
Alright, what's up Traders Point family? How are we doing today? Good, good. Good to see you. I want to welcome everyone across all of our physical campuses and those of you joining us online. So glad to have you.

Today we are kicking off our Christmas series of messages. And I'm really excited about that. But I've got to tell you that I feel a little bit late to the game on it. I feel like maybe we should have started the Christmas series several weeks ago because it felt like right after Halloween, if not before, I started to see Christmas decorations already go up. How many of you had the Christmas tree up right next to the pumpkin? Anybody? I just wonder.

Now, I'm the kind of guy in a normal year, I don't really want to see anything related to Christmas 'til the day after Thanksgiving. Anybody with me in that? I know there are a few of us—a few of us. This is a deeply divided issue, I know. I think it's somewhere in the Bible, actually, that you should not celebrate Christmas... I guess not.

This year, I've got to tell you, I was totally fine seeing Christmas trees as early as possible because we need something to celebrate, don't we? And as we start this Christmas series of messages, we're calling it *Anxious Christmas*, which some of you are like, "Yeah, that makes a whole lot of sense that we would talk about anxiety around Christmastime, some of you might be wondering what that has to do with the Christmas story 2,000 years ago.

And as it turns out, it has everything to do with it. See, in a good year, in a normal year, right around the holiday season anxiety, loneliness, depression—those things are at elevated levels. Many of you already know that.

But then you take the kind of year that we're having right now and it's just going to be magnified all the more. We are in a season right now where we have sort of gotten accustomed to receiving on a daily basis via our devices or on social media or the news a daily updated case count of COVID around the state and around the world.

And yet, I'm wondering—what if we were to get a daily count of the numbers of anxiety? I wonder what that would be. I wonder if we were to get a daily count of the number of those wrestling with loneliness, fear, depression, worry, and panic... Something tells me that those numbers would be at an elevated level as well, an epidemic level. And I think that the effects of that anxiety that we are currently experiencing in 2020, they will stay with us and last a whole lot longer than the pandemic will.

So just so we know that we are all on the same page with anxiety—anxiety can have a number of different definitions. I want to give us this one just so that we are all on the same page today as we start. Anxiety is primarily a feeling and feelings are important things that may or may not be trusted, but it's:

A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome

In other words, anxiety is this period of time in which we are not quite sure what's going to happen right around the corner. So we're somewhat fearful about it, we're somewhat uneasy about it and this would be not only a pretty good description of 2020, but it would be a pretty good description of the very first Christmas as Luke describes it to us, which we don't always seem to connect those two, especially as we read the Christmas narrative.

We've sort of grown up accustomed to seeing the nativity scene, and there are various versions of this, but this is sort of Norman Rockwell-esque. We see Mary and Joseph and a little baby wrapped snugly in strips of linen in a manger. And we see the star and we see the wise men and the shepherds, and it just looks so picturesque.

Yet, something tells me that if Mary were here today and she were to see that she wouldn't recognize it. Something tells me that if Mary were to see this, she might even laugh out loud and say, "What's that?" Well, "That's like you, and Joseph, and Jesus. It's the Nativity. Everybody knows about that image."

And she's like, "That's not how that went down." I think she would pull us aside and she would say, "Honey, let me tell you what really happened that night. Can I tell you that Joseph and I got into a huge argument just moments before that? And we said some things that weren't very nice to each other. Could I tell you what it felt like to be out in the cold in a barn when nobody would take us in?"

"Could I tell you about how a family member said some really hurtful things to me a couple of months before? They didn't believe the whole story about the fact that I was carrying the Son of God. Could I tell you about some of the fears and the worries and, yes, the anxiety that I was going through in this moment, because I was just a teenager then and I wasn't yet ready to be a mom, let alone raise the actual Son of God? Could I tell you about some of the things I was experiencing in those moments?"

See, with this feeling of anxiety, and so many of us know this, is this sort of impending feeling of waiting. Like, we're waiting for something. I don't really know. Maybe we're waiting for things to get better. We're waiting to not feel this way anymore. We're waiting to turn a corner and it feels like that might never come. And I'm just guessing that there are a number of you who can relate to me, we're not very good at waiting.

I'm just going to confess to you, I don't like to wait. I'm not really good at waiting. It's the reason why I don't like traffic jams. It's the reason why I don't like to go to the doctor, because I don't like to sit in the waiting room.

It's the reason why, when I'm at a crowded store and the lines are full, I don't like to wait, so I will very quickly try to assess which line is going to go the fastest simply by looking at the people in the lines. And I will make a judgment.

I know you're not supposed to judge people by the outside, but I do. I judge by looking at them and the clothes that they wear whether they are fast or not. And can I just say that I never get it

right. People who look fast end up being slow. People who look slow end up speedy fast. Go figure.

And we're in a year right now—2020 just feels like one big giant waiting room. And we're waiting for things to get better. And we're waiting for the income to return. And we're waiting for the pandemic to end. And we're waiting for this feeling of isolation to come to a close. And we just wonder if it ever will.

And when you look at God's word, the longest season of waiting for God's people, ironically would have been just before Christmas. Just before the Messiah, the one who was prophesied all those years ago, would come—Immanuel, God with us. That he would be born into the world.

In fact, God's people had been waiting and waiting and waiting—400 years to be precise. In fact, in this period of time, that 400 years would be between the recording of the Old Testament and the recording of the New Testament. It's often referred to as the Intertestamental Period. The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi, the first book of the New is Matthew. And if you've got a paper Bible, that's just one flip of the page. If you've got a digital Bible, it's one click of a button.

But to the people going through it at the time, it was a 400-year waiting room. And in that 400 years there wasn't really any spoken word from God. There wasn't really any seeming action on his part. And they were wondering: Had God forgotten what he said he was going to do?

Because in the Old Testament he told us what he was going to do but it seems like all of this time has gone by and we're wondering if maybe God has fallen asleep at the wheel, we're wondering if he wandered over to the other side of the universe and got caught up in something else and forgot.

And yet, what I want you to know today is what God was communicating through this first Christmas story. And please hear me. Somebody needs to hear this today, while they were waiting God was working.

And can I say to you, that while you are waiting—whatever it is that you are waiting for right now—collectively all of us are waiting for the pandemic to be over, but individually, you've got your own wait. Waiting for that special someone. Waiting for that someone who used to be that special someone for things to get better again.

Waiting for your health to return. Waiting for this feeling to go away. What is it that you are waiting on right now? And you are about to give up hope. In fact, you are sort of standing on your last leg and hanging on by your last thread. You're like, "I've tried everything. I'm not quite sure."

Can I just assure you today, even before you might believe this, could you just borrow some of my faith today to just know that while you are waiting, I assure you that God is working? And that's not just something we put on a coffee cup, something that sounds nice to say this time of the year, it is embedded in the Christmas story.

In fact, in order for us to understand and grasp what Luke is telling us in the Christmas story, we need to understand these two important words. The words:

promise and fulfillment

Those two things have to go together. And much of the Old Testament would fit under the category of promise. These are all of the things that God promises that he is going to do. The reason why the Old Testament is so harsh and so brutal is because it's showing us what life was like outside of God's grace. And he gives us 300 promises in the Old Testament of what he's going to give us in and through his Son, Jesus.

And then the New Testament would be fitting under the word fulfillment, primarily in the work and the person of Jesus. Jesus fulfills every single of those 300 promises God gave in the Old Testament.

And yet, if you were living then, in the moment, you would have wondered: God, where are you? It's not been four years, it's not been four decades, it's been 400 years. I thought you would have come by now. I don't understand. It seems like such a random number—400 years. Why not 300? Why not 500? Why 400 years?

And it's not just some random number. It's not as if God was just like, "Well, I guess now is the time to send Jesus. No. There was great intention behind the waiting room. And that's what we see in Luke, chapter 2, starting in verse 1.

It's the Christmas story. You've probably heard it before. Many of you have heard it a lot of times before. And yet, one of the dangers with familiarity is that you stop reading it. One of the dangers with familiarity is that you stop listening to it. And yet we see these little clues that Luke gives us that while God's people were waiting, he was working. And he still is.

Look at what Luke tells us in verse 1. He says:

"At that time..." Now this isn't once upon a time. This is at that time. In other words Luke is saying that this is a specific moment in history, "...the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire." Alright that's a little bit of an unusual way to tell us about the birth of Jesus. How to get that started.

And then in parenthesis he says:

"(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) To which I want to say, why is that necessary to tell us?"

How many of you have ever had an uncle or a family friend who just can't get to the point? He's like talking to you about his day. And just wandering off on all kinds of rabbit trails. And you're like, "Can I go take a nap? By the time I'm done maybe you'll be finished with this story. Why do you need to include all of these details?"

That's the question I have for Luke, "Luke, why did you include that little detail there? Who cares about Quirinius?" Well there is a reason. It says:

“All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.” This is something the Old Testament tells us. It’s part of the promise. “...he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.” That was where he was living.

“He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.” That’s not convenient at all. Can I get a good amen from all of the pregnant ladies? Going on a road trip when you’re nine months pregnant. “She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.”

Four hundred years of planning and yet she couldn’t give birth in a hospital. She’s in a barn. And Luke is so specific about these details that when you read it, at first glance, it doesn’t really seem like it’s all that necessary to the story. You’re like, “Luke, I don’t know why you’re telling us this. The other gospel writers don’t.”

If you actually look at Matthew’s telling of the birth narrative, Matthew sort of tells it kind of like the nightly news would tell it. The nightly news just gives enough detail, kind of from a 30,000-foot level. They don’t spend a whole lot of time on it. Just a quick overview to tell you what happened like in Matthew.

Mark doesn’t even tell us, like, “Mark, how do you overlook that?” Mark just skips right to Jesus’ life and ministry.

John is a bit philosophical in the way he chooses to talk about Jesus’ birth. He says, “The Word became flesh.”

But Luke—Luke goes out of his way. We’ve been in a series of Luke since last fall. If you remember you know that Luke is well educated, Luke is sort of like an investigative reporter. He’s writing all of this so his friend, Theophilus, would come to believe. Luke is going out of his way to give us a historical account. Luke just wants us to know all of these seemingly random details about the Christmas story. And we’ve got to ask ourselves why.

Well, if you really look at it, Luke is telling us why. Luke is basically saying, “Here’s what was going on at that time in history.” It seems like God has them in the waiting room for no apparent reason, but in reality, God was at work behind the scenes. So what was going on?

Let me give you just a little bit of a timeline of history. You see, between the time that Jesus’ birth was promised in the Old Testament—it actually happened in the New—there was this group of people known as the Persians. They were gaining more and more influence in the world and this scared the Greeks. So they decided to rise up and stop them.

Maybe you saw the movie about this. It’s called 300. All of the washboard abs, alright? It’s loosely based on this. And they decided to stop the Persians. And a guy by the name of Phillip of Macedon unites the Greeks together and leads them into battle. And when Phillip dies, his

son takes over, a young man by the name of Alexander. And he eventually comes to be known as Alexander the Great.

He conquers the entire known world in just 12 years. That was all around 350 years before Jesus was born. And because of his dominance and the Greek influence around the world, everyone becomes more united in language and in thought. In fact, one of the common phrases that went around the world at this time was that everyone spoke a little Greek.

So you see that God was beginning to orchestrate some events so that way the language barriers would come down. Everybody spoke at least a little bit of Greek so that way when the Messiah was born, news of his birth would spread quickly around the world.

In addition to this, about 280 years before Jesus is born the Greeks take the Old Testament Scriptures, which up until that point had been written only in Hebrew and reserved primarily for the Israelites, they took those, and they translated them into Greek. That's what the Greek Old Testament is. It's called the Septuagint. And for the first time everyone, not just the Israelites, was able to read all of the promises about this coming Messiah.

And Jesus would be born at a very unique time in history because hundreds of years prior, when his birth was promised, the world was very disconnected. They didn't have roads that connected them, but in that 400 years the Romans built this elaborate highway system. And there was this phrase, all roads lead to Rome.

And there was also something known as the Dea Spora. This was something that happened before Jesus was born that the Jewish people didn't take very kindly to. To them it didn't look like it was a good thing that was happening, but they were dispersed all over the Roman Empire. As we look back with a little bit of retrospect, we see that God was actually sending ambassadors around the world, individuals—men and women who would actually talk about the coming Messiah so that the gospel would be spread more quickly.

Then about 63 years before Jesus was born the Romans defeat the Greeks and they take over power in the known world. One of the most well-known emperors was a guy by the name of Julius Caesar and under his rule things were incredibly volatile. He gets murdered about 25 years before Jesus is born and a new Caesar takes over, a guy by the name of Caesar Augustus. Seems like Luke mentions him, doesn't it?

And under his rule there was this unprecedented season of peace that would last for a really long time—all over the world. Imagine that. World Peace—finally. The poor girls in all of those beauty pageants didn't know what to say in their interviews because they already had world peace.

So Caesar Augustus, during this time of unprecedented peace decides to take a global census, because what better time to take one than when the world is at peace? Much better than when the world is at war.

His motivation would have primarily been political and financial. He wanted to know how many citizens he had so he knew how to tax them. He wanted to know if he ever got attacked by another army, how many men he could recruit to get into his army quickly. And so there is this census that takes place. And he calls upon Quirinius, his right-hand man, to make all of that happen. Seems like Luke mentioned him.

And registering for this census required you to travel to the town of your birth to file the paperwork. Everybody would have had to do it because the internet didn't exist yet.

Here you have this couple, Mary, and Joseph, visited by the angel, told she was going to give birth to the Son of God, big problem though. The promises said that the child would be born in Bethlehem, but they lived in Nazareth—100 miles away. How are they going to get there? Well, suddenly a census pops up. Mary is nine months pregnant. I'm sure that Joseph was super nervous to have to go and break the news to her that they needed to take a road trip and that's where they go.

And I would imagine that to Mary none of it would have made any sense. I would imagine that she would have been fearful and worried and even anxious. Here she is. Away from home. Away from family. No place to stay.

She's going to give birth to this child. It seems like God has checked out. "God, you were going to take care of me. I was visited by the angel. You told me what was going to happen, and yet this just seems out of control. And I'm sure that Mary had all of these questions, just like many of us have questions today about God's involvement in our world.

But we see that God was at work behind the scenes, executing all of these details around the world for 400 years so that Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, would be born at just the right time in history.

Because, you see, when we are in the waiting room, God is always at work. It is never just waiting for waiting's sake. It isn't just waiting because God is playing games with us. It is waiting because God is doing a whole bunch of strategic maneuvering behind the scenes and it is no different today in 2020.

This has been an incredibly rough year of waiting and waiting. And yet, I'm completely confident that while I don't know all of what God is up to, I do know that he's up to something. I do know that he's at work. I do know that he is moving in the lives of people, if nothing else to maybe awaken us again, to awaken the church once again because maybe we've drifted from where he wanted us in the first place.

In Galatians, chapter 4, verses 4 through 5, I love Paul's words here. It says:

"But when," can you say it out loud with me physically and online, "when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children."

We see that God knows what he is doing. The birth of Jesus happened at just the right time in history. There was Pax Romana. There was all of this Roman peace. There was the highway system, the Septuagint, the language barriers had all come down, because when Jesus would be born in a very understated way, news of his birth would spread rapidly. And maybe there are just a few of us who need a little reminder of that this Christmas.

You have a Heavenly Father whether you believe in him or not. He believes in you. You have a Heavenly Father that whether you see him or not, he sees you.

I just want you to know that, as a dad, it breaks my heart when any one of my kids think I have forgotten them, even for just a second, because they don't always know what I'm up to. They don't always know what I'm doing.

I've got four kids. My three girls love raspberry mocha Frappuccino from Starbucks. Can I get a good amen? So who doesn't love a raspberry mocha Frappuccino? I'm going to get one after the service is over. It's good. My daughters, they love them. So every now and then they will talk me into rolling through the drive through and they know how to work it. They know what buttons to push.

One day I was on my way home from work a couple of years ago and I just thought, "I'm just going to roll through, I'm going to go ahead and get them, unsolicited, some raspberry mocha Frappuccinos. I'll just take them home. It's a good gift from their daddy who loves them.

I rolled through. I got them. I go home. And my hands were full when I walked in. I could only grab two of the three. I left the third one in the truck. And I walked into the kitchen, my two oldest were sitting right there so I just handed them to them—they were just right there. I said, "Hey, I got you these."

That's when I noticed my youngest standing behind them. Big crocodile tears, lips quivering. She thought I forgot about her. Can I just tell you in that split second, what that did to this dad's heart? I about pulled a hammy trying to get back out to the truck trying to get that third one back into her as quickly as I possibly could. I'm sure to her it felt like an eternity.

I'm just wondering if there is anybody who feels like your Daddy has forgotten you. That your Heavenly Father has checked out. He's asleep at the wheel. You've been unemployed for 10 months, "God, come on. Where are you?"

In this moment when you needed your spouse the most, your marriage is falling apart. In this moment where you are wondering, "Hey, what's around the corner?" It feels like there is no place where you can step on solid ground and you just cry out in these moments of desperation whether it's early in the morning or late at night, "God, where are you?"

Can I just tell you that there have been more than a few occasions where I've said those things to him, "God, where are you? I just don't understand how much longer. God, you've already got our attention. God, lesson learned. Got it. Check. Can you end this season? Can we just get on to a more sense of normality?" And God's like, "I'm not done working yet. I haven't forgotten."

Could you just be reminded that when you're in the waiting room there is always a good reason. In fact, I'm even beginning to get to this place, I trying to muster the faith to get to this place, if God's got me in the waiting room, it's actually a good thing. It means that he cares. It means that he's at work. It means that he's working a blessing right now in the background. And he's just like, "Hey, would you just hold on?"

See this Christmas, more than ever... The name that was given to Jesus when he was born was Immanuel and the reason why is because God is with us. God is not behind us. God is not in front of us. He's not beside us or around us, God is with us.

And I want you to know today, this Christmas:
God is closer than you think.

In fact, Scripture says that he is close to the brokenhearted. And if you are brokenhearted, and you've got to be honest—every single of us, we're brokenhearted about something right now—that means that God is as close to us as he will ever be.

And right now, today, as we look for answers and as we look to alleviate some of the anxiety and the fear, as we sit in this waiting room, may we hold onto these promises that God gave 400 years ago and recognize that he's a good Father who will come through at just the right time. That phrase sounds so cliché, but the reason why is because it's true.

God is seldom early, but he's never late. He's at work right now in the details of your life whether you see it or not. In fact, in Hebrews, chapter 4, verses 15 and 16 it says, referring to Jesus:

"This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."

And a lot of people have asked over the last years, "How do we know that God cares?" And we can very easily point to the cross of Jesus. And most of the time we do. And for good reason. We point to that and say: "That shows how much Jesus cares. If that doesn't communicate his compassion for us, I don't know what will."

But we can just as easily point to his birth because that communicates something almost even deeper. That Jesus would be willing to come just as helpless and as vulnerable as we all came into the world. The one thing we all have in common, as different as we may be, is that we all came into the world the same way. Nobody just appeared. We came into the world through a physical birth.

And Jesus said, "I'll go through that too. And not only that, but I'll be dependent upon two very broken, sinful people as my mom and my dad. And I'll actually learn how to walk. And I'll go through adolescence and puberty. And I'll go through all of the awkwardness of those early years. And I'll go through what it feels like to be sick, and what it feels like to be hungry, and what it feels like to be tired."

Jesus went through it all. Why would he do that? Why would he go to all of those lengths? We know very, very little about him from zero to 30. Why? It's because he is going out of his way. God is a patient God and he's working this out to say, "Listen, I've come not to be a transactional God but a relational God. And that takes some time."

In fact, I'm reminded several years ago of a guy by the name of Father Damien who was a priest, and he became famous for his willingness to serve lepers. And he served in a village that had been quarantined as a leper colony. And for 16 years Father Damien lived with them. He didn't live outside of the village, he lived in the village.

And he bandaged their wounds. And he embraced them when they needed a hug. And he touched them when nobody else would. And he organized schools and bands and choirs.

And he built homes so that they would actually have some shelter. And he built 2,000 coffins by hand so that when they died, they could be buried with dignity. Slowly this village became a place for them to actually live rather than a place to go to die.

But he did nothing to keep his distance. He didn't separate himself from these precious people. He got close to them. And as a result, they loved him for it. They trusted him for it.

Then one day he began his weekly message to them with these two words *we lepers*. Because, you see, he had become infected and now he was one of them. And Father Damien was no longer in their village, he was in their skin. And they were in this together.

And that is the message of Christmas. We serve a God who didn't just come into our world; he wrapped himself in our skin. Jesus came and he said, "I will relate to you in every way to reconcile you back to my Heavenly Father.

The great British theologian John Stott said it so well. He said:
"In a world filled with suffering and pain, I could not fathom worshipping a God who is immune to it."

And God came and wrapped himself in human flesh and he was born at just the right time in history to send us the message that you are not forgotten and that he has a plan. And he says, "Listen. I'm in control and I know what I'm doing. And I know right now it feels like things are out of control. I know right now you're searching for hope.

And there isn't anything you can do to manufacture hope. You really need to lean in to the hope that he can give.

Listen. I cannot manage my way out of 2020 and neither can you. The only thing that we can do is lean upon him and trust that the God who has been at work in the past is still at work right now as we sit in the waiting room.

In 1 Timothy, chapter 2, verses 5 through 6 it says:

“For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.” Now get this last part, “This is the message God gave to the world...” When? “...at just the right time.” At just the right time.

And I believe that God knows what he is doing. I do not believe that he is slow, uncaring, or delaying. I believe that he is patient. Right now the question is: Am I still going to listen? Am I still willing to tune down the noise enough to hear from the only voice that really matters?

Right now, God has got you in a waiting room. And I just simply want to ask: What will you do with that time?

I don't know how all of this is going to come to a close. I don't know where we'll be a year from now. But I am confident that there will come a day when we will look back together, both individually and as a church, we'll look back and we'll say, “Oh, now we see. Now we see some of the things God was doing.” Right now he's building spiritual and emotional muscles in us. And it's a chance for us to redeclare the hope that we have in him.

I love this lyric from one of the songs that Hillsong sings. It says, “I can see the promise. I can see the future. You're the God of seasons and I'm just in the winter. If all I know of harvest is that it is worth my patience, then if you're not done working, God, I'm not done waiting.”

And it's that last sentence that really jumped off of the page for me this last week and it spoke to me and it was as if the Spirit of God was saying to me, “Aaron. Are you willing? Are you willing to make that your prayer?”

I've got to be honest. That has not been my prayer the last seven months. My prayer the last few months has been, “God, would you please intervene? God, would you please bring this to a conclusion. God, would you please show us the exit room?” I don't know if I have the faith to pray that, but God if you're still working, I'm not done waiting.

Could we find ourselves in that place today on this anxious Christmas to say, “God, we believe you. We trust you. We see what you've done in the past. We know what you have done in the present. We know what you promise for the future. And we believe that you're a good Father and that we don't have the perspective that you do. So, if you're not done working, we're not done waiting.”

And we trust that he's just not finished yet, but he is working behind the scenes to exact his purposes just as he did 2,000 years ago. Could you take confidence in that? Can you take heart in that?

I know right now there is somebody who is really, really hurting. There is somebody who is like, “I don't want to wait anymore.” And I totally get it. Right now I know that there is somebody who is like, “I just feel like I'm on my last leg. I don't know how much more of this I can take.”

Right now what we need is, we need this mutual encouragement for the body of Christ. That's why the church gathers whether in a room like this or in a living room. It's so, so important.

In fact, let's put our hands together for those who are hurting. If you're hurting, I want you to receive this right now. Don't give up. You are not alone. You may feel like you're alone. You may feel like you can't go on. But you are not alone. There are people who love you, who are in this with you, and the Spirit of God is right there.

You might be like my little girl with those big crocodile tears and the quivering lip like, "I wonder if he's forgotten me." And I'm telling you that he hasn't. He'll be right on time. God, if you are not finished working, we're not done waiting.

Father, we come to you today as a people who are tired and weary from a year that has just beat us up. But, God, we're not complaining. We want to worship. God, we're not doubting, we're declaring that you are who you say you are. You are a good Father.

So, as we wait, as you've got us in this waiting room that only you fully know, we declare with a bold confidence as Hebrews tells us that you are our good Father. And you are enacting some things behind the scenes that we can't fully see or know. And perhaps you're building some faith muscles within us. Maybe you're weaning us off that we're addicted to that isn't for our good.

So, God, today we just raise our hands in complete dependence of you and in defiance of the evil one who would confuse us. God, please unite us together through this season of the year when so many of us need the hope and the joy and the peace that only you can provide. We declare it in the name of Jesus. We ask this in his name. And everybody says: Amen.