

Good evening!

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

May the peace of the Lord be with you.

(pause to let folks say "and also with you.")

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

We trust in God, and God is worthy of our trust. Even when we are practicing social distancing, and trying not to make each other sick.

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 when we were together in one room. I'm going to do this tonight and this Friday. Then, this Sunday, March 29, we're going to move to Zoom. We will try to post video from that here, too, but there's more information on both the Church website and the Church Facebook page.

If you've missed any of the videos, you can find them and watch them later either here on Facebook or linked from the sermons page 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.

Today, let's pick up in Mark chapter 12, verses 38 through 44, if you'd like to read along at home. Jesus is still sitting in the Temple, teaching his disciples and anyone else who will listen.

"As he taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'"

This is the Word of God, for the People of God.

Thanks Be to God.

When Jesus walked the earth, he was fully God, but he was also fully human. He cried when Lazarus died. I'm sure that he laughed. The only times that Jesus is described as getting angry, though, were when powerful people used God and religion to exploit the poor and the weak.

That's why he turned over tables and cleansed the Temple. And that's why he got angry about how this widow was being treated. God's law is supposed to protect the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner from abuse. And it wasn't working, because the very people who were supposed to enforce God's law were the hypocrites who were breaking it. We'll talk more about that on Palm Sunday.

The widow gave all that she had to the Temple. She might have given it out of a feeling of obligation, but the poor were not required to give. I would like to believe that she gave out of a sense of hope.

Hope is important, isn't it?

We all know that you need food and water to survive, but Jesus told us that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that God has spoken."¹ We need the word of God, and the hope that it brings.

We need hope that no matter how bad things get, they will get better.

Truly I tell you, things will get better than they are right now.

There was a wonderful movie a while back, called *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, in which a character explains this very simply.

¹ Matthew 4:4.

“Everything will be all right in the end... if it's not all right, then it's not yet the end.”

As post-Resurrection followers of Jesus Christ, we have an advantage over Jesus’ disciples and the chief priests and the Romans – we know how this story ends! At least this part of the story. We know that Jesus will die and be resurrected, not just for the people around him then, but for us, too.

We know that, no matter how much stuff we go through, how difficult our lives are, God still loves us. We know that Jesus died for us. And we know that the Holy Spirit is here to give us strength to get through whatever the world throws at us.

God did not send the coronavirus as punishment for anyone for anything. That’s not how a God of love does things.

Bad things like hurricanes and floods and outbreaks of disease happen. It’s when bad things are happening that God’s love is most necessary, and most clearly visible.

There have been plagues before, and I’m not just talking about something out of the Middle Ages. Right here in Columbus, the schools and public gatherings, including most churches, were closed for most of two months about a hundred years ago, because of influenza. These public

health measures worked. Columbus had a much lower death percentage than most cities on the East coast or in the South.²

And then the schools and churches re-opened, and things got back to normal.

Things will get back to normal for us, too.

We just have to not give into fear.

So, I urge you: pray. Pray for our country and our representatives. Pray for the world.

Hold on to faith. Keep doing the wise, sensible thing and maintain physical isolation. Keep reaching out to your friends and your family and your church family.

And Let go of fear. Let go of anxiety.

“It will be all right in the end, so, if it’s not all right, this is not the end.”

And now, people of God, I call you people of God because that’s what you are, people of God, remember, it will be all right in the end, so, if it’s not all right now, this is not the end. Hold on to faith. Let go of fear.

Trust in God and wash your hands.

² October 14, 1918-January 2, 1919. <https://www.influenzaarchive.org/cities/city-columbus.html#>

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.