

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on April 4, 2021:
"Easter Service"**

[Today's special service includes an Easter Message by President Greg Williams of GCI, a discussion lead by Pastor Craig Kuhlman, the "Resurrection Story", the poem, "Easter Joy" and communion.]

Scripture reading:

John 20:1 (NIV), Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2) So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

3) So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4) Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5) He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6) Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7) as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

8) Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9) (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

11) Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12) and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13) They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14) At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15) He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16) Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). 17) Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18) Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

An Easter Message by President Greg Williams of GCI, "In the World, But Not of the World":

Greetings GCI family around the world. We have officially past the one year mark of the global pandemic called COVID-19. Undoubtedly a year of unique challenge and hardship for many, especially for those who have lost loved-ones.

We gather at this time and in this season not to mourn death but rather to celebrate resurrected life – the resurrected life of our Lord, Jesus Christ. A very happy Easter to everyone who is hearing this message.

Closely tied to our celebrating of Jesus is our calling to follow Jesus and be his ambassadors. Celebration naturally links to participation. Our good friend Gary Deddo calls this worship and witness.

In our life's journey, we have a constant need to be reminded of the practical instruction of how we are to walk out this journey. In my personal experience, I find that I've studied so much of Christ's teachings early on in my early life and then mistakenly thought, "I've got that. Now let's move on."

Even as I prepared this message, I was rejuvenated in the exercise of going back to Matthew's Gospel and being washed over by Christ's words of life. Christ is the center of our worship and He remains in the center regardless of whatever happens.

We, on the other hand, need to be re-centered on a regular basis. We are like the GPS on our phones. As we get off route, the reminder to re-center pops up. One significant piece of instruction that Jesus gave the disciples on the night before his death at Calvary, was the concept to be "in the world, but not of the world." His long prayer to the Father recorded in John 17 covers this premise with great detail.

John 17:1-26 (NRSVA) After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2) since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3) And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4) I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5) So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6) 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7) Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8) for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9) I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

10) All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11) And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12) While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost

except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13) But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

15) I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17) Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18) As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19) And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20) 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22) The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23) I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24) Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

25) 'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26) I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

That was sweet lovely wife, Susan, reading this passage. And by the way, she also picked out my tie for this recording, as well. Thank you, Susan.

Jesus prays for the disciples gathered in the room that night and for those coming after – meaning you and me. It is a prayer of reality. He is going and we are staying, it is a prayer of sending, a prayer of protection, a prayer of wrapping his people in the truth of the Gospel. It's also a prayer of inspiration and assurance, which is called the high priestly prayer, and rightly so.

So, what does it mean for Jesus' followers to be in the world, but not of the world? Jesus had provided much instruction in his keynote address, called "The Sermon on the Mount," aptly described as the manifesto of the kingdom of God.

Allow me to cover a few highlights that help guide us of being in the world but not of the world challenge. His followers are to be salt and light. Salt, as a savoring seasoning that brings the taste of Jesus to relationships and circumstances. O, how much this is needed in so many settings today.

Light that cuts through darkness and eliminates the Truth and points to the person of Jesus, as light of the world. In most of the world's matters, Jesus is a secondary thought, if he is thought about at all.

How would things change, if we ask not only, “What would Jesus do?” but, “What has Jesus done and what is he presently doing?” These are the re-centering questions. His followers are to seek, above all else, God’s kingdom and righteousness.

The believers’ priorities must be ordered so that spiritual things take precedence over physical things. God knows the daily physical needs of his people and he is faithful to provide. The apostle Paul implores us to set our minds on things above. It’s such a good reminder to keep us mindful that true citizenship is not of this world.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to have a daily reliance on the triune God. We should not only be seeking physical provisions, but Jesus’ right way of thinking and his right way of acting. It’s not a list of rules for right or wrong actions that are tallied and scored, but it is people with transformed hearts.

And by the work of the Spirit, we are empowered to love our enemies and actively pray for them. Whoa! That is non-typical human response. In fact, this response is Christ-like.

Recall Jesus’ words from the cross. “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” Jesus went to Calvary to die for fallen sinful humanity and to free mankind from the power of sin and death.

Hallelujah, that work of salvation was complete and final in Jesus. However, the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus wasn’t only the covering for sin. It is very much about the calling and drawing of humanity into personal relationships moving toward the culmination of the eternal kingdom of heaven.

It circles us back to the upper room prayer. This high priestly prayer that Jesus offered after sharing foot washing, communion and mind blowing revelation with the disciples, is much more than closure to the evening.

This prayer of sending was much more than a former benediction to end a religious service. It was a crescendo as to how these men had been shaped and influenced by Jesus and who they are in Christ. And it ties in with the section from the Sermon on the Mount known as the “Be Attitudes.”

Allow me to share thoughts from N. T. Wright on the “Be Attitudes.”

“The programmatic statement of God’s kingdom on the Sermon on the Mount isn’t simply about ‘ethics’, as people often imagine in our shrunken Western world. It’s about the mission. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, the peacemakers, the hungry-for-justice people’, and so on. We all too easily assume that Jesus is saying, ‘try hard to be like this and if you can manage it you’ll be the sort of people I want in my kingdom.’ But that’s not the point! The point that God’s kingdom is being launched on earth as in heaven, and the way it will happen is by God working through people of this sort... when people look out on the world and it’s disasters they wonder, why God doesn’t just march in and take over.

Why they ask, does he permit it? Why doesn’t he send a thunderbolt... and put things right? The answer is that God does send thunderbolts – human ones. He

sends in the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, the peacemakers, the hungry-for-justice people. They are the way God wants to act in his world.

They are more effective than are lightning flashes. They will use their initiative; they will see where the real needs are, and go to meet them. They will weep at the tombs of their friends and at the tombs of their enemies.

Some of them will get hurt. Some may be killed. That is the story of Acts, all through. There will be problems, punishments, setbacks, ship wrecks, but God's purpose will come through.

These people, prayerful, humble, faithful will be the answer, not to the question why? But to the question what? What needs to be done here? Who shall we send?

[God and the Pandemic: a Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath by N.T. Wright]

Now, what does all of this mean for us at Easter 2021 and still coming out of the global pandemic? Well, it is deeply meaningful to know that we live under the caring words of the high priestly prayer. We are in the world living—sent, protected and armed with truth directly from our high priest and risen Lord.

It is deeply meaningful to know that we are forgiven of our sins – past, present and future through the selfless sacrifice of Jesus. We are reminded of this covering every time we participate in the communion service.

It is deeply meaningful to know that we live in a day-by-day relationship with our living Savior. We can rely on him to not only provide daily bread, but daily wisdom and guidance so that we are in alignment with his perfect will.

It is being centered in Jesus that keeps us from the ever present ditches of our society. It is deeply meaningful to know that we are called to participate with Jesus being salt and light to a world that needs the savory seasoning of Jesus and the illumination of who he is.

As N. T. Wright said, “We are God’s human thunderbolts, the meek, the mourners, the peace makers actively launching God’s kingdom on earth.” For all of the rallies that happen in this world, this is the rally for God’s church.

For us as believers and followers of Jesus, there are no greater words than, “Jesus is risen.” Now did I hear a global echo? He is risen, indeed. So, as a united GCI family, as we live and walk in this crazy world, let’s clearly and profoundly represent our risen Lord Jesus. And may our faith grow stronger and spread wider, all to his glory. Amen! and Amen!

Pastor Craig Kuhlman:

- Welcome to Grace. He is risen, indeed.
- President Greg’s Easter message highlighted 3 things, which I’m going to point out and then invite those of you who want to participate into a discussion about them.

- First, Greg talked about the need for re-centering.
- Secondly, he spoke of the challenge of living in the world and yet not being of the world.
- And finally, in reference to N. T. Wright, he talked about being human thunderbolts, as salt and light to the world.

- So, what are some ways that you have found in your life when you felt the need for re-centering and how do you find re-centering in Jesus works best for you?
- Member comments:
 - The reading of the 4 gospels helps to center us in Jesus, because the gospels are the word of life.
 - For those who don't like to read, there are Christian videos on the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John which are readily available.
 - Going out in nature and the sun shine helps me to re-center.
 - My wife and I listen to praise and worship music on CDs while driving our car, which refocuses us.
 - Fasting and praying has re-centered my dad.

- Is that a challenge for any of us today of being in the world and yet not of the world?
- Member comments:
 - Yes, but I try to stay away from the social media and refocus my thoughts on Jesus.
 - Pastor Craig binges on first responder series such as "Station 19", "Chicago Fires" and "Nurses."
 - These are real people responding to real issues by helping people, which is so encouraging to him.
 - Whatever circumstances I'm involved in during the day, I restart my day focusing on Jesus to feel his presence in my life to deal with issues I'm facing.

- We also need to remember that those not-yet-believers are included in the love of Jesus, which they probably don't realize.
- This helps us when we come in contact with others to be able to share God's love with them, because God loves them and has not judged them.

- Finally, have you found any ways to be a thunderbolt of salt and light to those around us?
- Member comments:
 - On Face Book and social media, I try my best to send out positive, happy thoughts, sharing Scriptures of good words and also posting funny videos to counteract all the negative things that are out there.
 - I do a lot of walking around my neighborhood and always try to say "hi" to everybody.
 - I support these wonderful Christian organizations such as the Bengali Evangelical Ministry, Samaritan's Purse, and Voice of the Martyrs who reach out and help people who are in need of help and then share the gospel with them.

- Pastor Craig then gave a summary prayer before the remainder of service continued.

The Resurrection Story by Rachel Benjamin:

Mary: It was still dark. I couldn't go...not when it was light. I had too many tears. I was afraid I'd never stop crying. I brought the spices; he deserved a proper burial. I had so many questions. Why? What now? Was it all a lie? There were no answers, so I just kept walking.

Peter: Lock the door! I ordered for them to lock it! I had believed a lie and now they were going to kill me too. Paranoid? Maybe. But I watched them beat him and now I knew they'd come for me too. I had denied him. God, forgive me, I denied Him. I was so afraid that if I let them find me, I'd deny Him again.

Mary: I had imagined every scenario in my head. Perhaps the guards would help us roll away the stone. Maybe they would be kind and realize we just wanted to anoint the body of our Lord. That was wishful thinking, I know. The men who murdered him, be kind? I thought maybe...maybe God would give me the strength to roll it away myself. Maybe I'd be arrested right there. Who else would want to anoint his body other than a professed follower? Maybe they wouldn't arrest me. Maybe they'd just kill me. Who would miss a prostitute? According to Jewish law, wasn't I already supposed to be dead? I drove myself crazy thinking I had imagined every possible scenario. But when I got to the gravesite, I realized I was wrong. I hadn't pictured this.

Peter: I had given up everything. Everything. And he just stood there. Jesus just stood there. I saw him raise Lazarus, with my own eyes, I saw Jesus do it! And... he let himself be crucified. Why? None of it made any sense.

Mary: It was as if the nightmare just wouldn't end. I started to cry louder and louder, "Who's taken him? Who's taken him?! They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have put him. Please tell me! Tell me who's taken Him."

Thomas: Alive? He was here and everyone saw Him but me? I missed it. I was too late. I wasn't important enough. I guess I just wasn't the favorite disciple. Whatever. I don't believe them. I won't believe them.

Peter: I was with John when the women came back from the tomb. Alive? What? I ran to the grave. But he wasn't there. I didn't know what to think. I wanted to believe...I couldn't believe. Not this time. I didn't have the strength to believe anymore.

Thomas: I told them, I said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it!"

Mary: In one last desperate breath I asked, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him. It was then that the gardener turned to me and said,

Thomas: "Thomas-"

Peter: "Peter-"

Mary: "Mary." He said my name. And I knew it was Him.

Peter: In that instant everything changed.

Thomas: I touched his hands and feet and I believed.

Mary: I believed.

Peter: I believed

Thomas: I believed.

Mary: He really was Alive....He's Alive!

Peter:...He's Alive!

Thomas: He's Alive! I know. I know how to doubt. My Lord understands doubt. But I'm telling you this so that you don't have to. I'm telling you the truth so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you can have life in His name.... He is Alive.

Easter Joy by Joanna Fuchs:

*Jesus came to earth,
To show us how to live,
How to put others first,
How to love and how to give.*

*Then He set about His work,
That God had sent Him to do,
He took our punishment on Himself,
He made us clean and new.*

*He could have saved Himself,
Calling angels from above,
But He chose to pay our price for sin,
He paid it out of love.*

*Our Lord died on Good Friday,
But the cross did not destroy
His resurrection on Easter morn,
That fills our hearts with joy.*

*Now we know our earthly death,
Like His is just a rest.
We'll be forever with Him
In heaven, where life is best.*

*So we live our lives for Jesus,
Think of Him in all we do,
Thank you Savior; thank you, Lord.
Help us love like you.*

Communion: