

The Story: Who is Jesus?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 April 2020

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Sunday, April the 5th. Good morning on this bright sunny Sunday wherever you're watching from. I'm in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. And so of course here, it's a springtime, but it's a snowy spring. So we're still a bit snowy here. But good morning to anyone who's watching. Good morning as well to people who will be watching in the future, people who will be watching once this is posted afterwards. So just to be aware of the fact that this morning's broadcast will be posted on the Braemar Baptist Church Facebook page. It will remain there so people can watch it from there and people can direct others to watch it there.

What I also do is we recently launched a YouTube channel. So if you're a YouTube person, you can go to YouTube and look for Braemar Baptist Church and you'll find our new YouTube channel. And I'll be posting this video there as well as taking the audio from this presentation this morning, from this morning's broadcast and putting it on our website. So we'll be doing some of those things. So you're here already, but if you want to know our Facebook page, it's Braemar Baptist on Facebook. So if you want to point anyone to it, please like us on Facebook. We appreciate that. And then you'll get notifications of when we're going live and when some other things are happening. This is one of our main communication tools right now. Our website is BraemarBaptist.com.

So please go to BraemarBaptist.com for any information and updates and things like that. So BraemarBaptist.com. We're using the, of course, the low-tech method of sharing some of this information on the screen. If you'd like to give to our church, please, if you're part of our church and would like to give, good morning, Eileen. That's donations at BraemarBaptist. So you can go to, you can go and set up a new e-donation through your, your online banking and you can do that.

[2 : 2 7] Donations at BraemarBaptist.com. If you have prayer requests, we encourage you to send those to prayer at BraemarBaptist.com. And that's a dedicated email address, prayer at BraemarBaptist.com. And we'll make sure that we're praying for you. If you'd like to receive our e-newsletter, that's something else we're doing right now. Just send an email to info at BraemarBaptist.com. And just let them know that you would like to receive our email newsletter and we'll make sure that you get added to that distribution list. That goes out during the week. So you'll, you'll be connected to that. And, oh, there's a back page. So if you are a podcast kind of person, you can find BraemarCast, which is the podcast version of our sermons, dating back to, gosh, about a year and a half now. So you can look for us on Spotify or Apple Podcasts. And we are BraemarCast. That's our, that is our, our podcast. So good morning, everyone. I do have some sun shining in my eyes. So I'm going to try not to frown. I'll try and try and keep my eyebrows unfurled and unclenched. But good morning for April 5th, which is Palm Sunday. So some of us, some people who are watching are from our church. So good morning to people from Braemar Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. You already know me.

There are others though, who are watching and who will be watching afterwards who are from other places in the world. So welcome this morning. There are a lot of options for you to be engaging in church and experiencing church in your life right now online. And so we appreciate you joining us this morning and welcome. We would love to welcome you into our building, but for now we'll welcome you into our virtual home. And that's something I want to draw attention to is the fact that we are the church. So I am not the church in a building. You are not the church in a building. The church is not a building, whether it's a cathedral or a home church or a church that meets in Africa or Canada or China. The church is the body of Christ and that is people. And so good morning to everyone who's good morninging me and hopefully others can see those comments as well. So as I'm saying, the church is us, the church is the body of Christ, people who believe in Christ around the world. So just because we cannot meet in person in a building does not mean

that church does not exist, that the church has somehow disappeared or gone away. We are the church in a different way. And so I encourage each one of you that you are still part of the church around the world. You're still part of, if this is your church, then you're still part of this as well. And I will continue to be your pastor in the new way that this is right now. So this morning, I'll be leading us in celebrating communion together. And you may be thinking to yourself, well, nobody, nobody FedExed or dropped off my

Welch's grape juice or my little crackers. Well, don't panic. Because what I want to encourage you to do is gather whatever you have. So I have next to me a glass of water. That's okay. I do have a glass of a little bit of grape juice and that's okay too. But you know what? No one's judging you and no one can see what you're using as your communion element. So you use whatever you have handy. I have a saltine cracker and that's just fine. I also have a cheese flavored cracker. I won't use the brand name, but there are lots of options. You can cut yourself a small piece of bread and use that. So take a moment if there's someone in your home to gather just a small glasses of water or juice or crackers and that kind of thing, because we will be celebrating communion later together. So, and I'll be explaining that a little bit more.

So, no one's going to be surprised when I say our world is a very different place these days, right? It's a different place from what we're used to. It's a different place from what is familiar to us and it's also important that we recognize that. I could sit here and preach and pretend that the world is not the way it is, but that would be foolish and that would be dishonest. And so let's recognize together that the world is not as it was. And yet, see, our circumstances have changed. And for some of us, likely radically. And I want to recognize that. It's important that we recognize that.

[7 : 35] And it's important that we recognize some of the things that we're struggling with. And some of you may be watching or listening this morning and may be thinking, today is Palm Sunday. Today is Palm Sunday. And so I need the comfort of that. I need you as a pastor, Pastor Kent, to talk about Palm Sunday and what that means, because that's what I always do at this time of year. And I need that. I need that continuity and that peace and confidence. And so, you know what?

We will talk about that. And others of you may be saying, well, we were doing this great sermon series in the story and talking about the upper story of God and the lower story of humanity and how those two stories are coming together in intentional ways throughout Scripture in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And to this day, how our stories and the story of God are still interacting, are still integrated. Our story is still part of God's story. So aren't we going to continue in the story and our sermon series on that? And my friends, the answer to both those questions is yes, and I will get there. But I felt a need to speak to something else that I believe is even more of a focus for us these days, for many of us, if not all of us. At times of crisis, people may look to pastors or ministers or priests, members of the clergy, for answers to things like, how do I deal with this?

What's going to happen? What do I do? Should I pray more? Should I pray less? Is it okay that I'm angry at God? Is it okay that I'm worried about tomorrow, let alone next week? And I don't want to disappoint you this morning, but I don't have all the answers. And I may not even have the answers that you're looking for. And I want to encourage you, hopefully, by telling you that I've asked many of those questions myself. In these days, I've experienced anxiety and confusion. And I can probably also recognize ways in which I have tried to maintain some kind of control. I am constantly cleaning kitchen counters and hand washing dishes and washing and folding laundry. And ladies are probably saying, wow, this guy's a treasure. You should cherish him. And so, but I recognize that's my way of maintaining control. Yes, it's my way of showing love to the people that I'm stuck with right now. But it's also my way of maintaining some sort of normalcy, maintaining some sort of schedule and structure. And I think that's very important. But I also want to seek to bring you some comfort this morning. Because no matter how strange and scary our circumstances might be right now, and they are, I want to encourage you that God is still in control. I've said to several people over the past week or two, God did not suddenly wake up one morning and say, pandemic? Oh my goodness, what do I do now? God didn't say, how long is this going to last? He knows. He didn't say, who will it affect? How will it affect them? He knows. He knows that you're scared. He knows that you're worried. He knows that you've lost your job and you're afraid of how you're going to pay your bills. He knows. And talk to him about that. This past week, my wife went on antibiotics for an infected tooth. And as you can imagine, pretty much impossible to have dentistry treatment done right now. So she went on the antibiotic about a week ago. And we thought, you know, great, this will get the infection under control. She'll feel better. And that's exactly how it played out.

Until Monday night, this past Monday. So Monday night, she began to react to the antibiotic that had been helping her. So it was a mild reaction at first hives, itchiness, swelling, things like that pretty mild on Monday night. The middle of the night Tuesday, she woke me up and her face was swollen.

She had passed out twice. So all of a sudden, again, a normal situation, relatively normal, which we felt had come under control was now completely out of control again. So the good news is, I'll fast forward a bit. She's struggled all this week. We had, we have a good friend who's also a pastor, who's a dentist and through his connections has been able to get an extraction appointment for my wife. So as I preach right now, my wife is having that infected tooth removed. So there's God's provision. There's God stepping in through people through connections to bring healing, bring wholeness, bring comfort and peace when nothing we seem to be able to do can do that for us.

[13:03] So I'm, I'm partly thinking to myself, in my brain, I hope my wife is doing okay, but I'm also here to connect with you. As you can imagine, I took my wife over to emergency and given COVID-19, I was not able to go into the hospital with her. So they took her in admitted her the other night in the middle of the night, well, 10pm, Wednesday night, I couldn't go in. And the last thing I wanted to do is go home. So I spent four hours sitting in our car, alternating between, between warming up the car and turning it off for four hours. So it triggered a bout of sciatica for me. So now I have not slept for a few nights, and I'm sitting here somewhat in agony. But, but see, there, there are things about our health, things about the reality of our lives that we just can't control. And so that's where we have to, we're, we're called to cry out to God and say, help us, Lord, we need you. And so my wife is doing better. She reacted in a very strong anaphylactic way to the antibiotic they gave her. And she will get better. But it was very scary for both of us. But again, we can see already, though, that God was in control throughout that entire situation. And that the prayers of others interceding on our behalf made a difference, and are continuing to make a difference in provision, in comfort, in healing, in all of these things.

The Bible says in the book of Philippians chapter four, verses six and seven, do not be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The book of Philippians was written, if you don't know, by the Apostle Paul. And if anyone had a reason to worry, it was Paul. I'm reading a biography on him right now, not because I'm a pastor, not because I'm a geek, a theology geek, well, maybe, but I'm enjoying it immensely. It's written by a Christian theologian named N. T. Wright. And you may have heard of him. And his last name is W-R-I-G-H-T.

If you're interested in Paul, and his life, and what he experienced, get that book and read it. It's extremely encouraging, and I'm loving it every minute of it. But as a central leader of the early church, Paul was dealing with conflict and division among the people of the churches, at the cities of Philippi and Rome. And even more than that, Paul was being more and more closely examined by political and religious leaders who saw him as a threat. He was this new leader of this strange new movement of followers of Jesus Christ, a man who had been crucified and died. The Romans thought it was done. The Romans thought this problem was taken care of.

And yet it came back because Christ was not dead. But Paul had every reason to be worried, to be anxious about the unknown, to about the circumstances of his life. It was the circumstances of his life were even unknown. But instead, instead of agonizing and worrying and stressing about the unknown of his life, Paul took his time in prison, when his health was compromised, his freedom was gone, he took the time to explain to us the secret of having victory over worry. Are you ready?

[17:15] The Greek word that's translated into the English word worry in Philippians 4 verse 6 means to be pulled in different directions. So maybe you recognize that for yourself right now. Do you recognize that?

You listen to the news. You listen to the news. And it pulls you one way. You talk to your friends or your family who have their own views or opinions.

And it's another way. There's no shortage of information, of theories, of projections. We hear about flattening the curve. Dr. Theresa Tam, the Canadian senior medical officer, talks about planking the curve. She wants to be even more aggressive.

We hear numbers out of New York and other places in the US. The US is now the highest infection and death rate due to COVID-19. Higher than Spain, which was terrifying. Higher than Italy, which

was terrifying. Higher than China.

So we're seeing day by day statistics and statistical models. Prime Minister Trudeau even shared new models for Canada are coming and they're serious.

[18 : 34] So it's about staying home. It's about changing our expectations. Not only for our own safety, but for the safety of others. And so while many of these sources of information are good, they're helpful. It's important to know these things. It's important to be informed.

We also need to recognize that by engaging constantly in all of these different sources and all of these different connections, things that are pulling us in all kinds of different directions. Almost all often at the same time.

And so our hopes for an end to this pandemic and everything to just return to normal. Does everyone want that? I want to wake up tomorrow and have it be like Groundhog Day, the movie. I want it to be like I start over. Everything's the same. Everything's gone exactly back to exactly the way it was. And so that's that'll pull us in one direction. And then our fears about all the mights, the what ifs, all of those things will pull us in a different direction.

And friends, that's the reality is our new normal will probably not look like three weeks ago or four weeks ago before our world was turned upside down by COVID-19.

[19 : 58] The world to which we return will not look the same. And I'm not talking about plants and animals. I'm talking about the realities of hygiene, the realities of social interaction.

And dear God, and I mean that with all sincerity, dear God, may our priorities be reoriented in better ways.

May we begin to remember, if not now, I bet you you're remembering it right now, what is truly important in your life.

So at times, as we're pulled in different directions, you may even feel like you're being pulled apart. At times, I do. I listen to a bit of news and then I have to watch something else.

I have to read. I have to go for a walk. I have to do something else. Because being pulled in different directions can feel like you're being pulled apart. And so the old English word from which we get our word worry actually means, this won't surprise you, to strangle.

[21 : 14] Let that sink in for a moment. To strangle. Do you at times feel like the unknown of our current circumstances, this uncertainty, the anxiety, the stress, at times, does it make you feel like you're being suffocated or strangled?

I can confess that I have felt that way. And at times when I experience stress, it triggers a condition that I have that has shown up a few times in my life that is called temporary global amnesia.

And I had a bout of it last week. So when that happens to me, it's usually triggered by stress, we think. When it happens to me, my brain essentially stops recording.

It stops writing new memories. And I enter a cognitive state in which I have no memories of any kind. None. I enter a dead zone of no memory, no recall, nothing like that.

I just enter a section as though my tape has been erased. So I know where I am in the moment, but I have no recall. I know who I am, but the hard drive of my brain stops recording new memories.

[22 : 37] My wife actually recorded with her phone a conversation that she and I had during that episode. And I, it was scary because I repeated things over and over.

I would ask a question. She would respond. A few moments later, I would ask the same question again. She had just explained moments before. And I appeared to people, I appeared to my son to be a bit muddled and confused.

And thankfully, these episodes do resolve on their own. They're not a sign of a symptom of a more serious condition. But they leave me with these very strange and somewhat disturbing memory gaps from the time period in which they happened.

And so for me, stress and anxiety seemed to flip a switch. And they caused very real issues for me. So if you're someone who worries, maybe you get headaches.

Do you get neck pain? Do you get ulcers? Even back pain? Worry affects our thinking, our digestion, even our coordination.

[23 : 47] And Paul gives us a great perspective on worry. He says that worry affects us in two ways. First, worry is wrong thinking or a wrong focus in our minds.

And second, worry is a wrong feeling in our hearts about circumstances, about people, about things.

Worrying has been referred to as the greatest thief of joy. The greatest thief of joy is worry. And it's pretty hard to feel joyful or happy or grateful when we're preoccupied by worries or anxieties.

And I'm sure you'd agree. If you're worried or anxious, that is all you can manage quite often. And worrying simply cannot change our circumstances in and of itself.

It's not the answer. And it's ultimately not the solution. The Bible says in Matthew 6 verse 27, and I shared this in a sermon a few weeks ago.

[24 : 56] Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Show of hands, anyone? By worrying, can you add a single day to your life?

I'm going to answer no for you. But have you ever tried to tell yourself or maybe someone else, oh, quit worrying. Stop worrying. Don't worry.

It's meant to be helpful, but it's not always that helpful, right? Viewing worry as a thief of our joy.

Author Warren Wiersbe, he's a great commentator, Bible commentator, suggests that because worry, he describes worry as an inside job, as though it's a crime.

Because it's something that happens in our mind. And as worry happens internally, it's hard to capture that thief. It's an inside job and you can't capture the thief.

[25 : 58] And Paul actually gives us three tools to help us conquer worry and experience a secure mind. Right praying, right thinking, and right living.

And Paul suggests some perspectives for prayer. And I'll be preaching a series on prayer in July.

So I'm not going to steal too much of my own content. But we need to begin with prayer.

When we worry, it means that we're focusing more on our circumstances than how God is ultimately in control of our circumstances.

Do you see that? When we are worrying, we're focusing on our circumstances themselves and forgetting that God is in control of those circumstances.

So when you're worried, when you're facing the unknown, I want to encourage you to start in prayer. As soon as you begin to feel a wave of worry crash on your shore, the shore of your mind, start in prayer.

[27 : 06] Acknowledge those worries and bring them to God. Because guess what? He knows the struggle that you're having. He knows you're worried. He knows you're anxious.

So bring it to Him. And don't be afraid to claim that you need His help. And I think that you can see here that worry becomes a matter of perspective.

And it's about how we reorient our perspective so that worry has less power over us. And I think we'd agree, maybe you'll agree with me, that the opposite...

Sorry, I keep shifting, but my leg is killing me. If we'd agree that the opposite of worry is peace, right? Peace involves both the heart and the mind.

So as we seek peace, we need to refocus our thinking. The Bible says in Isaiah 26 verse 3, You, speaking of God, will keep in perfect peace Him whose mind is steadfast because He trusts in you.

[28 : 18] Perfect peace in God. And we've all experienced situations when we convince ourselves that something must be true.

Simply because we think it's true. Right? Our thoughts can have a great deal of power on our words, on our actions, on every area of our lives.

By focusing our thoughts on God and not allowing our minds to wander those never-ending roads of what-ifs, if-onlys...

By focusing on God and not allowing our minds to wander there, we allow less opportunity for worry to take hold. I am an over-thinker.

And many of you who are watching know that. I confess that. People I live with in my house know that. I am a filterer.

[29 : 21] I will filter and filter and filter. I will over-analyze. I will over-think. And yet that's not helpful. It's wise to filter.

It's wise to research, to think, to use wise counsel. But at some point move forward.

Because if you stay in that cycle of over-processing and over-processing, that's when worry begins to take hold. You begin to become paralyzed and unable to move forward because of worry of the unknown.

And I want to take... I want you to take comfort in something this morning. None of what is happening... and I touched on this a little bit earlier. None of what is happening right now is a surprise to God.

None of it. You got that? None of what is happening right now. Not enough toilet paper. People staying inside in isolation.

[30 : 28] The fact that you can only ride one person in a taxi or an Uber now. The driver and one passenger. None of this is a surprise. The respirator issues that are around the world.

None of it. The fact that Sweden is taking their own stance that makes no sense to the rest of the world. None of it is a surprise.

God is aware of every person in the world. He's aware of... and I'm including you in that, my friends. He's aware of your circumstances right now.

He's aware of your needs. And at this very moment, God says, I see you. I know you.

I've got you. The unknown of our circumstances right now, the unknown in the coming days, will cause us to worry.

[31 : 30] And that doesn't make us bad people. You're not a big sinner just because you're worried about your circumstances. That's what the unknown does. You know what it makes you?

Human. It makes you human to worry when things are unknown. But... Where do you turn when things are unknown and you begin to worry?

Turn to God. He's got this. But as you recognize yourself beginning to worry, Even if you need to do this moment by moment, And I hope and pray that you will.

Pause as you begin to worry and pray. I don't care if it's five seconds. God, I'm worried. God, help me. God, I don't know what's going to happen with this.

You've got it. Help me trust that you've got it. Ask Him for help. It's okay. Try to put your current worry or worries into words.

[32 : 39] And I think we become paralyzed by a desire to pray perfectly. A desire to pray in the right moment, in the right place, in the right words, at the right time, following the right meal, before the right meal.

Wearing the right clothes, too fancy, not fancy enough, too casual to pray. None of that matters. God does not care. Pray to Him.

He wants you to talk to Him. And He's here to listen. Put your worries into words and ask God to take them from you.

Ask Him to help you to have peace in the middle of your uncertainty. Friends, even during these uncertain times, God is in control.

He never wasn't. So far, I've given you some facts, some tips, and hopefully they're helpful.

[33 : 43] But unless knowledge is put into action, it remains useless. Unless knowledge is put into action, it remains useless. It remains just knowledge.

So I know it's not always easy to be at peace when everything is uncertain. Or at times when things are dangerous. Our circumstances right now are in some ways dangerous.

But we need to recognize that if we are surrendering our worries to God, and if we're seeking to focus our minds on God, then our actions and our outward behavior should reflect the focus of our prayers and thoughts.

Sorry, there's no way to make that less heavy than it sounds. So I'll do it again. If we need to recognize, if we're surrendering our worries to God, and if we are seeking to focus our minds on God, these are all the facts pieces, then our actions and our outward behavior should reflect the focus of our prayers and thoughts.

Do you have that? So our outward attitude, our outward behavior needs to reflect the fact that what I've encouraged us to do is to surrender our worries to God, to ask Him for help, to try and refocus our thoughts from worries to God.

[35 : 18] So do your actions reflect someone who is seeking to maintain control over their own life in uncertain circumstances?

Do your actions reflect someone who is trying, if I can only do this, if I can only hoard enough supplies, if I can only do a certain thing a certain number of times, if I can only go into the office once a week instead of working from home, if I can only go for a drive when I really should stay home?

Do your actions reflect a desire to maintain control? Or do they reflect someone who is reaching out to God for comfort and peace, and laying their worries at God's feet?

Do your actions reflect someone who is seeking to maintain control over their own life? I'm not saying that if you're not doing that every day, there's something wrong with you or your faith is

somehow deficient. Don't hear me say that. But are your thoughts pulled in every possible direction at every moment of the day as you fret and stew and wring your hands?

Or are you seeking to be aware of that important health information, seeking to be aware of world events, but then focusing your thoughts on what God is doing in the world. What does God want for you to learn right now? What does God want your focus to be? What does God need your focus to be? What are the needs around you? You know we hear about people donating money to the food bank. Maybe that's something that you can do. You know are there people in your life that you haven't connected with in a long time? Are there relationships that have been strained that you can work on healing? That's a good thing to do.

[37 : 29] And you know what? There's nothing wrong with spending some time reading a book or watching TV or making a puzzle with your family because we are supposed to stay home. So just remember to focus. Remember to look for opportunities that God may be putting right in front of you. He may be asking you or seeking for you to be a source of comfort to someone else in your life. It may not be about you. It may be about someone who needs you to be Jesus to them. Does that make sense? Someone may need you and Jesus may be asking you to step in. And friends God is always near to you in every moment. And I encourage you to talk to him about your worries. Even ask him as I said before to help you to let go of them. Because worrying and holding on to it is not going to be healthy for you. It gives you sciatica and makes it hard for you to sleep at night.

So try to let go of your worries and trust that God will meet your needs. He'll show up. God always shows up. And often in ways that we can't possibly imagine.

Have you asked for God to provide for you financially? And there's no check in the mail? And yet someone showed up and gave you a meal?

Or someone showed up and covered some sort of expense that you had in your life? It's the same thing. It's done in a different way. Because God knows better. And God will provide better than we can imagine.

Or we can conceive of. And so I mentioned earlier that today is Palm Sunday. So I want to share a short reflection on that.

[39 : 29] That I read this week. And it was meaningful to me. And I hope it's meaningful to you. Palm Sunday is the day in our church calendar when we reflect on what is known as the triumphal entry.

And it's the time when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey. A cult. Mark 11 tells this story. And it's also included in the other gospels.

And I encourage you to read about that on your own. There's some homework for you. That I'll mark next Sunday. No, I won't mark it. But there's some homework. So Mark 11 tells us that Jesus, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people shouted, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our Father David that is to come. Hosanna in the highest.

And we face quite a contrast of experiences and emotions as we consider not just this event, but the week that follows. Because the triumphal entry that we celebrate, that we recognize on Palm Sunday, is the story of Jesus being welcomed into Jerusalem with great joy and exultation.

[40 : 47] Hosanna! They cried. Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus was treated exactly how he should have been treated.

People were excited to see him. And there was much excitement. There was joy. There was celebration. But this excitement quickly turned to shock and horror.

As we move through this week towards the events of Good Friday. And those events culminated with Jesus hanging in the cross, saying, crying out, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And with that, scripture tells us, Jesus gave out a loud cry and breathed his last.

How things could change in one short week. How appropriate a reflection for now. What happened to all those people who were shouting and praising him as he entered Jerusalem?

[41 : 59] How could they allow him to enter into crucifixion and ultimately death? The deepest answer to this question is one that we might not expect.

And that is that the Father willed it. The Father willed by his permissive will so that many would turn to him.

Ultimately, they would abandon Jesus. They would allow him to be crucified. And this is so important for us to understand. At any time during that first holy week, Jesus could have exercised his divine power and refused to embrace his cross.

But he didn't. Instead, Jesus willingly walked through this week, anticipating and embracing the suffering and rejection that he received.

And he didn't do so begrudgingly or even with regret. He embraced this week willingly. And choosing it as his own will.

[43 : 11] Why would he do such a thing? Why would Jesus have chosen suffering and death when he could have walked away?

Because in the Father's perfect wisdom, the suffering and death, this suffering and death, was for a greater purpose.

God chose to confound the wisdom of the world. To confound expectations. By using the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus.

As the perfect means to secure our redemption. In this act, in this act of crucifixion and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God transformed the greatest evil. As he always does. Into the greatest good. The cross remains a silent and constant reminder.

[44 : 19] That not even the greatest of evils. Can overcome the power, the wisdom, and the love of God. God is more powerful than death itself.

And God has the final victory. Even when all seems lost. May this holy week. May this road to Good Friday and Easter.

bring you hope for your own life. And for your own eternity. So often we can be tempted towards discouragement.

And even worse, we can be tempted towards despair. Worry, discouragement, despair. These are human conditions. And especially in these days of the pandemic.

The many worries that come from that. We can be caught in despair. Caught in worry. Caught in anxiety. But all is not lost for us either.

[45 : 23] Nothing can ultimately steal away our joy. Unless we let it. So friends, don't let worry steal your joy. No hardship.

No burden. No cross. Can conquer us. If we remain steadfast in Christ Jesus. If we let him transform all that we endure in life.

The eternal sacrifice of his own cross. We'll restore. So reflect today. Reflect this week upon the contrast of emotions.

From Palm Sunday. Through to Good Friday. Think about the fear. The confusion. The despair. That many would have had. When they saw Jesus murdered.

Reflect also upon this being a divine act. Through which the Father permitted this grave suffering. So as to use it for the greatest good.

[46 : 26] Ever known. The Lord gave his life freely. And he calls you to do the same. So reflect upon the circumstances or challenges.

That may be the burden. Or the cross in your life. Know that the Lord can use these challenges. Use the hard, difficult circumstances.

Through which you're going right now. To bring forth an abundance of mercy. When you offer it to him as a willing sacrifice.

Say God take this from me. And use it. Use it to shape me. Use it in me to change me. God may not remove it.

But God will use it. May God bless each of you this Holy Week. Let's pray. Lord, when I'm tempted to despair or worry.

[47 : 25] Give me hope. Help me to see your presence in all things. Even in those things that are most troubling to me. May this Holy Week transform my darkest moments in weakness.

As I surrender all to you. My God. Jesus, I trust in you. Amen. So in the interest of making this the longest sermon you've ever experienced.

But you're at home. So you could be wearing your pajamas. So it doesn't really matter. I want to touch this morning briefly. Just a few moments in our sermon series on the story. A lot to pack in this week.

But I want us to consider for a few moments. Who is Jesus? Which I think is a pretty appropriate topic during the week leading up to Easter. Mark 8 verse 29.

We read that Jesus gathered his disciples together and asked them. Who do people say that I am? So who did people say that Jesus was?

[48 : 29] Particularly during his time on earth? Well, some thought Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead. Maybe you've never heard that one before.

Others thought Jesus was the prophet Elijah. Still others thought he was one of the other Old Testament prophets. Like Jeremiah, for example. Jesus then asked the disciples directly.

Now, who do you say that I am? Peter answered first. As he often did. Saying that you are the Messiah.

You are the Son of God. And that question reverberates, I think, still throughout history. Who is this guy?

Who is this Jesus? So we're just going to take a few moments to look at that this morning. Every thoughtful person, including each of us watching or listening this morning, must raise and ask this question for ourselves.

[49 : 36] Just as in Jesus' day, there were various popular answers. Also, there are many answers in our time.

So let's consider a few of those briefly this morning. Some people think Jesus was. You may say was. Lots of people think he's dead and buried.

He's gone. Some people think Jesus was a decent guy. He was decent. He was a good human being. Jesus was simply a good person who created the golden rule.

Jesus showed he was a friend of the poor. He was an advocate for people who needed him. He was essentially everyone's best friend. Real good guy.

Real good teacher. That's pretty much it. Yet Jesus kept referring to himself as the son of man. And this phrase, that description, is used at least 80 times in the New Testament referring to Jesus.

[50 : 46] In Daniel 7, chapter 7, verse 13. The son of man, the same term, is referred to as a divine being.

Are you catching that? So Jesus and others used the terminology, the son of man, to refer to him. And clearly, in Daniel, that term was meant to refer to someone who is a divine being. So this good guy, just a decent human being, also kept using I am statements about himself.

I am. And this was a title used for, not surprising to many of you, God in the Old Testament. I am.

So Jesus claimed to forgive sins. He claimed to be greater than Jonah and Abraham. He claimed to be greater than Solomon. And even John the Baptist.

[51 : 53] He claimed to be greater than the temple and the Sabbath. Jesus' claims for himself and of himself suggested more than a decent guy.

Now, others saw Jesus as a demented fool. Again, someone who had died, many thought, well, it's about time.

That guy was crazy. But if he was a demented fool, people were deeply devoted to him.

And those followers didn't become demented killers or power hungry, like the followers of other world figures we might consider to be demented fools, like Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin.

Men who may have had great moments in their early lives or great ideas at one point, who clearly became insane, who clearly had diabolical agendas that they carried out and whose followers helped them carry out.

[53 : 07] We see none of that with Jesus. And Jesus won the admiration of men and women from all levels of society. No one taught or led like him.

No one. He didn't turn people into these blind, demented followers. He made people better.

He freed them. He healed them. He taught them. For example, he taught some common fishermen, who then went on to write some of the most revered writing in human history.

Is that a demented fool? I don't think so. And others might see Jesus as a deceiving fraud.

Some saw him as a trickster, see him as a trickster, who led people astray and took advantage of them. He played on people's weakness.

[54 : 14] He took advantage. People see him that way. But what about the miracles? What about the miracles that Jesus himself performed?

And more than 36 of them, real miracles, are recorded in the Gospels. They're recorded in the Bible, in one of the most historically accurate and supported documents in human history.

These miracles are recorded. Jesus also demonstrated that he cared about people and sought to make their lives better by his power.

He never thought of himself first. He always considered what others needed, what was best for others. So around 120 AD, a historian named Quadratus wrote to the Emperor Hadrian about Jesus.

The works of our Savior were lasting, for they were genuine. Those who were healed and those who were raised from the dead were not seen merely while our Savior was here on earth.

[55 : 36] But also after his death, they were quite alive, quite a while, so that some of them, even to our day.

And maybe you've heard this before. But the things that Jesus did, the things that people experienced firsthand, or witnessed firsthand, after Jesus died, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose.

people who witnessed those experiences, witnessed those miracles, and those events, still lived at the time of others. I heard somebody describe it this way at one point.

Oh, yeah, if you want to know, because the Jewish culture was very, very much a spoken culture, and passed on, passed on accounts, imagine, oh, yes, you want to know about such and such?

Bob saw that. You could phone him, or go and ask him right now. So this is the kind of thing we're talking about. This is not hundreds of years separated.

[56 : 43] These are people who witnessed these things firsthand, so you could go and ask them. That's the kind of reality that we're talking about. So one of the greatest testimonies of, to the truth of Jesus Christ, and his claims about who he is, and who he was, is also the historic growth, the explosive growth, of the New Testament church.

Because, I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but why would people literally risk their lives, to proclaim something that wasn't true? Right?

Why would you stand for something, that could get you killed? And yet, that's what happened.

Some of them, had personally, as I said, witnessed these things.

And that's why, they felt so strongly about them. That's why the church grew, because they had witnessed Jesus in person. They had seen what he did. They had seen or experienced, how he changed lives.

And so they followed him. And so my hope, this morning, is that we recognize Jesus Christ, as not someone who was, but someone who is, someone who is, someone who is a divine friend.

[58 : 12] Jesus did miraculous things with a wonderful heart. He showed that he was a tender, compassionate person, who befriended and truly helped people.

And I believe Peter said it correctly for us. Best of all, probably. You are the Messiah. You are the Messiah. You are the Son of God.

Amen. So as we reflect on this coming week, and as we reflect on Good Friday, Jesus went to the cross on a hill named after a human skull, Golgotha.

And he showed what he thought of us, that he loved us deeply and gave his life for us. This morning, as we reflect on Jesus and his sacrifice, we're celebrating communion together.

And as I speak to you about this, just take a moment that you can get yourself a small glass of water or juice. Mine isn't even Welch's. So what do you do?

[59 : 24] You work with what you have. It's okay. Get a small cracker or a piece of bread, and we'll use whatever you have on hand.

Because I want to celebrate communion together this morning in this unique and special way, virtual communion. Remember, it's not what you have to eat and drink right now that are important, but what they represent for us.

So don't panic if you don't have Welch's grape juice at home. Everything will be all right. I promise.

The Bible tells us we need to take a good long look at what's going on in our hearts when we partake in communion, the Lord's Supper.

And in 1 Corinthians 11, 28, the Apostle Paul wrote, Let a person examine himself, and so eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. And in Corinth, the intended act of communion with the Lord had become a thoughtless and even selfish church ritual.

Their minds had shifted from the sacrifice of Jesus and the significance of that and had wandered elsewhere. And so we must not ever let that happen to us.

[60 : 38] We must stay mentally engaged when we take the bread and cup together. 1 Peter 1, 18 and 19 reminds us that they've been ordained, these elements, to soberly remind us of the high cost of God's forgiveness.

eating and drinking them vividly depicts our union and solidarity with Christ as our Savior, our Lord, and the source of our spiritual life.

And we also take this time to examine ourselves, to ensure that our relationship with Christ is authentic and genuine. Not only recalling the beginning of our relationship with Christ, but also seeking to discover if there's any unconfessed sin that's getting in the way of our current fellowship with God.

And lastly, it would be wrong for us to eat and drink of the cup of Christ without a heart that is purposely thankful. The Lord's Supper is not only a reminder of his brutal death, but it's also a celebration of the incredible, generous grace of God and the invaluable privilege of being forgiven. So we're doing this on our own this morning in our homes, but we're still, I want you to remember, we're still part of a family who are doing this together.

[62 : 07] Not only as we're celebrating this now, right in this moment, but as brothers and sisters in Christ who are doing this in many different ways and many different places around the world this morning.

And as you take the bread and cup this morning, do it with a grateful heart. They can say along with generations of Christians, thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift.

Luke 21, 14 to 20 tells us about the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table and he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, take this and divide it among you.

For I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. And he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them, saying, this is my body given for you.

[63 : 22] Do this in remembrance of me. My friends, the body of Christ broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of him.

In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup saying, this cup is the new cup, the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

My friends, the blood of Christ poured out for you. Drink this in remembrance of him. Let me pray for us.

God, we are so thankful for your grace to us. God, thank you for welcoming us to your table.

Thank you that we can experience your goodness only because of your good and profound and amazing grace. Thank you for calling us to be your saints.

[64 : 58] The honor of being your church and your people sent into the world to tell others about you so that you may change their lives as you have changed ours.

Amen. As we close this morning, I want to just share one kind of closing reflection.

Nadia Bowles Weber, B-O-L-Z-W-E-B-E-R, her last name is hyphenated, is a Christian theologian. Lots of people have trouble with a few things that she says just because she can use bad words sometimes, but her church is in an inner city environment.

And so, but she has some amazing things that she says and she has a Palm Sunday reflection that I like to read as we close. And you can listen or you can close your eyes or whatever you like.

Dear God, some of us are exhausted by a constant stream of bad news. Some of us are exhausted from the effort of trying not to freak out.

[66 : 10] Some of us are exhausted by not knowing how we'll pay rent. Some of us are exhausted from the effort of trying to entertain and educate and feed and love children who are stuck at home.

Some of us are exhausted by the 13-hour shifts in a hospital we no longer recognize, working a job we're afraid might kill us.

Some of us showed up to this pandemic with pre-existing physical and mental health conditions that were already exhausting. Some of us are exhausted by loneliness and some of us are exhausted by the effort of trying to make this all okay for everyone else.

Lord, life is so strained and tender right now. I know that not a single one of us is promised another day, God.

But we're asking for the strength for just this one that we are in. Father God, as we take this step by step, day by day, give us today our daily strength.

[67 : 26] Strength for today and if you could spare it, bright hope for tomorrow. Bright hope for tomorrow. Amen.

My friends, it's been a joy to speak to you this morning. God bless you. Go in peace. Go into a week filled with the hope of God, the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Give your worries to Him. Lay your worries at His feet. Find joy in every moment. Find comfort in the time you spend with friends and family with whom you are isolated.

Care for one another and know that you are cared for by others, by your God and by me. God bless each one of you. Have a great day and have a great week.

Amen.