

Well, thank you for your hospitality. *[turning to the audience with his back to the choir]* I hate to give the choir my back, but I don't know how else to do this.

But it's been great to be here and at Bishop's School on Friday, and to be joined by Chris and Gregorio who work at Homeboy Industries. It's the privilege of my life for almost 40 years to work with gang members. And the day won't ever come, when I have more courage, or I am more noble or I'm closer to God than they are. I was thinking of a kid named Hector, who I knew many years ago, who was 15 years old and who dropped out of school and was working at Homeboy and trying to, I think, inhabit the truth of who he was in his dignity and his nobility. And he came into my office, and he was trying his hand at small talk. And he said, "Oh, by the way, I ran into a man who attended one of your talks once." I said, "Really?" He goes, "Yes. He found your talk rather monotonous." "Oh my gosh, really?" And he says, "Well, no, actually that didn't happen, but I need practice using bigger words." So I encouraged him to practice on somebody else.

"This is my Son...listen to him."

And so we want to kind of listen and live as though the truth were true and put first things recognizably first. We want to take seriously what Jesus took seriously. And fortunately for us, there're only four things. They're big, only four. Inclusion, nonviolence, unconditional loving kindness, and compassionate acceptance.

"This is my Son...listen to him."

So, the goal in God's dream come true is that we create a community of kinship, such that God, in fact might recognize it where there is no us and them. There's just us. Where there is no daylight that separates us. All of us were born into this world wanting the same things. We're all naked under our clothes. We're human beings and so we all happen to share the same last name: Beings. And so we want to create this community of beloved belonging. The great John Lewis says, "We all live in the same house." He doesn't say, well, some live in the basement and some live on the third floor. He says, "We all live in the same house." It's not aspirational, one day we might all live in the same house, no. It's the same message as Jesus. Kinship connection. It's God's dream come true that we be one.

So, we've seen the enemy and it's not each other. It's that which keeps us enemies with each other. And Homeboy Industries wants to be the front porch of the

house everybody lives in. And it's been the privilege of my life to be connected to that for now 34 years, as an organization. Thousands of gang members walk into our place, which is now the largest gang intervention rehab reentry program on the planet. And they come and they want to reimagine their lives and they want to leave behind the stuff that holds them back, where they've been stuck. And they want to transform their pain, so they don't have to transmit it anymore.

So, we have 10 businesses, enterprises, bakery, cafe. We have a restaurant at LAX airport. We have a diner at the only place you can get food at City Hall in Los Angeles, an electronic recycling center. And so enemy rival gang members work side by side with each other. And we want to approximate what God's dream come true might look like, where we stand against forgetting that we belong to each other, where we obliterate once and for all of the illusion that we are separate.

One of our businesses that's been around for 27 years is our Homeboy Silkscreen and Embroidery factory and thousands and thousands of rival enemy gang members have worked there over the years and we do high quality work, reasonably priced, and we UPS to La Jolla. *[laughing]* I'm just saying. But a couple, Ruben and Christina, run the place and have for 27 years. And every once in a while, I remember not that long ago, I got a text from Ruben. He said, "I'm sending Gilbert to you." Well, this can't be good. And if he sends somebody to me, it's like sending somebody to the dean's office or the principal's office. And it's quite a ways from where we are.

So, Gilbert shows up and I go, "All right, what happened?" "Well, *supposedly*," he says, "I stole some t-shirts." I said, "Well, did you?" He goes, "Well, yeah, but it was only three t-shirts. There were thousands of them." I go, "Ah, let me see if I got this right. So, I need a car. And so, I go to a car dealer and they have a thousand cars. I take one car. It's not exactly stealing because there are a thousand of them." And he looks at me and he says, "Exactly." *[laughter]* Well, the two of us, it just sort of floated in the air. And at Homeboy, we always say, we laugh from the stomach there. And the two of us nearly fell out of our chair. And there was no daylight that separates us. There was no us in them. There's just us.

"This is my *[beloved]* Son...listen to him."

And so we roll up our sleeves. The prophet Habakkuk writes, "For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and it will not disappoint. And if it delays, wait for it." And we don't wait by folding our arms and standing there, we roll up our sleeves and we try to build and nurture and cherish each other into this community of kinship, such that God might recognize it. Where there are no enemies, there are only sisters and brothers who lock arms and try to create the world that God hopes for.

In the old days, a homie would come to me and it's sort of like, not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," is going to be let in. But not every homie who says, "I just need a job," will get in. But homies will come. Our place is not for those who need help. It's only for those who want it. You have to walk through the door. And I can remember years ago a homie would come in and he'd say, "I'm ready. I think I'm ready." I'd say, "Okay, I have an opening in Homeboy Bakery, but you're going to have to work with X, Y, and Z." And I rattle off the names of rival enemy gang members. And they would always say the same thing. They'd sit for a second. They'd go, "Okay, I'll work with them, but I'm not going to talk to them." And I remember how much that bothered me in the early days until you discover that it's impossible to demonize somebody you know. Human beings can't sustain that.

So, I had a homie, 19 years old, everybody called him Youngster, and I thought he was ready. So, I brought him over to the Homeboy Silkscreen, and I introduced him to some 30 coworkers there working in our factory. And I watched him as he looked these guys in the eyes and he shook their hands and half of them were enemies. And I thought, "Wow, this is great." Until he gets to the last guy who seems to be wanting to avoid this encounter altogether, a kid named Puppet. And when Puppet and Youngster are in each other's vicinity, they mumble something. They stare at their shoes. They don't shake hands. Well, I know they're enemies because I know what gangs they're from, but he just shook hands with a whole bunch of other enemies. And I find out later that this was a hatred that was really quite personal and quite a deep. And they seem to not to be able to get beyond this animosity.

And so I kind of sensed that much at the moment. I said, "Look, if you can't hang working with each other, let me know. I got a bunch of people who want this job." And they don't say a word. Six months later, Puppet leaves his home to walk to a store some distance from his

house and he purchases something. But on the way home, he decides to take a shortcut and he dodges into an alley and suddenly unexpectedly, he's surrounded by 10 members of a rival gang, 10 against one. And they beat him badly and he falls to the ground and while he's lying there, they will not stop kicking his head until he's lifeless. And somebody finds his body and takes him to White Memorial Hospital where he's declared effectively brain dead. But it's the policy there to keep him connected to machines for 48 hours so that you can have two full days of a flat line with no brain activity at all, no brain waves. And then you can officially declare him dead.

I was in St. Louis giving a talk and I flew home immediately. And I've seen a lot of horrible things in my life, but nothing to compare to the sight of this young man with his head swollen many times its size. Oh, it was horrifying. You could barely train your eyes on him. And after the 48 hours, I anointed his forehead with oil and said a closing prayer and blessed him. And then we disconnected him. And a week later I buried him. But in the first 24 hours, while he was lying there beaten in the hospital, I was in my office alone and I get a phone call and it's from Puppet's coworker Youngster. And he says, "Hey, that's messed up about what happened to puppet." I said, "Yeah, it is." And then with a certain kind of eagerness, he said, "Is there anything I could do? Can I give him my blood?" And we both fall silent under the weight of it until finally he broke the silence, choking back his tears. And he said with great deliberation, "He was not my enemy. He was my friend. We work together."

Now, can I say that always happens at Homeboy Industries? Of course it does. Any exceptions? No. And it shouldn't surprise us that God's own dream come true for us, that we be one, just happens to be our own deepest, longing for ourselves. Because we were all born wanting the same things and we're all naked under our clothes. And we're human beings and we all share the same last name: Beings.

"This is my Son...listen to him."

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