

The Cornerstone

Good morning!

I'm Pastor Doug Browne. Thank you for joining me this morning.

"In life and in death we belong to God.

"Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve."

This is the very beginning of *A Brief Statement of Faith*, one of the more modern creeds in our *Presbyterian Book of Confessions*. Everything else we say and do as Christians comes back to this profound statement. Wars do not change it. Plagues do not change it. They aren't that powerful.

We trust in God, and God is worthy of our trust. Even when we are practicing social distancing, and trying so hard not to make each other sick. It was not an easy decision to move worship to this medium. I hope and pray that, in two months, we're all saying that we overreacted. That would mean that the steps we as a society are taking are working.

During this time when we're not meeting in person, I'm going to post videos here, praying with you and walking through the Bible stories in the Gospel of Mark, continuing from where we left off. Some of them will be

shorter than others, but I'm hoping I can put up a couple each week. Look for announcements on this page and on the church website.

My hope is that this will help us remember that we are God's people, no matter what's happening around us, and that God loves us.

Let's start with the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Mark 12:1-12.

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Then he [meaning Jesus] began to speak to them in parables. 'A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watch-tower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?'

When they [the chief priests] realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.

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Many of the Hebrew prophets used a metaphor of a vineyard for the people of God. God planted the vineyard, and left the kings and priests in charge of it. Jesus is tapping into that metaphor in his parable about the tenants. That makes this parable less obscure and more in the faces of those chief priests and the followers of King Herod.

God had told them in the Law how to run a community and a society.

The community is supposed to be centered around God and worshipping God. That is the cornerstone on which everything else rests.

Everyone is supposed to rest on the Sabbath, and worship the LORD. Even the land is to get a rest every seven years, allowed to lie fallow.

Every seven times seven years, or every forty-nine years, is the Year of Jubilee. Everyone is supposed to return to their family and to the land that their family was given back then. All debts are cancelled, and land returned to the original owners. Even slaves are freed, because "the people of Israel are servants; they are MY servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God [and I say so]."

Every fiftieth year, all debts are supposed to be cancelled and people are to remember the LORD God who brought them out of Egypt. It's right there in black and white in Leviticus 25. Remember that the next time someone tells you that we ought to be applying the rules of the Old Testament today! But the whole point of this was to come back to the LORD as the center and giver of life.

Jesus knew that the Hebrew people never celebrated the Year of Jubilee, at least that we have a record of. That was probably part of the uproar when he pronounced the Year of Jubilee in his first sermon, but that's another story.

Jesus came down here anyway.

Jesus knew that the leaders of the people were leading them in obedience to Rome, not God.

Jesus came down here anyway.

Jesus knew that the people had any number of things in the center of their lives, but God wasn't it.

Jesus came down here anyway.

Jesus loved us too much not to.

We are seeing some scary stuff in the news.

We've had to cancel in-person worship and move to these online devotions for a few weeks. I know that this is not easy for many of you. It's not easy for me.

I promise you, this will be temporary. We will return to normal.

No matter what happens, hear me when I say this:

"In life and in death we belong to God."

"...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I pray for all of us this morning that we never forget that.

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And now, People of God, go forth into God's world and walk with God. Know that God loves you and God will never abandon you.

And may the grace of God the Father, the love of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit rest upon you and rest in you, now and forever. Amen.