

**Family Reunion**  
**Selected Scriptures**  
**ABC June 14, 2020**

PRELUDE

Greetings. It's good to see you & to be here together. Life has changed since we last gathered, hasn't it? It's been 91 days since we had a service here & 98 days since I last preached at this pulpit. Everything is different than it once was. Today's service is going to be different than normal as well, as if you couldn't tell already. No bulletins, no hugs, no singing, pews moved, offering box in back, obsessive washing & cleaning, & hand sanitizing stations at the door. But many things haven't changed & at the top of that list is that God is still on His throne, He's still in control, & He has a purpose & a plan that is perfectly right & good. We can, & must, take comfort in those facts. He has allowed us to gather together this morning as a family reuniting, as a body coming together. Are you glad to be here? You're going to have a chance to share today. We'll all have opportunity to pray & praise, so be ready for that.

We've chosen a middle of the road route to reopening while doing our best to follow the government authorities God has placed us under. Not everyone will be satisfied, thinking we're going too fast or too slow. Bear with us as we navigate these times prayerfully & be gracious to those who don't think exactly the same as you.

Why are we here this morning? To fellowship with each other, to worship together, & to hear from God through His Word together.

CALL TO WORSHIP -- 1 Chronicles 29:10-13

**Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever & ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness & the power & the glory & the victory & the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens & the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, & You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches & honor come from You, & You rule over all, & in Your hand is power & might; & it lies in Your hand to make great & to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, & praise Your glorious name.**

PRAY

A pastor tweeted out these 4 words a few weeks ago: *Dear 2020. Please stop.*<sup>1</sup> Can you relate? I'm not a bird watcher but have been told that in the Sierra Valley (where we used to live) you could

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<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/scottsauls/status/1266875568831766534>

easily see 100 different species of birds in one day. Bird watchers flocked to the valley for this very reason. Paul David Tripp, recently wrote on why we can have hope in the midst of these challenging times. & it has to do with considering the birds of the air. He writes:<sup>2</sup>

*Here's a mind-boggling figure: scientists estimate that in the United States alone, 13.7 million birds die every day. It's a seemingly random & rather unpleasant statistic, but when I came across it, my heart was deeply encouraged. (Mt 10:29, ESV) **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? & not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** There are hundreds of billions of birds in existence around the world today. Almost all of them have no monetary value whatsoever. Apart from a handful of endangered or noteworthy birds, we don't track these creatures, name them, care about them, or know them.*

*But their Creator does. He is in control over every aspect of their life: their birth; the color & quantity of their feathers; their nest; their breeding; their migration; & ultimately, the time, location, & manner in which they die.*

*Think of all the technology, human resources, & coordination that is required for us to track the relatively few planes that are in the sky every day. God is in complete control over the flight paths of every single one of these hundreds of billions of birds. This reality alone should be unbelievably reassuring.*

*No matter how it looks at street level, your world is not out of control; no, it is under the careful administration of the Creator who has the wisdom & power to be the great Author of it all. But that's not enough; Jesus takes the comforting illustration even further: (Mt 10:30-31) **But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.***

*By grace, you are now the adopted child of the One who has this immeasurable control. As His son or daughter, you are far more valuable than any bird. This means Your heavenly Father exercises intimate, personal, & specific control over your life for His glory & your good.*

*Discovering peace in difficult times is never accomplished by measuring the size of your strength & wisdom against the size of your trouble. No, rest is found when you compare the size of what you're facing against the Creator of the heavens & earth. By grace, He is your Father wherever you go. Whatever you are facing today, meditate on Mt 10:29-31. Ask God to remind you of His power, presence, & promises. & then get up & live, with courage & hope, in light of this truth!*

Aren't you glad our God is so great? Even in trying times, He's still on His throne & in charge. Because of that, we have much to be thankful for & to praise Him for. What are you thanking God for today? Chance to share after this song, *My Heart is Filled with Thankfulness*. This is a song of thankfulness is structured into 3 verses of past, present, & future salvation: the 1<sup>st</sup> verse reminds us of Christ's redemptive work on the cross; the 2<sup>nd</sup> is of God's day-to-day presence & power with us, walking alongside & providing us with all we need; & the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse looks forward to the sure

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/an-encouraging-statistic-about-death>

knowledge that His eternal rule makes our future assured in Him. Listen, hum along, & worship God together & then be prepared to share why you are thankful today.

*SONG – My Heart is Filled With Thankfulness*

What are you thanking God for today?

What news would you like to share with the rest of us? (Kendra's 6 months pregnant)

What has God taught you during this time?

What have you missed the most during these past 3 months?

In the midst of a changing world, this virus hasn't changed anything important about the church. What do I mean? After all, we haven't met for 3 months! While that's true, the church is still the church. We, the children of God, are the church. In all the important ways, nothing has changed about that. We are still the people of God, gathered in the presence of God, to bring glory to God. We still affirm His righteous rule by living under His command. We still love one another with the same love with which the Father loved the Son (Jn 17:26). We still testify to the truth & power of the gospel before a watching world. Throughout redemptive history, God's people have gathered to worship Him in all kinds of situations, many of them less than ideal. They worshipped together as slaves in Egypt, as wanderers in the wilderness, as exiles in Babylon, & as objects of Roman persecution. The church today joins their faithful company. We may be six feet apart, but we are still the church. & you know what? God still loves the church & Christ is still building His church. Going to church is rarely convenient, & these months of worshipping via screens has elevated the comfort of staying at home. When we can hear a sermon & have "church" without getting off the couch or getting out of our pajamas, it's hard to muster the energy to actually go to church again. (Of course, if you're willing to go out & be everywhere except the church, your priorities are wrong. Just saying!) But our fundamental motivation for committing to the church hasn't changed because of COVID-19. As we're able, we go to church, serve the church, & love the church because God does. Christ promises to build His church (Mt 16:18). He serves the church by making her holy, & He loves the church by dying for her (Eph 5:25-27). & what God loves, we must love. Do you love

the church? How do you show it? By being here when you can. By reaching out & caring for & loving one another throughout the week.

One danger of the quarantine & self-isolating is that it can create a false sense of self-sufficiency. Equipped with an internet connection, we can instantly stream church services that are much more professional than we get here. It can be tempting to think our spiritual progress can be grown remotely too. But the Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. With his words to Adam in the Garden, **It is not good for the man to be alone** (Gen 2:18), God establishes the importance of one another. & this is borne out in the rest of Scripture: the family of Abraham, the assembly of Israel, the churches in Acts, & the congregations the NT Epistles were written to. In the whole Bible, there are no lone Christians. You were created & redeemed to join with God's people to worship & work together for His glory. You were made for church.

There's been a lot of talk recently about what's essential to our society, with civil authorities categorizing our activities & businesses under various phases & classifications. But whatever official designation church services receive, we must never allow our hearts to believe that worship with the church is unimportant or not essential. Corporate worship is the crucial business of each of our lives. In corporate worship, the people of God assemble in His presence to speak to Him (by prayer & song) & to hear Him speak to us through His Word. We gather at His invitation & according to His command. We testify to His reign over His kingdom & we exalt Him before our unbelieving neighbors. In worship, we offer to our sovereign God the praise He is due. It's the most essential business of our lives.

We also need the church because it makes us more holy. This pandemic has required additional cleaning protocols. We want our church to be free of germs & we do our best to provide a safe place for you to gather to worship. But there are other more dangerous threats to the cleanliness of the church. Sin, our mortal enemy, festers in our hearts unbidden like virus spores lurking around us. Thankfully, the local church is designed to promote the purity of each of its members. As we receive God's Word together, as we exhort & encourage one another, as we cry out together for the help of the Holy Spirit, as we set a godly example for one another, & as we warn one another

of the danger of sin, we work together to drive out sin's destructive decay. Thankfully, Christ organized His church for the good of our souls.

The church is also your family. Defining a *household* has become another preoccupation of our day. Our civil authorities recognize that these foundational units of people who live & care for one another need to continue doing so. In most cases, the members of a household are free to carry on as they were, with the reminder to wash your hands often. The Bible tells us that we're part of a different kind of household, one whose boundaries aren't defined by a census or tax filings. As a Christian, you are part of the **household of God** (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15), which is the church. You have been brought into the family by God's sovereign choosing & given a new family identity through the blood of Christ. That means that our fundamental family priorities of sharing our lives & caring for one another are not derailed by this pandemic. We've all missed time spent together, fellowshiping with one another. But what does that mean? What is fellowship? James Packer, in his book, *Your Father Loves You*, wrote:

What is meant by fellowship... ? Gossip? Cups of tea? Tours? No. What is being referred to is something of a quite different order & on a quite different level. (Acts 2:42-47, New English Bible) **They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, & to share the common life, & break bread & to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, & breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy as they praised God.** That is fellowship as the NT understands it, & there is clearly a world of difference between that & mere social activities.

The Greek word for *fellowship* comes from a root meaning common or shared. So *fellowship* means common participation in something either by giving what you have to the other person or receiving what he or she has. Give & take is the essence of fellowship, & give & take must be the way of fellowship in the common life of the body of Christ.

Christian fellowship is two-dimensional, & it has to be vertical before it can be horizontal. We must know the reality of fellowship with the Father & with His Son Jesus Christ before we can know the reality of fellowship with each other in our common relationship to God (1 Jn 1:3). The person who is not in fellowship with the Father & the Son is no Christian at all, & so cannot share with Christians the realities of their fellowship.<sup>3</sup>

Even if we have had to fellowship through emails, texts, phone calls, & videos, the church is still a family & today is our reunion. Do you love the church? Aren't you glad God has called us together into His family?

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<sup>3</sup> Page for March 2

The church has work to do. Recent weeks have brought changes to many people's work. For some, work-at-home is the new normal. For others, work has disappeared, leaving financial worries in its place. Even as businesses begin to reopen, many of us find our work changed. The church has work to do as well & it hasn't changed because of a virus. Jesus said, **Go therefore & make disciples of all the nations** (Mt 28:19). Declaring Christ, the Savior of sinners, to the lost & dying world is a task for the church & we're all co-workers in this job. We each must pray for kingdom workers to be sent out (Mt 9:38) & to have gospel success (Rom 15:30). We each contribute to the needs of gospel outreach & missions (Phil 4:15). We each invite our friends & neighbors to **come, see** the Savior (Jn 4:29). Christ's command is a job for us to do together. But that's not all.

The church has a glorious future. These days, we may be discouraged by the apparent insignificance & smallness of the church. We might be tempted to wonder whether the church is going to disintegrate. But when God allows us to glimpse the realities of eternity, we see that the best days of the church are yet to come. Listen to the words of the apostle John: (Rev 21:2-4)

**I (John) saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. & I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, & He will dwell among them, & they shall be His people, & God Himself will be among them, & He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; & there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."**

The church has a future, & it is glorious. Don't ever doubt or forget that. Instead rejoice & hope in that sure & certain fact.

Because of all this, we must, you must, I must be the body God created us to be. The church needs you & you need it. The Bible repeatedly describes the church as a body. (1 Cor 12:12-13) **For even as the body is one & yet has many members, & all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,** writes Paul. In the church, we each have unique gifts & abilities, & we use them together for each other's good. No part is unimportant & no part can function well without the others. We need each other. It's in the local church, we grow in our knowledge of Christ. We each have some gifts, but Christ has all the gifts. We each have the Spirit, but Christ has the Spirit without measure (Jn 3:34; Rom 12:3). We each serve in a few ways, but Christ serves perfectly in every way. We each know some things,

but Christ has **all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge** (Col 2:3). Only in the assembled body can we experience the fullness of Christ our head (Eph 1:22–23). The church is the bride of Christ, she is the Beloved of the Father, & she’s a dwelling place of the Spirit. We aren’t a people of fear; we’re a people of faith & we must live like it.

Our faith is grounded in the Lord Jesus & His sovereign rule over creation. Throughout the ages, when epidemics & plagues would wipe our entire cities & villages, it was the followers of Jesus who stayed in those cities & cared for the poor & sick. Author Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity* writes,

*Christianity revitalized life in the Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms & new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with homeless & the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers & strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans & widows, Christianity provided a new & expanded family. To cities torn by violent strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. & to cities faced with epidemics, fires, & earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.<sup>4</sup>*

Tertullian, a North African church leader, wrote, *It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of our opponents . . . they say, “How they love one another!”*

Is that true of us? May those who disagree with our beliefs see our desire to display the love for Christ through the healing of hurts, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, & sacrificing ourselves in the cause of justice, & may they say, *Look, how they love people.*

When the world is in chaos, we’re to rest in the peace of Christ. When the world is afraid, we’re to be strong & courageous because Jesus is our courage & strength. When the world is hopeless, we’re to be a hope-filled people because our hope is in the One who defeated sin & death.

SONG – His Way is Perfect

Let’s pray for the families in our church who have lost loved ones during this time of isolation & for those around the world who have lost loved ones. We mourn the loss of life. We are to mourn with those who are mourning (Rom 12:15). Somehow, in our mourning, Jesus comforts us with the hope that creation & people will not always be broken. A new creation, where sickness & death are no more, is coming. PRAY

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<sup>4</sup> *The Good Life: What Jesus Teaches about Finding True Happiness*

Let's pray for the medical & scientific communities & for our first responders. PRAY

Pray for the political leaders around the world. They need our prayers. PRAY

We also must be praying for our country. It's been a rough 3 months & an even rougher last 2 weeks. Whenever pastors talk about racism folks get uneasy. But the fact is, all of us as Christians need to call sin out wherever it is, & racism is a dreadful sin in the eyes of our Almighty God. If the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22:39), & if racism oppresses & objectifies my neighbor, then this sin is a violation of one of the greatest commandments in Scripture. Yet we're often afraid to talk about or address it. This should tell us something. It should trouble us. The problem is this: We've so confused Christianity with politics that people often assume Christian equals the stuff political conservatives identify with & non-Christian equals the stuff progressives talk about. & since racial justice often tends to be at the forefront of the discussion in politically progressive circles, we shy away from them because we think that to discuss the evil of racism is to identify with the liberal left. But here's the thing: When we call out the evil of racism, we're identifying with the Almighty God, Creator of **every nation, tribe, people & language** (Rev 7:9).

It's a contradiction & a sin to those who are willing to condemn the desecration of the image of God in abortion, but not willing to condemn it in racism. Both are odious in God's eyes & we must say so. We as Christians should mourn the death of George Floyd, for example, & pray that God changes the hearts of those who are prejudiced. We should pray that God changes our own hearts because the fact is, churches in this country have had a history of not speaking up on this issue. I know this is heavy. But isn't our goal to be biblical, to speak the truth of God's Word. Christians believe the lives of people matter because they're made in the image of God. When we see those lives being unjustly treated or crushed, we should cry foul on the basis of Holy Scripture. I don't care what CNN says or what the Huffington Post says or what Fox News says, those aren't our authority. Our authority is God Himself & His Word He's given us. That's what we must live by.

How do we address the issue of racism? The 1<sup>st</sup> step is listening to God's Word. I think the Scripture is clear about this. It says we need to call racism in all its forms sin & condemn it. Too often we



talk about this issue instead of talking to one another with love & a desire to listen. Yes, the gospel brings us together. We're multiple races, but we're united in Christ & we need to relate to each other in charity so we can be an example to the world of the unity in diversity that the gospel brings about. This is one of the ways that we as a church can shine so brightly for Jesus Christ.

In a society that's so divided, where there's so much tension, so much fighting, & so much pain, we have to be unified in the gospel, no matter what our backgrounds are. I think of what Jesus said in Jn 13:35, *the world is going to know you're My disciples by your love for one another* & then in Jn 17 He prays that the church would be one. Why? So that the world might know that God the Father sent His Son into the world. Our unity, our ability to come together, despite the fact that we might be different & to love each other & serve each other is a sign of the power of the gospel to the rest of the world. & we need that right now.

Let's pray that God in His mercy would help all of us individually & collectively as Christians to confess the sin of racism & do all we can to bring reconciliation & peace to those around us. Would you pray with me toward that end?

*Father, we need You. Our country desperately needs Your help & Your church desperately needs Your assistance. Help us to honor You, to speak the truth of Your Word, especially with regard to this issue & to be able to say, sin is sin & to condemn it wherever we see it. Enable us to stand against all injustice & all prejudice.*

*Lord, we rejoice in the fact that we are made in Your image, & we seek to love all fellow image bearers with the love that You give to us. Help us, Lord, as a church to be united in Your gospel, to gather around Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins, to have that unity, that peace amongst ourselves so we might be able to demonstrate the power of the gospel to a world that's longing for something else, for something better, something that only You can give.*

*Lord, help us to be faithful to You to stand up for those who are oppressed, to speak against all oppression, & to cling to the hope we have in Your Son, Jesus Christ, which unites us into one body.*

*Thank You for bringing us together today. Help us be the body of Christ you want us to be. May our fellowship be deep & rooted in our love for You & for each other. & it's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Song – God of Heaven

**Stand: Isaiah 46:8-11 -- Remember this, & be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. Remember the former things long past, For I am God, & there is no other; I am God, & there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, & from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, & I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.**

**May the Lord bless you & protect you; may the LORD make His face shine on you & be gracious to you; may the LORD look with favor on you & give you peace (Num 6:24-25).**

Thank you for being here today. Please exit starting from the back & continue to the parking lot or grass to talk with one another. I'll meet you out there.

POSTLUDE