

## Easter Sermon: Simple Easter

We had a lot of really special things that happened last Sunday and I know not all of you were here for that Sunday, but I have been getting messages and phone calls asking about these two things in particular that came up during the service and so I felt like I need to give you kind of an update now or reporting, if you will.

The first of which is that we were so blessed last week to have Tucker Walsh's baptism, which is **Carol Purviance's great-grandson** and Mac Walsh's son. It was a beautiful baptism in which we made promises that we would be there for this family. You weren't here, but we made promises on your behalf that you're going to be there for that little one in prayer and in service and in help and in love. And so that happened last week and it was very special. And yes, the prayer shawl that we used to wrap up Tucker was made by Carol Purviance, his great-grandmother, which was very special, and so I was getting questions about that.

The other one was the special prayer concern that I brought up last week. The woman that, to protect her identity, we're referring to as K. As you heard, we are in partnership with Breitpoint "Needs Among Us" program, and this is 50 families at a time that we're partnered with. And what we found out was that a couple of weeks ago in one of these families, the mom of an 18-month-old who's seeking her US citizenship went in for her scheduled check-in and never came home. And so they had no idea where she was.

And this was shared with us as a prayer concern, and I shared that with you as a prayer concern last week. And I have to tell you, this kind of sat heavy with me. And that alongside the baptism really made me think, because I thought to myself, what would I do as pastor if one of Tucker's parents was taken into custody and the family didn't know where they were? And I thought this is the whole point of "Needs Among Us"—that we treat each and every one of these families that we're partnered with exactly the same way we would treat each and every one of you. And so what would I do?

So I tried to go visit, but first we had to figure out where she was. So through some work and some partnership with folks, we were able to identify that she's being held at a detention camp in rural Missouri. I've been trying to get there to visit her. You won't believe how complicated that is for a pastoral visit. But that's kind of still in the mix, but we were able to help figure out where she is. And the other thing I thought that we would do for Tucker's parents is, if it was one of them, is we would try to help make sure they got connected with a lawyer so they'd get some help because a lot of people go through this process without a lawyer to help them. And so we were able to, through some connections, get the family connected with a lawyer that specializes in that so they can walk alongside them. And through this whole process, I just became aware of how terribly complicated the whole thing is and how complicated it is to navigate this and how complicated it is to try to just do the very basic helps that we would do for anyone else in the congregation. And it's just so complicated.

And then we come here to Easter morning and we have the passage from John. And my goodness, this is a complicated passage. There's so much in this. It can get complicated quick. I mean, it starts off with Peter and this "other disciple." Who's the other disciple? Why doesn't he

have a name? There have been hundreds of years of theological reflection on why he is called the other disciple. And I could give you a complicated sermon about that. And then there's the foot race, right? The other disciple gets there first, but doesn't go in. And Peter pulls ahead at the last minute and goes into the tomb. Why is that? And for hundreds of years, there's been all sorts of complicated theological reflections on what does that symbolize and what does that mean and what is that supposed to be telling us?

And then they get in there and then there's like this CSI kind of investigation we can do on the linens and how they're folded and where they're located. There's excruciating detail given to us about how it's folded and where it's placed and what does that mean? And I could give you a very complicated sermon about that. And then there's two angels that appear and they sit on either side of the place where Jesus was, which then is supposed to bring up these images of the Ark of the Covenant with the two angels and the Mercy Seat in between where the blood of the sacrifice was given in olden days. And there's a beautiful, complicated sermon that I could give you about that also.

And then Mary turns around and doesn't recognize Jesus. What is going on with that? She's been with him all these years. And there's a very complicated sermon about the new life that we have in the resurrected body and I could give you that too and it's very complex and we've talked about it for hundreds of years. And then he says, "Oh, but don't touch me yet because I haven't yet ascended." Why? Why can't she touch him? Later Thomas is like wanting to put his fingers in the holes—this is very complicated. And then he says, "Oh, and then I go to be with my God and your God, my Father and your Father." And I'm telling you, for hundreds of years theologians have baked their noodles over that phraseology. And what does that mean? It's all so complicated.

And I thought, coming here on Easter morning, I don't want this to be complicated, too. I went to one of my preacher friends and I said, like, it's just feels like it's going to be so complicated. And he said to me, he said, "Rob, look, the main thing for Easter Sunday is you just got to make sure that everybody gets a little Jesus." So, I've checked that box off. But the message has got to be simple. And yes, there's the simple message that Christ came and lived and died and was resurrected for you, for your salvation. But that's not incredibly simple either, is it? It's a little complex as well. I think it could be even simpler and it should be simple because everyone—everyone should be able to access the good news, the basic good news that we have on this Easter morning.

And that's when I thought of Brad. Who's Brad? Brad is the brother of one of our church members. And when we prayed last week for Kay and the situation that she's in, this church member talked to their brother Brad. And it just so happens that Brad is involved in a faith community that helped out a family in a very similar situation to what Kay is going through. And through getting them connected to lawyer services and going through the proper procedures, that person was then able to return on their path to citizenship and get out of the detention camp.

So, how do we—yeah. How do we get connected to Brad? By just some great work of the Holy Spirit, folks. Because what are the odds that Brad is the brother of someone who was in worship last week to hear that? And Brad went on to say like, "Look, all you just need is that whenever

she appears in front of a judge, you just need someone to be there physically who can stand up and say when they say, 'Is there anyone here for one of the defendants?' If you stand up and just say the person's name, it causes the court to pause, to pull that person aside from the rest of the docket, and then to address their particular issue because there's someone there who said their name."

It's just that simple. And it can help give her time to go meet with her lawyer, which can't meet until later in the month. And her trial, her appearance date is Tuesday, this Tuesday at 8:30 a.m. and it's in Kansas City. And Brad said, "Well, wherever it is, it really would be good if someone could go there." And he said, "Where is it?" And I said, "I don't know." And then he helped me search online. And finally, we found out where her trial is going to be. And her trial is going to be in Kansas City. And I gave him the address. And he said, "I work in the building next door. I will go on Tuesday morning and stand up and say her name."

And that made me think about where the real turning point is in this scripture lesson today and some of the grace and mercy that we need to hear out of the scripture today because Mary is confused. She doesn't understand what's going on. This is complicated for her, too. And she doesn't get it. Even looking right at Jesus, she doesn't get it until—until he says her name and it causes her to pause and she responds, "Rabboni," which means not just teacher, it means my great teacher, my ultimate teacher.

And it brings back the relationship that they had. It brings back the love that Christ showed in living and dying and being resurrected. In going through that for her and for you and me and us together. And in that moment, she remembers that love of God that is so great through Jesus. And she ends up telling others about it. And that made me think of Gloria. Gloria was one of my first Sunday school teachers. And if the Easter message is going to be simple, I bet it's contained in something that Gloria taught me when I was a kid. And sure enough, what came to mind immediately for me was: *"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak, but he is strong."* Sing if you know it: *"Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells us so."*

And by the love and the witness and the work that you do, others might know it also. Go forth with this very simple message today: Jesus loves you. Amen.