

"The Story So Far"
May 24, 2020 | Pastor John Stickl

Hey everybody, happy Memorial Day weekend to you and your family. I hope you guys are having a great weekend within an opportunity to just rest and get a little bit refreshed because I don't know about you, but I definitely am tired of this season and all that we have walked through. And so it's a great opportunity to rest.

And on Memorial Day weekend, we celebrate those who have gone before us, who have laid down their life and sacrificed so much that we might enjoy the freedoms that we have. And there are so many freedoms in this season to be grateful for and to give thanks to God for.

And so I pray that you and your family can rest in the grace and the peace of Jesus this Memorial Day weekend. And if this is your first time with us, I want to welcome you to Valley Creek Online. We are so glad you are here with us today. Wherever you're joining in from, somewhere in the world, hope is here. Everyone is welcome. And Jesus changes everything.

You see, we are one church that's currently meeting online, that carries the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. And this is our 11th weekend online. Can you believe it? Eleven weeks since we have gathered together at one of our campuses. And I know it is getting harder and harder to engage online. I know the desire for all of us is to get back into these buildings and come in and worship at our campuses.

And so the temptation is to lean back and to check out. But can I just encourage you? Come on, keep leaning in. Use your faith. God has something great for you. You see, remember we are not just a building, we are not just a gathering, we are a people. And just because we're not at our campuses, and just because we're not gathering together, doesn't mean we've lost who we are. We are still Valley Creek Church. We are still the children of God. We are still the body of Christ.

And we haven't lost our relationships. We can still freely love God and love one another. And we haven't lost our purpose. We are still a movement of hope for the city and beyond, making disciples, bringing the kingdom of God to this earth. And I know it hasn't been an easy season for so many of us. I know we've had so much communication from so many different things from the news and schools and businesses, and all the activities we're a part of.

And so I just want you to know as a church, we've tried to not overcommunicate with you. We've not wanted to fill your inbox with unnecessary emails. We've not wanted to bombard you with communication. We've tried to communicate appropriately to encourage you. And really, what we've been doing in these 11 weeks, we've just been trying to resource you. We've been trying to resource you so you can bring your faith into your home, because I think that's a lot of what God is doing in this season.

And we've resourced you with kids services and kids music and daily reading plans. I think we've put some amazing stuff on social media, some experiences, some encounters, ways to

deal with anxiety and depression, ways to deal with disappointment, all kinds of resources we've tried to share with you that you can use for your own faith. And this Friday, we released one of maybe my favorite resources we've been able to do in this 11 weeks. You see, that song we just sung a few minutes in Jesus' name was released on Friday.

And it is available at any of the places that you can get music. You see, in January, we gathered as an all in community and we recorded some live worship, an album that songs that our church has written, songs that God has birthed in this house and in this family. And that song we just sung a few minute ago, I'm telling you, this is an anthem for coming out of the corona season.

In Jesus' name, we are taking back what the enemy has stolen. In Jesus' name, victory is ours. So I want to encourage you, download, stream it, play it in your house on repeat over and over again. Play it over your family. Play it over you finances. Play it over your children. Start building your faith. Come on. Because in Jesus' name, we're taking back what the enemy has stolen because that which Satan wants to steal, God always wants to give back even more to us what has been taken.

And so when we write songs in this church, in this house, in this family, they are prophetic words from God. We hope they bless everybody, but they are prophetic words for this family. And I want to encourage you to let this be an anthem in this season because God has given us back what the enemy has stolen.

You see, I know in this season, there has been so much information coming at you and me. I mean, man, the news has had a story to tell, has it not? I mean it seems like no matter what you look at, no matter what you listen to, there is a story the world wants to tell you. And you have had to sift and navigate through so much information, so many opinion, so many viewpoints, so much stuff coming at you from every direction. The world has had a lot to say over these past 11 weeks. But do you know who else has had a lot to say? God.

And over these last 11 weeks, God has been speaking to our church and this family. And He's been giving us a different story than the world has been giving us. And so on this Memorial Day weekend, when we remind ourselves of the freedoms that we really have, not just in America but the freedoms we have in Jesus' name. What I want to do is I just want to take a moment and walk you back through the 11 weeks that we've traveled together to remind ourselves of the story God has been telling us.

And so if you are on this journey with us, let this all bring it back up in your heart. If you're new or you missed a few weeks, may this refresh and encourage your soul. Will you just open up your mind with me, open up your heart, real quick, let's just walk through what God has been telling us over these past 11 weeks.

Today, instead of gathering at our physical campuses, we're gathering at our online campus. And right now, we are in thousands of locations together. You see, what I love about our church is that we're not a building, we're a people. And so wherever you are, that's where Valley Creek is. And I know some of you, this whole corona thing has been a really big deal. See, some of you you're over here on this side of the equation. And it's brought a lot of anxiety, it's brought a lot of stress and panic, and concern, and fear to your life. And so when we announced this week that we weren't going to gather as the church, there was like massive relief and peace that was released into your heart.

And some of you, you're way over here on this side and you're thinking to yourself, like come on man, are you kidding me? Like this thing isn't really a big deal, can we just go back to our normal lives? And then there's a whole lot of us that are somewhere on the spectrum in between. And it really doesn't matter if you're over here or if you're over here. Your emotions and your feelings are real. And this isn't about should we gather or shouldn't we gather. This is an opportunity for all of us, whether we're over here or over here, to trust in the Lord. And then honoring the leadership he has placed in our lives.

You see, God has placed governmental authorities over our lives. Romans 13 says that they are literally his servants that He's placed there. And it's up to us to honor them. And we've been asked by the local and national governing authorities to not gather together in large groups right now. Then it's impossible for us to move and hope for the city if we're unwilling to align and submit to the requests of the leadership of the city.

See, some of you, all you want to know is when can we go back to normal? But this isn't about going back to normal, this is about moving forward into a new dimension of abundant life.

I would bet that just about all of us, we weren't expecting this. And while we may have been surprised by that, God hasn't been surprised. You see, if Jesus is the good shepherd, that means sometimes he leads us through the valleys we don't want to go through to get us to the green pastures that we need.

And what I've learned throughout the years is that God's steps are always better than our plans. Storms show up in our lives seemingly out of nowhere. And all of a sudden, we question God's love for us. And we start thinking things like this. Like don't you care about my business? Don't you care about my finances? Don't you care about my health? Don't you care about my school? Don't you care about my sports and my plans and my activities? Don't you care?

May I just encourage you? Don't let the circumstances that are happening around you make you question the love that God has for you. God is inviting us to take our eyes off of the storm around us to look back to Him and remind ourselves that He is with us and that hope is still on the move. And it's in the midst of the darkness where hope shines its brightest.

I just want to share with you the five things that I've been praying for you. The first thing I've been praying for you is simply this, that God would use this for good. I'm praying that we would rest in the finished work of Jesus. We would have an awakening. Our relationships would grow stronger. And the last thing is really simple, it's just that we would be hope carriers. The kingdom of God is a movement of hope. And it flows through the church, not a building, a people. And as we go into the areas of life, we bring hope. Come on. Are you telling me, right now, these areas need hope more than ever before.

Families need hope, and education and all the chaos right now needs hope. And healthcare workers and what they're dealing with needs hope. And businesses and what they're going through needs hope. The government needs hope. Media and sports, technology, you know how many things are running through the internet right now? Even that area needs hope. And even the church needs hope in Jesus' name. So we're the hope carriers.

Come on, hope is more contagious than the coronavirus. Whoever has hope in these areas of life, it doesn't matter what their title is, they become the influencer. They become the leader of that space. So we'll just go where we go everyday with hope. We have the opportunity to impact the world, maybe now more than we ever have in our generation.

Storms don't create what's inside of us, they just reveal what's already there. Like this storm is not creating the emotions and the feelings and the perspective inside. It's just revealing what's already there.

Whether you realize this or not, this season is a gift in your life. Don't lose this moment. Leverage it. God's truth is superior to the facts of this world. You see, a fact is something you can see, taste, smell, touch. It's something you can prove to yourself. It's tangible. You can grab a hold of it. But then there's truth. Truth is God's promises. Truth is God's declaration. Truth is God's kingdom. If you're sick in your life, fact is you're sick. You got a doctor's report. It's confirmed, there's sickness in your body. But truth is by His stripes, you've already been healed.

A fact is you might be able to pay your bills right now. But truth is superior to that. And truth says, God's going to meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Fact might be that you're lonely in this season. Truth is He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Fact is there is a coronavirus storm going around all of our lives. Truth is Jesus has given you His peace. You see, God's truth is superior to the world's facts. And in this season, it's up to you and me to take the attention of our hearts off of the facts of this world and turn them to God's truth.

All of the things that you want in life, they're found in Jesus. The love that you want, the peace you desire, the joy that you seek, the wisdom, the healing, the answer, the breakthrough, it's all

found in Jesus. That's why it says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and everything -- everything else you want is found in Him." And He's not limited in this season. So maybe we need to change our perspective.

Maybe we need to stop talking about all the things we can't do and start focusing on what we can do. Maybe we need to stop looking at the limitations and start seeing the invitations. Maybe we need to stop looking at the obstacles and see the opportunities. You see, I think if we're honest what this Easter reminds us is how much we take Easter for granted. I think every year, we just kind of think of Easter, oh, it's this tradition or this religious thing or a family opportunity. We don't -- we just kind of take it all for granted.

And then all of a sudden, this Easter showed up and it's like we're desperate for a resurrection. We're ready for the circumstance to change. We're ready for the situation to be resolved. We're ready for a breakthrough to come. Like we are desperate for a resurrection. And here we are on this Easter, and the resurrected Jesus has come to your house. There's nothing left for you to do. Everything that ever has been or ever will be required from you has been paid in full.

You're a new creation in Christ Jesus. There's no condemnation and He did it all for you.

You turn on the news, you go to Yahoo, you go to your social media feed, everybody's talking about how do you survive this corona season. And while that's a great question and a fair question, as followers of Jesus, we should really be asking a better question. You see, the question is not how do you survive this season. The real question is, how do you thrive in the midst of it?

What Jesus is building on this earth right now is his church. And the church is not a building, and it's a service, it's a people. It's you and me and us united together moving forward by the Spirit of God, a family on mission, on a journey together. And that's what Jesus is building. And if that's what he's building, then if you want to thrive and flourish in life, you have to align yourself with what he is doing.

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Ready? Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish. When this whole thing started, I think when it started we're all a little confused. Nobody ever heard of it. We weren't sure what was happening. And then we kind of went into panic mode and we like went on runs with toilet paper and food. And then we kind of got into like the disbelief stage, like is this really happening? And I think over these past two weeks in particular, this is when a lot of us have really hit the bottom.

You see, this is a season where there is a lot of loss. And it's okay to grieve that loss. And in fact it's not only okay, you have to grieve them. You have to process your emotions with God.

Because if you just bury them inside of here, when you bury emotions, you bury them alive, and they will come back at the least opportune time.

You have to understand that it's not about the coronavirus, it's about all these other things that existed long before the coronavirus. All the coronavirus did was awaken them. Like anxiety, and depression, and fear, and doubt, and worry, and insecurity, and relational problems. We think those are secondary issues. This has just brought them all to the surface, which means that's actually God's grace in your life. That God is saying, I love you enough to bring these things to the surface so that I can set you free.

It's time for a victory. See, in this season we have to take authority over the things we can control and surrender the things we cannot. Listen, we can't control the coronavirus. We can't control the economy. We can't control when things are going to get opened. So we got to surrender all that to God. But we got to take authority over the things we can control. And you know what we can control? We can control remembering who we are in Jesus.

We can control engaging in the Scriptures. We can control choosing to be a person of worship. We can control engaging online and finding other giant killers to move forward with in life. We can control how we choose to spend our time, where our mind goes, and what we focus on in this season. God is doing a deep work inside of you right now. He's preparing you. He's equipping you. He's doing stuff, removing the junk and the pain and the things that hold us back. Because guess what? On the other side of all this, God has a destiny for you. Don't lean out from it, lean into it. And let Him do everything he wants to do.

The one person we should talk to the most is maybe the person we've talked to the least. We need to pray and converse and have conversation with Him. That's how we keep a healthy heart and get through these hard seasons. Hey dad, you're a really good dad.

And you have a great perspective on life. And I'm so grateful you're my dad because you're kind, and compassionate, and loving, and generous. And I know you have great plans for my life. And so I don't want my plans for my life, I want your plans for my life. I want your kingdom to come into my world. And I know because you love me, you're going to meet all my needs. And I know that when I mess up, I can go right to you because you're going to forgive me. And as you forgive me, you teach me how to forgive those who have hurt me. And I know you are going to protect me and give me victory.

Dad, you're a great dad. You see, what I think is so interesting about prayer is prayer is really two things. It's intimacy and it's authority. It's intimacy because the whole thing is having a conversation and a relationship with God, our Father. And our Father wants to hear our hearts.

He wants to speak to us. So it's about intimacy and it's about authority. It's about stepping into the authority that we've been given as followers of Jesus that God has literally empowered us,

as citizens of heaven, as representers of His kingdom and who He is, as hope carriers in this world, that He has given us, His children, to pray down His kingdom and His will and His heaven into the world around us to bring all things into the submission and the surrender of the lordship of Jesus.

We are a movement of hope for a world that's stuck in a spirit of fear. Because the world needs hope more than ever before, don't fill this season with Netflix and news. If you seek God in this season, then in the season to come everything else will be added unto you. Before Jesus asks them to do anything, he shows them he has already done everything. There is a promise that says that if we will stay planted, rooted, committed to Jesus and his church, the house of the lord, we shall flourish.

It's time to pick up your shield, pick up your sword, stand back up and say, I know this is a hard season. But I will not be a victim to it, I will be victorious in the midst of it.

It's time to rise up. It's time to say I'm tired of you squatting on my life. That is mine, it belongs to me because of the finished work of Jesus. And I'm going to take these lessons, I'm going to apply them to my life and I'm going to be victorious in Jesus' name, whether that giant falls today or at the end of my life, I don't really care because I know I'm going to stand and endure. I will overcome because of what Jesus has done.

So come on. I know the world has had a story to tell. But so has God. And just because the world wants to be loud with their story doesn't mean it's right and it doesn't mean it's truth. Yes, Satan has come to steal, kill and destroy in this whole coronavirus season. But Jesus has come to bring us abundant life. And so the question I want to ask you is what is the story that you're telling. You see, we're all telling a story at least to ourselves. We have a narrative in our mind, something that plays over and over again. And I just want to you, like what's the story you're telling? And maybe a better question is this, what's the story you're going to tell about coronavirus 10 years from now?

Like when you look back on this, are you going to tell the negative narrative story, all about the fear, and the doubt, and the worry, and the discomfort, and the pain, and the brokenness, and the loss? Or are you going to tell a narrative about the goodness of God? You see, yeah, the world wants to catch you up in its narrative, but you know the real narrative of this season? The real story is that God is good. Jesus has forgiven me. I am loved. And everything is possible.

The real narrative of this season is that God is with me and God is for me, so I don't have to be afraid. The real narrative of this season is that, yes, Satan wanted to use this for harm, but my God is using it for His good. The narrative of this season is the lord is my light and my salvation, so whom shall I fear? That my God has prepared and positioned me for such a time as this. That I have been set apart by the grace of God for the good of others and the glory of God.

That my God is going to finish the work that He began in me. That even when I am faithless, He will remain faithful. That the joy of the lord has been my strength. That His peace is guarding my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus. That He has filled my life with hope. And that He has never left me nor forsaken me.

Come on, somebody. You need me to keep going? I mean that is the real story. And so we got to change the narrative. We got to change our perspective. We got to stop fixing our eyes on what we can see and turn our eyes to what we can't see because what we see is temporary. But what is unseen is eternal. This is a season for our faith to grow in Jesus' name, and to remind ourselves of the story that he's telling. And the reason this matters is because faith comes by hearing.

And so whatever story you're listening to and whatever story you're telling, your faith in that thing is growing. And so are you telling the negative narrative or are you telling a narrative of faith, a narrative of hope, and a narrative of love? You see, we love all the stories in the Bible of these great adventures, and these great challenges, and these great battles. We love the story of Noah. He had to face the whole earth being flooded. We love the story of Moses, having to confront Pharaoh and his entire army. We love David having to face the giant of Goliath. We love Daniel thrown in the lion's den. Jesus facing the cross. Paul being shipwrecked. The disciples being arrested. The 1st Century church being persecuted. We love those stories. We just don't want to live in one.

And yet what we forget is that faith grows in the soil of hardship.

And in this season of hardship, God is using the pressure, He's using the challenges, He's using the difficulties to build your faith, to strengthen your soul, to go to a new place in His relationship with you. And what we have to do is change the narrative that we're telling. The world has a story to tell. But these last 11 weeks, God has had a better story that He's been whispering. And so my encouragement and my challenge for you this week is to just be grateful that you're a part of a church that wants to speak forth the hope of God into you and your family, and to take some time to change the narrative, to reframe the perspective, to stop agreeing with the world and start agreeing with God. Let's stop talking about how bad things were or are, or are going to be, and let's start talking about how good our God was, is and will forever be.

And so my encouragement for you is, grab that song in Jesus' name and let it reframe the narrative and remind you that this week God has a better story to tell than the world. And in Jesus' name, we're taking back what the enemy has stolen.

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Next week, I'll kick off a new series for us. And we're kind of start moving forward together. I wanted to just pause this week to look back, to remind ourselves of the truth of what God's been doing, so we have the faith and the courage to keep moving forward together.

So you pray with me. Jesus, thank you that no matter what story we think is happening around us, you are the author and perfecter of our faith and you are the one who is writing the real story.

So Jesus today, we choose to reframe our perspective. We choose to change the narrative. We're not going to allow the news or the brokenness or the world or the one that shouts the loudest to dictate what the story is. We're going to allow you and your whisper and your truth to tell us what the real story is. Thank you God that no matter what is happening around us, no matter what we feel like has been stolen, killed or destroyed, in Jesus' name, you will give us back more than the enemy has taken. And that's the story that we're going to tell to ourselves, to our friends, to our family, and to the world around us. Jesus, you are the author of the story. And so we thank you for the freedoms that we have on this weekend. In your name we pray. Amen.

Hey, I am so glad that you're here with us online today. I hope that you and your family can rest this weekend. I hope you see a new narrative to the story of this season. And for those of you that want to give online, you can give at valleycreek.org as part of our response to the great story that God is writing in our lives.

If you need prayer for anything, we would love to pray for you. If you go on our website, you could just fill that out. We would love to just pray for anything that's going on in your life. In a moment, there'll be some discussion questions here that I would encourage you and your family or whoever you're watching this to check out and walk through.

But next week, we'll start a new series. And may this week be a week that in Jesus' name, we start to take back the story of what's happening in this season. I love you. We'll see you next week.