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Wow. We just want to add our voice to all of the gratitude right now. I just want to look right into the camera and say, "Thank you," to all of our medical professionals and their families, everybody who is a first responder on the front lines of this thing in any way, shape, or form. We are so, so grateful to you. Thank you so much.

I just want to wish all of you a very happy Easter. I know this is unlike any Easter we have ever experienced, but the tomb is still empty and God is still on his throne. I just want to welcome everybody wherever you may be joining us from around our city and all over the world, we're so glad you are here.

Well, it was Easter and they had quarantined themselves. They sat in a room upstairs and they waited for the time to pass. They wondered when it might be safe to go outside once again.

Just a few weeks prior to this they never could have anticipated how much their lives would change, yet it had changed all so quickly. And they sit in this room, they try to keep their distance from other people. They are desperately looking for some updated news that might bring some rays of hope.

It looked like they were going to be in there for a while. They could feel the thoughts of uncertainty and anxiety begin to build within each one of them as they began to wonder what life might look like when this was all over.

Now, it might sound to you like I might be describing the situation most of us around the world are finding ourselves in here on Easter of 2020. But actually, I'm talking about a group of people 2,000 years ago.

I'm actually referring to a passage of Scripture I want to look at with you today out of the Gospel of John, chapter 20. As it turns out, we actually have a lot more in common with the followers of Jesus on that very first Easter 2,000 years ago than perhaps we've ever had.

Several weeks ago, I looked at my calendar and it dawned on me for the first time that Easter Sunday was going to fall right in the middle of the peak of this pandemic that we are currently in. The reality washed over me that, for the very first time ever, as a church family we would not be able to gather, physically, together for Easter Sunday.

Can I tell you that I could barely process that? In fact, if I'm being honest, I can still hardly process it. Now what you may need to understand about pastors is that Easter is our Super Bowl. It's the thing we've been training for all year long. In fact, as soon as Easter of 2019 was over, we started planning for this one. Because it's the highest

attendance of the year, everybody is so excited, we always do tons of baptisms, we have the greatest message in the world that Jesus has walked out of the grave so that you can have hope beyond yours as well.

So, we always look forward to Easter. And if you would have told me just a couple of months ago that I would be preaching my Easter message to an empty room, I would have told you that you are crazy. And yet, here we are.

It's Easter, but it doesn't look or feel much like any Easter I've ever experienced. I don't know how you are feeling about that right now. I'm sure you're probably experiencing a whole host of emotions. Maybe you feel a little sad. Maybe even you feel a little depressed, if you're being honest with yourself. It feels as if Easter, among a whole host of other things, has maybe been ruined or taken away by this virus.

And yet, I want to encourage you with this truth today. I want you to know simply this question:

What if Easter 2020 **looks** and **feels** more like that first Easter over 2000 years ago than **any other** we've ever experienced?

You might say, "Aaron, what in the world do you mean about that?" Well, I just want you to know that on that first Easter 2,000 years ago, like us, everything was shut down. After Jesus had been crucified and put into a tomb, his followers were filled with fear, anxiety, and they were uncertain about their future. They wondered what was going to happen to them.

In fact, the word is anxiety. Anxiety defined is simply this, "A heightened sense of vulnerability plus a diminished sense of power." And that's what so many of us are feeling and experiencing right now. More than ever, we have this feeling of vulnerability about circumstances that really very few of us can control.

And if that's what you're feeling, I want you to know you're not alone. And I want you to know that the followers of Jesus 2,000 years ago felt and experienced that exact same thing on that first Easter.

Look with me how John describes the scene in chapter 20, verse 19, "That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting **behind locked doors** because they were **afraid** of the Jewish leaders."

Now, we actually have some language today to describe what the disciples were experiencing. It's terminology that, as a human race, we didn't even have that long ago. But now we've become very familiar with these terms. We could say this:

Followers of Jesus were "socially distancing" and "sheltering at home".

They were behind locked doors. And much like us, they were trying to understand how things could have changed for them so quickly. It was disorienting. Because, if you remember, it had only been a week prior, on Palm Sunday, where the disciples were with Jesus and they were walking into the City of Jerusalem.

Do you remember the scene? Jesus is on a donkey, crowds of people are around them. They were well within six feet of each other. They are laying down palm branches in front of Jesus, praising his name. They were happy to see Jesus and the disciples.

And now, they have crucified their king. They placed Jesus' lifeless body in a tomb, and the disciples' whole world gets flipped upside down. Their leader is buried and dead, and along with him they feel like their hopes and their dreams.

And when the rock sealed the entrance to that grave, it felt like it sealed their future as well. And now, they are quarantined in this house, uncertain of what their new normal was going to be.

Followers of Jesus were swimming in a sea of uncertainty.

And I'm sure many of you, over the past several weeks, between working at home and trying homeschool kids, you've been trying to figure out a way to pass the time. Maybe you've gone to the family game closet and pulled out some board games. Maybe you played Monopoly, Yatzee, and Jenga. Maybe one of those games you pulled out is the Game of Life.

And if you've ever played the board game Game of Life, you know the way to win the game is to constantly accumulate. It's to upgrade your house, get expensive properties, and get better job, and go on more elaborate vacations.

I never really enjoyed the board game Game of Life when I was growing up as a kid. You could feel like you were winning, then all it took was to pull out the wrong card or land on the wrong space. And then you got a job loss, your house flooded, you got sent to jail, and all of the sudden you weren't winning anymore.

And, I don't know, maybe many of you have been playing the Game of Life, not necessarily the board game. You've been playing the game of life, where you just felt like the key to happiness, the key to success, is to accumulate, climb the ladder, acquire more and more. And you were playing the game of life until the virus came in and really sort of changed everything. And now you're feeling a bit disoriented. You're feeling a little bit lost.

And I want you to know in John 16, a few chapters prior to the passage we're in today, Jesus actually, in a very pastoral tone, promised us, "In this life, you are going to have trouble." But then right after that Jesus said, "I want you to take heart. I want you to be encouraged because I have overcome the world."

And I don't know about you, like I've known those words of Jesus from John 16 for a really long time, and yet every time I experience trouble, trial, difficulty, or crisis in my life, I act shocked and surprised. Like, "God, where are you?"

And Jesus says: I told you this was going to happen. I told you that you were going to pull that card, land on that space, and I also told you where your hope resides. It is not in your circumstances. It is not with the ups and the downs of the stock market. It is in a person. And his name is Jesus Christ.

And see, I think that's what happens in moments like this. It actually shows us where we have really been putting our hope all along. And it shows us where we have been finding our sense of peace all along.

You know, I was researching this past week about the history of the word quarantine. And, many of you probably know this, but it turns out that word comes from a Latin word that means 40. And it actually derives from the 40 days Jesus prayed and fasted in the desert before he began his earthly ministry. The history of the word quarantine literally is a space of time in which Jesus prepared himself for his life's purpose and mission.

It really has nothing to do with removing yourself from society because of sickness. It has everything to do with preparing your character and your heart. And I want to get back to that.

I just wonder if maybe this is a span of time that all of us find ourselves in that we can do some re-evaluating of the game of life we have been playing up until this point. I think God wants to do a tremendous amount of life change in every single one of us.

Could I just get really transparent with you right now? About 10 days ago I lost it. I was trying to be strong for so many people. About 10 days ago my adrenaline wore off, my mental strength wore down, and my emotions welled up. It was a Thursday afternoon. It was actually beautiful weather outside, but I got to this place where I had just reached my limits.

I calmly walked outside in to my backyard. I got far enough away from the house where I was confident nobody could hear me. I stopped by a tree, and I began to weep. I cried out to God. Listen, I have not cried that hard since junior high school when I found out Milli Vanilli had been lip syncing.

And I have no idea of that is funny or not, because I'm in an empty room right now. I'm just imagining you all think that is funny. I think we all probably need a good laugh, even if it is a cheesy joke.

But in all seriousness, I stood there by that tree, and my vision blurred through my tears, and I began to calm down a little bit. It was in the stillness of that sunny afternoon that I felt like the Spirit of God said to me, "Aaron, you haven't spoken with me with that much

emotion, passion, or focus in a really, really long time. And that hit me like a freight train. It took a crisis to get me back to the heart of God.

I'm reminded of what Winston Churchill said years ago, "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

Can I encourage you with that same thought? I would never wish a crisis on anyone, but there can be so much good that can come out of it. I can't presume upon what God is doing in the world, but I think what God is trying to communicate to all of us is that God, in recent weeks, has stripped everything from us that competes with him.

The Bible calls this idolatry. I don't know what you think about when you think about an idol, but it's not a gold little statue. An idol can be anything. An idol is anything that replaces our focus and attention from where it is deserved and the only one who can sustain it, which is God.

And God has recently just stripped us from all of our idols. We worship the god of sports—March Madness, the NBA, the Indy 500, the Tokyo Olympics have all been cancelled or rescheduled.

We worship the god of entertainment. Hollywood has been shut down, and movie theaters are closed.

We worship the god of money, and the stock market has fallen and the economy had taken a beating.

We worship the god of self-reliance, and our personal freedom and autonomy has been restricted through lockdown.

Now, I want you to hear me really clearly. I believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that we will come through this and we will come out of it because God is still on the throne. But let's not miss the gift of this season either. We have never been more reliant upon God than we are right now. As painful as it is, it is a gift we never want to squander.

Look at how John describes what happens next. I love this. This is the power of Easter in verse 19, "**Suddenly**, Jesus was standing there among them! '**Peace be with you,**' he said."

Jesus comes and that's the first thing he wants them to know. Out of all the things he could have said. He could have said, "Tada." He could have said, "I'm here." He could have said, "I'm back." He says, "Peace."

Things were feeling dark and hopeless. They were confused and scared. Jesus knew what they needed. And what Jesus said to the first followers on that first Easter, I believe he wants to say to you and to me right now where you are.

Now, you may go, “Aaron, we can’t get to church.” Listen, they weren’t in church. They were not with crowds of people gathered together in a church building on Easter morning. They were a small group in a living room. And Jesus brought them peace through his presence. He can do the same thing for you today. He is right there with you in that living room wherever you are. He wants to speak peace right into your life.

And the next thing he offers them is proof. Look at verse 20. “As he **spoke**, he **showed them** the wounds in his hands and his side. They were **filled with joy** when they saw the Lord! **Again** he said, ‘**Peace be with you.**’”

He gives them evidence to believe he rose from the dead. I want you to know today that if you believe, like if you really believe that Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead, that changes everything.

And then John wraps up the scene by saying, “They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!” But then Jesus found it necessary to say again to them, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus appears to the disciples and this is what he gives them. He gives them peace. The result is joy. And then he gives them a purpose. And don’t miss that last part. I believe that’s what he wants to do today on this Easter 2020. He wants to give you peace right now in the midst of all the uncertainty you are feeling.

The result of that, I hope, because of the risen Savior, the empty tomb, is that you’ll experience some joy. But Jesus also wants to give you a purpose. He wants to focus the energy of your life on what it is you’re truly living for.

One of the most beautiful things for me to see and witness as a pastor over these past few weeks is to see how real and true this has been for our church family here in Indianapolis. I know there may be people watching from all over the world, but I want you to know our church, centered here in this city, has been stepping up and we’ve been trying to offer peace and joy, trying to live out the purpose God has given to us.

And I’m just seeing stories all over our city of how regular people are shining the light of Jesus in the midst of really dark circumstances. I’m getting all kinds of stories, not just our staff, just people in our church. They are buying and delivering groceries, and prescriptions, and supplies for people who can’t get out—maybe the elderly or those on forced quarantine.

They are donating food items, delivering meals, paying utility bills. We have people going down to Wheeler Mission downtown to prepare bagged lunches. They need about 100 lunches a day in April, that’s 3,000 bagged lunches. We’ve got people going down there to pack those.

We’ve helped provide free child care for medical professionals in our city, delivering meals to them at the hospitals, trying to provide care packages for their families and to come around them.



We had a small group right after the school closings who went and cleaned the MLK Center to prepare it for children who would need to be there for IPS School 43. Our church has given nearly \$100,000 to help purchase 235,000 N95 type masks to medical professionals and first responders all over our city.

We're reaching out to help other churches through this, churches that may not have the technology we do to get their services out. We partnered with a church in Harlem, New York, right in the epicenter of this pandemic, trying to help them with technology and help them with resources so they can continue to pastor their people.

There is a church in East Germany where God is doing some amazing things. Prior to this pandemic, they'd had about 700 people showing up to their church. Now, since this pandemic, they've gone online and now, much through the equipment we've helped them purchase, they are reaching 3,000 people every weekend. It's just amazing.

And Jesu says this in verse 21, "As the Father has **sent me**, so I am **sending you**."

I find it interesting that the peace Jesus offered them was tied to the purpose he has for them. I just think it's amazing how God is expanding our platform to reach more and more people.

I was a little bit nervous several weeks ago when we couldn't have physical gatherings. I just wondered how church online was going to go. It has blown my mind that in the last five weeks our attendance has actually increased. Our online engagement—we've had just under 20,000 people every weekend at the church service watching, worshipping with us. There are nearly half-a-million online impressions every week.

I want you to check out this graphic here. This is a map of the whole world. These blue dots, if you can see it, are everywhere people are engaging with us online from around the globe.

And I look at that and think, "Only God." I look at that graphic and think of Matthew 28, The Great Commission, when Jesus said, "I want you to go and make disciples in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And do you know what the initial disciples did? They stayed in Jerusalem because it was comfortable there. That was where their normal routine was. So, they stayed in Jerusalem. What did God allow? God didn't cause it, but he allowed persecution to come and get them out of Jerusalem so that they would go to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Listen, I don't believe God causes pandemics, but I think he can use them to get us up and out, around the world. And I believe that God has shut us down in order to send us out. And I find it ironic that church buildings are empty all over the globe on this Easter,

but the message of a risen Savior is being listened to by more people than ever in the history of the world, due to technology. Only God can do that.

And listen, church buildings may be empty, but so is the grave. So, you hold on to hope. Don't miss what God is saying to you and wanting to do in you in this moment. This is not just a season for you and I to get through, this is a season for a breakthrough. And I believe thousands of lives are going to be changed and impacted by what God wants to do today.

You see, we can live with peace, joy, and purpose because the resurrection means we have hope regardless of our circumstances.

Jesus says these words in John 11:25-26. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life, and anyone," that means anyone. Whoever is listening or watching this right now, wherever you may be around the world, he is talking about you. "Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying."

That's a big statement. Jesus says: There is nothing that can touch you in this life, not even death. Because I walked out of a grave, you can have hope beyond yours as well. The resurrection says we have hope because of Jesus regardless of how dark the world might feel right now. That's where our hope lies.

I was doing some reading this past week on the CDC website about the Coronavirus and where it got its name. And you've probably seen the magnified images of the virus. It looks like a little ball with spikes on it. Actually, the word corona is this idea of a crown of spikey thorns. That's where it gets its name. In other words, it's the thorny crown virus.

And Jesus understands what it is we're going through right now because he wore a crown of thorns on a cross. He bore that pain. He bore that suffering so that nothing would have the final say, including a thorny crown virus.

I want you to know that in Revelation it says, "There will be no more mourning, there will be no more crying, there will be no more pain, no more suffering because of Jesus."

And today, on Easter Sunday, we have hope. We have hope that one day there will be no more anxiety or anger. There will be no more fear of frustration, no more unemployment, no more isolation, no more shortage of supplies, no more depression, no more social distancing, no more quarantines, no more sickness, no more virus, no more death.

And today... More than anything, I want you to have the hope of heaven that Jesus desires to give to you today. And so, if you want to have the peace that can be found in Jesus, we would love to introduce you.



I simply want to ask you to join me in prayer. And if you want to receive Jesus, just text “Jesus” to this number here: 317-768-0777. And our team would love to follow-up with you, and talk with you about the best decision you can ever make today. In fact, in living rooms all over the globe, would you just give it up for all the people right now who want to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior and their King right now today? Welcome to the family.

Let me pray for you.

Father, we come to you today and we’re so grateful for King Jesus. We’re so grateful for an empty tomb. Father, we need you more than ever. We love you. And we thank you for the hope of heaven. And I pray people could experience the peace that can only be found in you, right now today.

We have joy, not because of our circumstances, but because of you. And we know you will overcome, and that we will come through this and out of this. God, help us to keep our eyes fixed on you, to turn down the noise that is out there, and to be laser-focused on you.

We love you, and we thank you. In Jesus’ name: Amen.