

The Story: Jesus' Ministry Begins

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[0 : 0 0] So we've made this decision recognizing that many of our people are in a higher risk group for contracting the virus. That's just reality. That's our reality. And we're going to be closely monitoring the healthcare updates and we'll keep everyone informed as things develop or change.

We'll stay connected with you, as I said earlier, by email, by phone, by Facebook, by Instagram, by all the tools that we have at our disposal. And remember, I've said this to a few people this morning already, we are the church.

This building is not the church. Not this building. Not any building that you've driven past today or will in the coming weeks. No building is the church, my friends. We are the church.

We will not be silenced. We will not be defeated. Christ has won. We will continue to be the church, even if we're not meeting as a larger gathering in the building for now.

And I will continue to pray for all of you, for each of you, for our city, for our province, for our country, for the world. I'm also going to continue, believe it or not, to bring a pastoral prayer every Sunday and to preach every Sunday because I feel called to do that.

[1 : 1 8] So what will that look like? Well, you'll be able to tune in. What I plan to do at this stage is to Facebook Live broadcast a sermon. Sunday mornings, 11 o'clock.

And I know full well there are lots of preachers online. Lots of people you can listen to. Online, on TV, lots of options. So, maybe you won't tune in.

And that's just fine. But I feel called to continue to be your pastor in that way, and I will do that. So, make sure you follow the church on Facebook, if that's an option for you.

Listen to the sermons on the church website. I will continue to post them. You'll also be able to listen to sermons in podcast format, if that's your thing. Lots of people were excited when I started doing that.

And obviously, that part would be audio only. So, the church office will, unless the deacons decide otherwise, in my mind, can remain open.

[2 : 1 6] Shailen and I will be here. So, we encourage you to please continue giving to the church. Because our expenses as a church continue. So, we encourage you to keep giving, however that looks.

Whether that is online. Whether that is bringing it in and dropping it off at the office. Or mailing it, I've had several people ask me. So, we encourage you to please do that. Because the need in that way does not stop.

And I also encourage you to stay connected with one another. And we will stay, as a church, as leadership, as pastoral staff, we will stay connected with you.

Pray for each other. Pray for your staff team and your pastors. We need it. Pray for your city, your country, your world.

It needs your prayers. Be a source of hope and support to your neighbors. Your friends, your families. People are scared. People don't know what to do.

[3 : 22] And you can be a source of support and encouragement to them. If you need help getting groceries or getting to the doctor or running other errands, please reach out to the office and let us know.

Because we'll help you get that done. That's what we're about. We're a family. Don't panic. We will get through this. We'll get through this as a church.

We'll get through this as a city, as a country, as the world. It's not going to be easy. But we will get through it together. We're a family, as I said.

And we will continue to be a family. And God remains in control in all of this. That's important for you to remember. And let me know if you have any questions after the service.

Because I will not have, I can guarantee I will not have all the answers. But I will do my best. Let's pray. Father God, we come to you this morning just as we are.

[4 : 27] Not as we've heard we should be. Not as we think we should be. Not even as we hope we will be. But just as we are. And Lord, for many, if not all of us, we come in this moment with fear.

With anxiety. Because the headlines on our screens and in our papers are about the unknown. About a new disease that seems to be stalking the earth and stalking humanity.

But Lord, we know, we profess this morning, we declare this morning that you are in control. We know of your promise and your call which says, do not fear.

And Lord, we have to say that at times that promise may seem a little bit crazy to us. Or even a little bit unrealistic. And we wonder what you mean by that, Lord.

Because for sure, you don't mean that everything's fine. You'll take everything away or that everything will necessarily even be okay all the time.

[5 : 33] Father, perhaps it's a call to remind ourselves that our fear can be enfolded by something larger. Something that is not global in scope, but is bigger than the universe itself.

Something that is love. Something that embodies love. And God, that is you. We confess that we live in such an unusual and amazing time in history.

That we're not good at facing these kinds of global threats. We know that most of our ancestors were used to this sort of thing. They were used to living with the unknown because so much then was unknown.

They were more used to sickness and death than we are. Because it was all around them. So, Father, we acknowledge that our fear, that at times our lack of resilience, is actually a sign that we live in a time of great blessing.

Where the diseases that killed so many in our history are now managed with medication. And so we thank you for that, Lord.

[6 : 47] We also acknowledge the gift that it is to live in Canada. We pray for that, Lord. We pray for parts of the world this morning, Lord, that would be devastated were this virus to hit them.

Many of those areas have been hit, Lord. Where there is poverty. Where there is minimal health care. And just very little infrastructure or resilience to be able to deal with this virus.

Lord, we also pray for the many people who have been and will be affected by the associated economic impact. Father, for the millions of people in the global south who live close to the edge in terms of livelihood.

For whom a lack of economic growth means a difference between eating healthy food or perhaps just eating rice. Lord, it may be that more people will be harmed by the downturn in the global economy than by the virus itself.

And we pray for them. Lord, we also pray for one another. We pray that our fear will not cause us to turn on one another.

[8 : 17] As a people, as a society. Father, we pray that we will not keep resources from one another or withdraw from one another. We think of your people who lived centuries ago, Father.

Who were known for the fact that as others were fleeing plague-ridden cities, Christians were marching in. In order to care for the sick.

Knowing that if they had died, they would come alive again in the resurrection. Father, because of that, others also marveled at the courage and sacrifice of your people.

They wanted to know about the God who inspired these people. And we wish we could be like them. We wish we could be them, Lord.

At least we aspire to that. So, Lord, if this does go bad, we ask that you would fill us with your spirit.

[9 : 23] So that your church will become known for its courage, its hope, and its self-sacrifice. Because what a story that would be.

So, Lord, in the end, we long for more than a lack of fear. We pray for hope, faith, courage, conviction, resilience.

And we pray that you would make us a people who bear witness to a larger story than this current story that is gripping your world. And we ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Good morning, Bramar Baptist. That's nice. We wave from a distance.

So, I read many social media posts from other pastors and ministry leaders this week. Not surprisingly. I'm a reader. I'm a researcher. So, I was reading, this week I was reading health updates.

[10 : 31] And watching CNN for epidemiologist reports. And I was also watching what other pastors and ministry leaders were saying, were doing. And I was praying.

God, give me strength. Give me direction. Give me awareness. And it's interesting to note, even, so even in our congregation, people will have different perspectives on this current time.

Some pastors that I read decided to cancel services immediately. Immediately. No question. Didn't even, you know, as soon as they heard one whiff of any sort of risk, shut everything down.

Full stop. Others, I was talking to Sig about this this morning, others are at the extreme opposite end of the scale. God will protect us. We will do nothing different than we have been doing.

That's fine that health is at risk. That's fine that experts are saying this is unwise. We will do no differently than we ever have. Is that right?

[11 : 37] I don't know. So my point in that is extend each other grace. Whether it's people, your brothers and sisters in our church or elsewhere, other people that you talk to, whether they are people of faith or not.

Because everyone has a perspective. Everyone has filters. And so just extend each other grace. That would be my request. So our church landed, we landed in between.

So we've prayerfully chosen a course that considers the perspective of health and health experts, as well as what we feel is in the best interest for our church family and those with whom we interact.

So this isn't just about our own health. This is about the health of people with whom we interact beyond our church. And so I also recognize that some pastors have decided to preach this morning focusing specifically on the health crisis.

They chucked everything out, started from scratch. But I have prayerfully chosen to acknowledge and address it. But also to continue to preach what God had already led me to preach this morning, for this Sunday.

[12 : 55] So here we go. Have you ever heard someone say that something was so good that it was scary? That idea seems like such a contradiction, doesn't it?

And yet we hear that expression more often than we might think. If you think about it, you probably hear it quite often. People might describe a hockey player, sorry, my analogy, hockey player as being so fast, someone like Connor McDavid, so fast and so skilled that it is scary.

Or we might hear someone refer to a skilled guitarist, we have no Vern here this morning, to a skilled guitarist's musical abilities or a ballet dancer's strength and poise and stamina as being scary good.

You may have heard expressions like that used, right? But how can that be? How does that even make sense at all? If something is inherently good, then how can it be scary?

Shouldn't it be encouraging and uplifting and all the other words that we associate and we consider with the idea of good? Ice cream!

[14 : 12] Not that scary. Unless you don't like ice cream or you're lactose intolerant, then maybe very scary. But I'd suggest that peanut butter chocolate ice cream, scary good!

So good! Oh, Myrna's shaking her head. And something scary, something scary is just something that frightens us, right? We might be scared in our current situation facing COVID-19, facing the unknown of health risks that we've never faced before.

And for whatever reason, people have decided over the past four weeks that they need to hoard mass quantities of toilet paper. And I apologize if you're one of those people.

I am not. So it leaves us with some to consider the scary possibility of at some point being wiped out. To me, that, something like that is, sorry, I couldn't resist.

To me, saying something like that, that kind of a risk is scary good, suggests that a person, an act, an event, seems to somehow defy all logic.

[15 : 32] Defy our expectations of what has come before. Scary good. Someone or something that acts and behaves in a way that somehow makes no sense, and yet makes perfect sense at the same time.

Did I lose you? Operating at a whole different level of good. So when we witness something, or someone, usually someone, with exceptional skill or abilities, people may say, who is this guy?

Or how can she do something like that? When Jesus Christ came into public ministry, people made those kinds of statements.

Who is this? How can he have such wisdom? How can he do that? This morning, our sermon is titled, Jesus' Ministry Begins.

And I'm going to suggest that in his early ministry, Jesus Christ was indeed scary good. The Bible fast forwards a bit in the gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

[16 : 57] And it moves quickly from his birth and his early years to the beginning of his ministry as an adult in his early 30s. And so we see Jesus appear back on the scene in the story in Matthew 3.

Scholars suggest that approximately 30 years passed between chapters 2 and 3 of Matthew. Have you ever thought of that before?

A little fast forward there. And during that time, Jesus lived in Nazareth and worked as a carpenter. And it's also helpful to note that during that period in the Bible, in Scripture, it has been 400 years since God's people had heard from a prophet.

Do you remember our journey through this story, through the Old Testament? Prophet, prophet, prophet, prophet, over and over and over. And yet none for 400 years until John the Baptist appeared.

And as I've taken our Baptist identity course through my course through Cary, I've learned that we didn't get the name from him. We're not Baptist because of John. People do believe that, which is kind of interesting to me.

[18 : 22] John the Baptist appeared. He appeared preaching repentance and baptizing people with the authority of heaven. The baptism that John brought fulfilled two purposes.

First, it prepared the nation of Christ. And second, the nation for Christ, pardon me. And second, it presented Christ to the nation.

And we learn here that the baptism of Jesus, we learn about that and it is good. The Bible says in Matthew 3, 13 to 17, go ahead and flip to that in your Bible if you want or turn it on or listen as I read it.

I'll read it for us this morning. I'll give you a moment. Page is flipping. Matthew 3, 13 to 17. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

But John tried to deter him saying, well, I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me? Jesus replied, let it be so now.

[19 : 42] It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. righteousness. And then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.

At that moment, heaven was opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, this is my Son whom I love.

With him I am well pleased. Have you ever thought about what happened in that moment? At Jesus' baptism, at his baptism, the sky ripped open and a voice declared from heaven, this is my Son whom I love.

imagine if you'd been there to hear that. See, that strikes me personally as scary good.

A voice from heaven. That doesn't happen every day. An audible voice. But have you ever thought to yourself, as you considered the baptism of Jesus, I have.

[21 : 05] Baptism is for sinners, isn't it? I see some nods. So, wait a minute. Yet the Son of God, this man, sinless man, Jesus Christ, was baptized.

Why? For what? God's people were hungry for a spiritual reality. And by being baptized, Jesus did two things.

Here's another group of two. First, Jesus' baptism gave approval to John's ministry. Jesus, identified as the Messiah, was giving John cred, giving his ministry value and weight and significance.

Jesus was endorsing John's work and his words. And second, Jesus was identifying himself with common people and sinners.

The very people he came to save. By being baptized, Jesus was declaring, this that I do now is for you and I'm not above it and I don't fail to recognize it.

[22 : 24] God said, but Jesus' literal, physical baptism by John also pictured his future baptism, his death and his resurrection.

So it's not a coincidence that that is what our own baptism symbolizes as well. Rebirth into new life.

In Matthew 4, we read an account of Jesus being confronted by the devil in the wilderness and that was scary. The Bible says in Matthew 4, 1-11, again I'll read this for us so have a look if you want to follow along.

Matthew 4, 1-11. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, remember our conversation about Lent a few weeks ago, he was hungry.

The tempter came to him and said, if you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[23 : 44] Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down.

For it is written, he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. Jesus answered him, it is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor. All this I will give to you, he said, if you bow down and worship me. me. Jesus said to him, away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. So you may have heard this story before, or it may be new to you, but if you ever stop to think, the devil, Satan, is not an imaginary figure.

[25 : 06] He's not a cartoon character. He's not the guy with the pointy horns and the forked tail that you see in certain times of the year. He is a real being with very real power.

And this encounter between Jesus and Satan is real, and it is very scary. especially for us. There was another time in the Bible when Satan very personally and directly appealed to human weakness and temptation.

Genesis. In the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Jesus so powerfully counters Satan's temptations, and he uses a very specific tactic and weapon.

scripture. Each time Jesus is tempted, he refers to God and the word of God. And so while Adam and Eve lost the original bout with Satan, Jesus won the rematch.

Scripture makes it clear that evil finds its origin with the devil, with Satan. the word devil is from the Greek word diabolos, which comes from a verb which means to divide.

[26 : 36] It's also the origin of the English word diabolical. So as we've recognized and confirmed this morning, the devil, Satan, is not a myth.

He's a very real being who wants to divide us from God and from one another. Satan uses confusion, conflict, pride, misunderstanding.

You've probably seen all of these tactics used. To drive wedges between people, to fracture relationships, he loves stirring things up.

Satan tried to take Jesus out in person by taking his best shot. But Jesus, as we read in Scripture, didn't even blink.

Jesus stood his ground and that was scary. Scary good. But Satan doesn't give up easily.

[27 : 45] He's tenacious. Jesus was also confronted by the devil through the religious leaders of his day. The Bible says in Luke 6, 6-11.

Again, you can follow along as I read this. Luke 6, 6-11. On another Sabbath, he, Jesus, went into the synagogue and was teaching.

And a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

But Jesus knew what they were thinking and he said to the man with the shriveled hand, get up and stand in front of everyone. So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath?

To do good or to do evil? To save life or destroy it? He looked around at them all and then said to the man, stretch out your hand.

[28 : 59] He did so and his hand was completely restored. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

It's been suggested that as many as 6,000 Pharisees and Sadducees, religious leaders at the time, were jealous of Jesus' impact, were jealous of his influence on people, and they began to conspire to have him killed.

In healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, Jesus was declaring boldly that God's work, God's will at work through him in bringing healing, was more important than any sense of religious rules that were at play.

The religious leaders objected to Jesus' actions, actions, but he stared them down with the anger of God because their hearts were hardened.

There was one religious leader that we read about who was a notable exception to the others who were hostile. His name was Nicodemus.

[30 : 24] The Bible talks about Nicodemus in John 3, 2-16. And there's such a great interaction there that reveals a great deal about Jesus' compassion and how he challenges people.

So I encourage you to read that story, that passage for yourselves. John 3, 2-16. Nicodemus was a high-ranking religious leader and he came to Jesus at night, recognizing him somehow.

Jesus was somehow an agent of God. Nicodemus is not hostile towards Jesus. He's actually curious, we read, and he wants to know more.

And as they talk together, Jesus talks to Nicodemus about being reborn in order to enter heaven. And it's probably not too surprising, it's a weird concept for some people, that Nicodemus is confused by that.

He's confused by Jesus referring to being born again. He says, how can that happen when I'm already old? How can I be reborn? Nicodemus hears, but he doesn't understand.

[31 : 42] He takes Jesus' words in a very literal way, as referring to a literal, physical rebirth, rather than a spiritual one.

Nicodemus wants to know, but he isn't ready to trust and believe yet. Trust and believe who Jesus is.

and recognizing how believing in who Jesus is can actually change his life. This rebirth that Jesus speaks of, like our first birth, is something over which we have no control.

Rebirth is not something we can choose. We can choose to recognize God, we can choose to accept Jesus, but ultimately our rebirth is not something we can make happen any more than our original birth we could control.

It is a miracle from God. Accepting Jesus, being reborn, is not just a second chance.

[32 : 56] It's a new beginning. In C.S. Lewis' book, in his series, The Chronicles of Narnia, the children ask Mr.

and Mrs. Beaver if Aslan the lion is safe. And the beavers reply to the children, no, Aslan is not safe.

But he is good. Like Aslan the lion, Jesus Christ is scary good.

John 3.16 says, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

for anyone who is aligned with the devil or chooses to reject God, Jesus is not safe. He is scary.

[34 : 07] But if you desire to be born again, to live your life with and for Jesus, he is very, very good.

God, if you don't know Jesus, or if you don't currently live your life in submission to him, please ask me about that.

Because my friends, you deserve to live a life, to have an eternity that's scary good. And Jesus is the only way to make that happen.

let's pray. Father God, thank you for your power, for your might, for your scary goodness, for your love for us.

Father, thank you that through the very human example of Jesus, we can see that your power prevails, that by leaning into you and trusting in you and your word, we will be victorious.

[35 : 22] Father, we are living in an uncertain time right now, but we remember that you are in control, and that all things will work together for your good according to your purpose.

Father, Father, as we go into the coming days as a church, not physically united at all times, in a greater community, in this place, Father, remind us daily, even moment by moment, that we are part of this family, in this place.

We are a family of believers here at Bramart. Father, and no matter what may come, we will continue to be a family with you as our Father. We love you and we thank you that you first loved us, and we thank you that you will continue to be with us in the unknown, and you are scary good.

we pray these things in your name. Amen.