than I do and I believe with all that I am that the answer to this is in this room and so I need your help to figure it out. Can you imagine how terrifying that might be for that leader, for that boss, for that CEO, but can you at the same time imagine how inspiring, how powerful that would be for those people in that room to understand that level of honesty, that level of vulnerability. Can you imagine what that would mean for morale in that moment?

Speaker 2: [19:09](#) Church. There was one thing that I am certain about in on some days. It is the only thing that I'm certain about and that is quite simply that I'm uncertain about a lot of things, that my life is not perfect, but I'm also aware that that's okay, that that's okay. John Ortberg wrote a book called love beyond reason, and in the book he tells the story of his little sister who was growing up and as a little girl, she had a doll, her name was Pandie, and this

little girl took this doll everywhere. Now, if you've ever had a child that takes something everywhere, you know that over time it becomes a little, it becomes a little ragged, becomes a little worn. But orbrook says that we loved Pandie and we loved our little girl. In fact, to love the girl was to love the doll. They were sort of a package deal. But the problem was this doll over years became really ragged. It was not cute at all. It was not attractive in any way, shape, or form. I was missing. The hair was all gone. But orbrook says the whole family, they loved this doll. Not because it was cute, not because it was beautiful. We loved it because of the way that the girl loved it. She loved it with a kind of love that made the doll beautiful.

Speaker 2: [20:50](#)

You see, I think wholehearted people are not perfect. They just recognize that we're all rag dolls, that we're all flawed in some ways. We're all wounded. We're all broken, rural, bent over, if nothing less. But we are gods rag dolls that God knows our raggedness and loves US anyway. That God loves us in such a way that our raggedness no longer becomes the most important things about us did at times. We may be unlovely, but never are we unloved. People who live wholeheartedly live with the courage to be imperfect. And the second thing that wholehearted people live with is a deep connection that comes as a result of authenticity. My favorite book of all time, no, scratch that. The best book of all time is the velveteen rabbit. Now you can disagree with me on that, but you would be wrong.

Speaker 5: [22:00](#)

Okay.

Speaker 2: [22:01](#)

And my favorite part of the velveteen rabbit is when the skin horse is talking with the rabbit about what it means to be, do you remember the story, what it means to be real? And they're having this conversation, these two toys, and the skin horse says, you know, real isn't how you are made. It's a thing that happens to you when a child loves you for a long, long time. Not just to play with, but really loves you in that moment you become real. The rabbit had some followup questions first. Does it hurt? Sometimes the skin horse says for, he was always truthful, but when you are real, you don't mind being hurt. Well, does it happen all at once sort of like being wound up or does it happen sort of bit by bit in the skin horses? Oh, it doesn't happen all at once. It doesn't happen all at once. You become and it takes a long time and that's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, who have sharp edges, who have to be carefully kept. He says generally by the time you are



real and Oh, I love this part, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off. Oh, I love that part.

Speaker 2: [23:25](#)

Oh, Shannon, am I right? Oh, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off in your eyes, dry drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But he says, but these things don't matter at all because once you were real, you can never be ugly. Septa people who just don't understand. I don't know about you, but what I find myself longing for in my life when I find myself longing for in my faith journey are people and experiences that are real. I'm tired of slick. I'm tired of pretend. I want relationships that are real, that are genuine. I want encounters with people who are authentic and I suppose that I'm not alone. You see, I believe that people are longing to be made real. In real is what happens when you become your true self. When you're not contrived or shiny or pretending anything, when you're not putting up a facade.

Speaker 2: [24:48](#)

Trying to be something that you're not because in that moment you are loved despite, and maybe even because of your imperfections. Several years ago I was keynoting at a high school camp and there was a girl who was there, I think she was a sophomore. Her name was Sarah and she was a beautiful girl, but she had this scar on her face that started right there at the corner of her mouth and reached pretty much all the way back to her ear lobe. It's a fairly significant scar and about the middle of the week. I asked her about it and she told me how it happened and to be honest with you, I don't remember how it happened. I don't remember the story at all, but I will never forget what she said after that. She said I could get it fixed. In fact, my mom took me to a plastic surgeon, but I don't want to.

Speaker 2: [25:47](#)

It's part of me. She said, it makes me who I am. Here's a high school girl surrounded by peer pressure, being encouraged to be pressured to maintain the right image. And this girl had figured out that the wounds are part of who we are. They make us who we are, and every single one of us, every single one of us has scars part of ourselves that we'd just as soon change or fix. But those scars, those stories are part of who we are and we don't have to be proud of them. Well, we just can't hide behind them either. Frederick Buechner is a Presbyterian Minister and a prolific author and theologian. He's written something like 30 books.

Speaker 2: [26:37](#)

His father killed himself and Biko was just a teenager. He didn't have exactly a perfect childhood to say the least. Later in his life, he started writing about his life as a way to sort of



understand himself, and he wrote a memoir called telling secrets. He told the story of his family. He told the story of his upbringing, his childhood. Needless to say, his mother was none too happy. In fact, she was outraged. She came to him one day and says, why? Why are you telling all of our family's secrets? And he said, mom, I'm telling them so I can forget them so that they don't own me any longer.

Speaker 2: [27:26](#)

There's an incredible book by Buddhist nun, but they didn't load run. The book is called the wisdom of no escape and in it she states that enlightenment is knowing where you are and telling the truth about it. Let me say that again. Enlightenment is knowing where you are in telling the truth about it. The truth is is that for years we have been searching for enlightenment, haven't we? And we read books and we we, we ask questions and we search and knowledge and we listened to preachers and we tried to learn along the way and she says that enlightenment comes in the moment when we are able to speak a word of truth about where we are in our lives, wherever that may be. I think I've shared with you before that the root word of the word courage is cor, cor and in Latin. That is the word for heart. In one of its earliest forms. The word courage meant to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.

Speaker 2: [28:37](#)

I would argue that the greatest, biggest, most important risk that many of us are afraid to take is the risk of being vulnerable to find the courage, to speak the truth of our hearts. But as Bernay Brown says, vulnerability is the birthplace of love, of belonging, of joy, of courage, of empathy and creativity. It's the source of hope, of empathy, of accountability, of authenticity, and if we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path, the only path she says. So what would it look like for us as a community of faith to show up fully and authentically willing to be vulnerable with one another without pretense, without trying to live into the facade of having it all together? Because let me tell you, when you show up that way, it gives other people the permission to show up that way.

Speaker 2: [29:48](#)

My guess is that if we showed up in that way, that we would find a community of faith in which we are loved and accepted as we are, we'd we'd find we'd create a place where it's okay to be our true selves, to be genuine and real. A place where we don't have to compare. We don't have to compete. I got to tell you, to me that sounds incredibly compelling and amazingly inviting and so the church May this be a safe place where we can trust one another to listen to our deepest struggles without

judgment. Trusting that other people will love us through our struggles. Because I tell you this, it is only when we are our most valuable selves, vulnerable selves that we are able to really grow, Oh and learn [inaudible] and change. It takes stripping away everything else to completely focusing on something other than our fear and our pride and our shame. Because in that moment we enter into the sacred space of spiritual intimacy and in that moment we discover new ways of being. In that moment we begin to discover who we are [inaudible] and who God is calling us to be. Amen. Amen.