Love God
Love Others
Share the Good News

SUMMIT CHURCH

Being Jesus Christ to the World

Theme: What Is God Thinking?

"Worst and Last and Best"

Jeff Huber, November 14-15, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

> ***38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love –*** Romans 8:38

SLIDE **Worst and Last and Best**

The phrase "the worst thing is never the last thing" is what we say here every Easter. It comes from American novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner in his novel *The Final Beast*.

SLIDE ***The worst isn't the last thing about the world. It's the next to the last thing. The last thing is the best. It's the power from on high that comes down into the world, that wells up from the rock-bottom worst of the world like a hidden spring. –*** Frederick Buechner

Numbed by the untimely death of his wife, Rev. Theodore Nicolet struggles on with his twin vocations: the raising of his two daughters, and ministry to the members of his church. The book is about his journey through the things that we have talked about in this series

including suffering, unanswered prayers, the will of God, suicide, and holiday depression that we will talk about next week. On this confirmation weekend we are going to wrestle with why the worst thing is never the last thing and what is the best thing? How are the worst and the last and the best combined for those of us who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Over the last few weeks we have been talking about these realities of suffering and unanswered prayers in the will of God and suicide and doing so because we recognize these are not God's will for our lives. God is not willing tragic things to happen in your life. God did not bring floods that forced more than 2000 people to be evacuated. We still have 80 homes which are inaccessible in our community and more than 150 will never be livable again. Almost no one had flood insurance in these areas that have been devastated by the rains that are continuing again this weekend and we expect to have more during the week. God doesn't bring these things so that God can make something good come from them. We don't talk about this being the will of God or say things like, “God won't give you more than you can handle. Everything happens for a reason. It must be the will of God.”

What we do believe is that when we get more than we can handle God is with us and comes to us through the power of his Holy Spirit and through people. We believe that if we place our suffering and pain and hurt into God's hands then God can force something good and beautiful to come from that tragedy. We believe that pain and suffering and tragedy will never have the final word because of the work of Jesus on the cross, where he takes the sin and pain and brokenness in our world and transforms it by being raised from the dead, showing us that the worst thing is nevertheless thing.

I remind you that the entire Bible is not the story of a people where everything went well for them because they loved God perfectly and did everything just right. The Bible is the story of people who experienced pain and hurt in the world and despite that held on to

their faith and found hope and strength in a God who made them to love them. It was their faith that sustained them. On the last night of his life, before Jesus goes to the cross, he says these words in John 16 to prepare his disciples for the days that are to come.

BIBLE

> 33 **I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."**

Jesus says things like this to his followers because they are meant to echo down 2000 years to us and we are meant to take heart because we have a Lord and a Savior that doesn't leave us on our own in the moments of heartache and pain. As a young Jewish boy, Jesus would have memorized many of the psalms. We know this because he utters several of them from the cross and there is one that we read at every funeral that we do which many of us know even if we are not religious. It is Psalm 23 where we read these words.

BIBLE

> 4a **Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.**

SLIDE We are not afraid because God walks with us

The reason the worst thing is never the last thing is because we believe that God walks with us. Christianity is the only faith tradition that believes that God cared enough to come in the flesh and to be human and to experience what we experience. Jesus experienced betrayal and heartache and suffering and unanswered prayers. He wrestled with God's will as he prayed in the garden the night before he died and he experienced the suicide of a close friend. When we go through these things we know we have a God who goes with us. We do not need to be afraid because we are not alone. We believe that in the darkest places, no matter how difficult things get, we don't need to be

afraid, because God is with us.

More than 145 times we read in scriptures that we don't need to be afraid and its often God commanding us and assuring us with a strong word. It is followed up almost every time by these words in Psalm 23. We don't have to be afraid because God is close beside me. The Israelites are preparing to go into battle against the Canaanites who have a much larger army, and we read these words in Joshua one.

BIBLE

> [9] **This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go**

Isaiah 41 was written to the Israelites as they were living as slaves in Babylon and being prepared to head home and wondering what laid ahead for them in a city that had been destroyed 70 years earlier.

BIBLE

> [10] **Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.**

Psalm 56 was written by David as he was being pursued, and people were saying false things about him. This is especially helpful in a world where we often see lies coming through every moment on our phones.

BIBLE

> [2] **I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me.** [3] **But when I am afraid, <u>I will put my trust in you.</u>**

The very name of Jesus is meant to bring us comfort as we are reminded in Matthew's gospel as it describes the birth of Jesus in chapter 1, quoting the prophet Isaiah.

BIBLE

> [23] **"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"**

This understanding of Jesus is bookended because we find those words in the beginning of Matthew's gospel and we find these words as the Gospel of Matthew concludes in chapter 28. The very final words of Jesus before he ascends to heaven.

BIBLE

> [20b] **… And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

I was visiting this week with someone who was evacuated from their home during the floods two weeks ago. They went to leave their home and when they looked outside the water was already waist deep and they could not get through the water because of their disability. There was thunder and lightning and it was very frightening. Their dog cuddled up next to them as they went back inside and dialed 911. They then they sat in their house and prayed repeatedly Psalm 23, ***"Even though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death I will not be afraid because you are with me."*** They were one of the hundreds of people that were evacuated that night as first responders showed up and neighbors and eventually, they got a knock on the door, and they were helped to safety.

I think of times when I've been in the middle of storms and our kids or our dogs come and they jump on the bed and they long to be comforted because it's scary. We pray together and we hold each other and it doesn't make the storms go away but it helps us to realize that we're not alone. These scriptures are meant to remind us that God is with us and we don't have to be afraid even when it feels the darkest or the floods feel overwhelming. There's something powerful to know that God is with us all the time.

The purpose of worship and prayer is to remind ourselves of this truth. It's helpful to remember to pray many times during the day and think about just doing it five times. We get up in the morning, and we lift our voice to God and then we have hopefully three meals and we lift our voice to God and then before we go to bed, we remind ourselves that God is with us as we sleep. Our hearts shift and our breathing changes when we remember this truth. The psalms were the worship book of the Jewish people and of Jesus and the early church. They are poetic and meant to be ones that change our hearts and our bodies.

One of our members, Joy Kilpatrick, is a breath coach and decided that during this time she would offer a time for us to do breathing exercises every Thursday night for the next few weeks at 5:30 in our base camp. I went to this last week along with my wife and another person from the congregation and it was a powerful moment just to breathe in together and to remember that God is in our breath. The Hebrew word for spirit is breath and the Greek word for spirit is also breath. The early church mothers and fathers used to pray the psalms by breathing them in and out. It's a simple way of remembering that God is with us just using this short verse that we read earlier from Psalm 56.

BIBLE

3 **But when I am afraid, <u>I will put my trust in you.</u>**

Let's try it together by breathing in the first half of the phrase and then breathing it out. During the pandemic we did breathing exercises when I did my daily Facebook time with those who could join us and we talked about different ways, we could open ourselves up to God by remembering to breathe deeply. When we're in crisis or trauma, we tend to have short shallow breaths and so breathing deeply especially when we feel anxious or afraid is a powerful way to breathe in God's Holy Spirit and to breathe out our anxiousness. It was especially powerful this Thursday to do it with others. I think too often we get

stuck in our head when it comes to faith but it's important to remember that Jesus told us to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, which also means body and breath.

GRAPHIC Ray Charles Genius with Grit

Ray Charles was #10 on the Rolling Stone Magazine list of 100 greatest musical artists of all time. He was called a genius with grit by the Wall Street Journal after his death in 2004. He won 18 Grammy Awards. Ray Charles had 3 number-one hits on the Billboard Hot 100 chart:

- "Georgia on My Mind" (1960)
- "Hit the Road Jack" (1961)
- "I Can't Stop Loving You" (1962)

He also reached No. 1 on other Billboard charts, including:

- Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs: 11 number one songs (such as "I Got a Woman" and "What'd I Say")
- Hot Country Songs: No. 1 with "Seven Spanish Angels" (1985, duet with Willie Nelson)
- Hot Dance Club Songs: No. 1 with "I'll Be Good to You" (1990

GRAPHIC Ray Charles with Mother

Ray Charles was born in 1930 when his mother was just 16 years old who was probably sexually assaulted. She was a single mother and was with her son when he began to go blind at age 5 and became completely blind at age 7. She died when he was only 14 years old. Up until the day he died he said the single most important person to influence him in his life was his mother, Aretha. We see a beautiful picture in this clip of a mother who wants her son to be able to survive in the world so much that she's willing to watch him suffer.

VIDEO Ray Mother Clip

Aretha was determined that ray would make it with blindness in this world. They lived in poverty for Ray's entire childhood, but she

made sure that he went to school and made sure each school had a good music program because he was gifted when it came to music. She wanted him to learn Bach and Beethoven as well as the Blues. Because of her love for her son, she withheld fixing everything and telling him exactly where she was at every moment. She didn't always pick him up when he fell over and she gave him the freedom to fail even when it was painful. She believed his success would depend on his ability to live with his blindness. Ray would later say that it was his mother forcing him to learn that would make him the musical success that he became.

His story reminds me the God doesn't cause things like blindness, and that God weeps as we sometimes struggle through life, but God is there for the embrace and believes in us. God knows that these moments which are difficult and painful are the ones which can shape us and bring about something beautiful like music.

We're meant to have a relationship with God that gives us a sense of peace in the midst of the storms. It doesn't take away all the pain or fix all the problems, but it does help us remember we're not alone. We recognize that God is with us.

What's powerful is that when we are together, we also could have a stronger sense that God is with us. I was at the community flood response meeting where we heard people from the city and the county, another disaster relief agencies about the extent of the floods and how 2000 people were evacuated from their homes. Many made it to safety on their own but some needed helicopters because bridges were washed out. We learned that there was zero loss of life, which is incredible when you see the damage that the floods left in their wake in places like junction Creek and Hermosa. Reminds me of the other reason why we understand that the worst thing is never the last thing and that the best is yet to come even in the midst of floods.

SLIDE God works through us when we work together

We have been asking this question throughout this series about

how God works in the world. What we saw throughout the past two weeks has God at work through our community that has stepped up and showed up with shovels and resources. We don't believe that God causes suffering or floods or pain or hurt. Part of living in an imperfect world is that there are moments like what we have experienced as a community in the past two weeks. There are moments where life feels overwhelming. We don't believe that God kills children or causes gunmen to shoot people or injects us with cancer. These things happen and, in a world, where there is pain and hurt, what does God do? If God is not going to miraculously intervene, then what will God do? If God doesn't protect us and wrap us all in bubble wrap, what is God doing?

SLIDE What is God thinking?

What we believe is that God works through us as we work together to bring about the Kingdom of God here and now. Jesus said very clearly to the Kingdom of God is now and not yet and we are meant to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. I have seen that happen in many ways this week as you have gone out in teams to muck out mud and to sit with people who are hurting. We trained several people to be a part of crisis teams this week and one of them went to sit with a young man who had a broken leg and was now living in a hotel because his home was flooded in the valley. He has no living relatives and it's just him and his dog and one of you went and helped him get gas and let him know that we were here. We're not gonna be able to fix all his problems but we can let him know that he's not alone. **We can show up in these moments because God has showed up for us.**

GRAPHICS Summit Volunteers doing Flood Work

I want it to be clear that we are not saved by all the work that we do when something like a flood happens. We are responding to what God has done for us and in those moments, God shows up and you become the miracle that people are asking for. When I was visiting with

that person who was stuck in their home and was rescued by one of our first responders, they talked about it being a miracle. When you think about there being no loss of life during this last round of flooding it certainly was a miracle, but it happened because people stepped up and responded. We learned that firefighters were doing rescues while their own homes were flooding. That's a picture of the way God invites us to respond.

This last week was Veteran's Day and one of the things I always stop and thank God for our people who are willing to put themselves in harm's way throughout the history of our nation so that we could freely worship. I have friends serving in places where they are not free to worship and people can be killed for not worshiping the right gods. It is in many ways a miracle that we have a country which is not perfect but in which we have the freedom to vote and to worship and to turn our hearts to God without fear of retribution. We sometimes forget that each day is filled with small miracles that we miss because we take them for granted.

We had just finished a funeral a week ago Saturday and I was getting ready to head home for a bit and two people showed up that had been displaced by flooding. Our amazing office person Bonnie, who has been coordinating many of the relief efforts had put together these packets of laundry certificates and soap because we've arranged with one of the laundromats to provide showers and soap and laundry. We got her car filled up with gas and then we gave her just two certificates with some soap as she looked at me and said, **"It's a miracle. I get to have clean clothes!"** I met someone at the fairgrounds who received a gift card from you to Walmart after they couldn't return home. Their home is one of the 80 still underwater and not accessible. They were so excited to buy underwear and socks and a few items of clothing. They described it as a miraculous gift that came out of nowhere.

We have the power to make a difference. We have been empowered by God to be God's presence in the world and to be part of

the miracle that someone needs. God's primary way of working in the world is not to suspend the laws of nature. It's not that God can't do that, but it's that God's primary way of working in the world is to work through you and me. We are meant to be the answer to people's prayers. First responders and doctors and nurses and people who show up with meals and those of you that can be generous with your giving are part of how miracles work in the world. The Holy Spirit nudges you and inspires you to step out in faith and it changes the world, so it looks more like the Kingdom of God.

GRAPHIC Flood Buckets

GRAPHIC Health Kits

The Johnstown United Methodist Church north of Denver made another 50 flood buckets for us to give out here in this community. The first fifty we sent to the Navajo Nation after the first round of flooding. They pray over these as they make them and now, they are being used by volunteers and homeowners. They were delivered to us by a wildfire fighting team that is not busy right now and wanted to help so they drove them all the way around through New Mexico to get to us this week.

Littleton United Methodist Church made these health kits which include soap and towels and other toiletries needed when people have lost everything. We've been able to give these out to folks with shower tokens and take them to people because a group decided this is how they would answer God's call and be a part of answering people's prayers.

I want to encourage you to keep your eyes open for how you might be the answer to people's prayers each day. One of the reasons I encourage you to pray every morning for God to use you is because I do believe God brings things across your path and when that happens to pay attention. It might be someone who just needs some encouragement or someone to pray with them because maybe your

back can't shovel mud. Maybe you're cutting someone's hair, and they need someone to listen to them. It may be that you can give a few hours to volunteer in our office throughout the week so that we can provide assistance for those who come in looking for it. Maybe you have resources that you need to give to flood recovery.

Most people don't have flood insurance in the areas most affected by the floods and after they are mucked out, we will need to begin reconstruction for those homes that can be repaired. We give away our entire offering that you designate for Christmas and 100% of that will go to flood recovery this year because we know that it's not just the next two months that people will need assistance but it's a long-term recovery process.

Many people I know were crying out in the midst of the floods for God to help them and God didn't stop the flooding, but God did send you and me, and hundreds of others. We provide financial aid and moral support and physical labor as we partner with people on the Navajo Nation and in Hermosa and Junction Creek and Guatemala and Kenya and many other places I can't begin to name. When you go to our website you can find many places where you can serve both locally and overseas and what I know is that when we do that we find meaning and hope and joy as we become the answer to people's prayers. What I find is that we find ourselves blessed when we remember that God works through us and others and that is how the worst thing is never the last thing. God speaks it this way through the prophet Isaiah, chapter 58.

BIBLE

6 "No, this is the kind of fasting I want:
Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;
lighten the burden of those who work for you.
Let the oppressed go free,
and remove the chains that bind people.

7 Share your food with the hungry,
and give shelter to the homeless.
Give clothes to those who need them,
and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

8 "Then your salvation will come like the dawn,
and your wounds will quickly heal.
Your godliness will lead you forward,
and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.
9 Then when you call, the Lord will answer.
'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply.

God's will is for us to provide food and shelter and clothes and to understand that in doing that we find the presence of God in our midst and we know that God is with us always. Jesus talked about this in Matthew's gospel at the Last Supper when he told the story of the sheep and the goats and reminded his disciples and us today that when we feed the hungry and provide drink for the thirsty and clothe those who need it and visit those in physical and mental prisons, we meet him in those places. When are when there is pain in the world, God lays it on our heart to respond if we are following Jesus.

I think of the number of people in our church over the years who have gone through their own tragedy of losing a spouse or a child or dealing with a difficult illness. They found healing by stepping forward and being trained as a care minister or starting a Parkinson's support group or being a part of divorce recovery or working with others going through addiction and recovery because they themselves have made it through. Many of you have shared with me your story of overcoming addiction and have asked me to pair you up with others who go through their own addiction and you have changed their lives and entire families as you became the answer to people's prayers.

SLIDE God Redeems our Suffering and Brokenness

Those stories that I see every week remind me of this truth of why

not only the worst thing is not the last thing, but it leads to the best thing, because God redeems our suffering and our brokenness. God takes the ashes of our lives and brings about beauty. God walks with us and God works through us and God redeems as we come out the other side. God doesn't cause suffering, but God forces something good and sometimes beautiful to come from those broken places in our lives. To redeem something is to buy it back and God buys back and takes back the pain and the hurt and the addiction and the brokenness in our lives to force something good and beautiful.

I met with someone several years ago who had been in a major car accident, and it had changed them physically for the rest of their life. They almost died and they were going to need constant care but something interesting happened to them in that process. His family noticed a change and said that he was more loving, caring, empathetic and compassionate. He became more appreciative of everyday things and while he doesn't wish that the accident had happened, it forced him to rely on his fate and a big part of that shift happen when he began to move from the question of why to the question of, "what now?"

SLIDE Moving from "why" to "what now?"

We don't believe that God causes accidents so we can be changed, but when we are willing to place those moments of suffering and pain into God's hands, we become different. God doesn't instantaneously deliver us, but God can use it because God is our Redeemer. God can force something beautiful to come from the ashes. I have met several people who have gone through long moments of unemployment and the ones that come out better on the other side are the ones that look at the opportunity. I have seen people's perspectives on life change when they are in a season of not having work. I remind you that we don't always get to determine what happens to us, but we do get to choose how to respond.

I was visiting this week with someone whose home had some damage from the floods and one of the things they told me that had been so helpful was helping other neighbors who needed it just as much if not more than they did. It got frustrating to keep working on their own home and so they reached out and helped others and it began to change their heart and help them move from worrying about why this happened to what they could do now to help God's Kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven. They also said it was helpful to get up every morning and pray and start with something for which they were thankful. They got in the habit of praying in the morning and praying in the evening and naming one thing for which they were grateful, and it began to change their hearts. The apostle Paul gives this word of encouragement and 1 Thessalonians 5.

BIBLE

> [17] **Never stop praying.** [18] **Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.**

Notice that it doesn't say to be thankful FOR all circumstances but instead to be thankful in them because it does change us and it changes our hearts when we start out by being grateful even in most challenging circumstances.

The first church I served in Aurora outside of Denver as a youth pastor had some amazing people in it. One of them was Bob who was laid off from his job that was very lucrative during a time of economic downturn. He wasn't able to find a new job right away and at first, he told me he was angry but then he realized he now had a chance to volunteer and do things he never was able to do before. Things began to change when he did two things. The first thing he did was follow this scripture, we just read and pray every morning and every evening and find something to be thankful for. The second thing that he did was to stop focusing on the "why" and instead focus on the "what now?"

He did some odd jobs to be able to have enough money to survive

and then he worked with our youth group and after a trip to downtown Denver where we worked with people living on the street in an agency that I had worked at as a social work student, he had this idea of bringing some of those folks to his house to live in his basement. Some of them just needed a hand up and I saw someone become a different person. He eventually went back to school and got his social work degree and brought faith into the places where he served as he would lead Bible studies for the staff and introduce many of the folks who came in to see him to Jesus. He would later say the best thing that ever happened to him was losing his job because it helped him find himself.

Since losing our son more than 10 years ago I have connected with many people who have lost children that I would never have met if it hadn't been for that experience. I have been amazed at the number of people who have used that loss to start ministries and help others because of what they've learned. I worked with one family who lost a child to addiction, and they created an endowment that now enables families who can't afford it to have their children go into treatment and be cared for. I saw another family whose child was killed in a car accident by a drunk driver provide housing for parents whose children had been injured in car accidents by a drunk driver so they would have a place to stay while their children were in long term rehabilitation.

What I have seen is that when people can shift from asking the question "why" to "what now" they become different and they are changed. The grief never really goes away but the invitation is for us to place it into the hands of a God who can mold and shape and change us. I believe that our loved ones in heaven can see how it is the Kingdom of God comes because of their loss and how it is that we respond. They would not want us to be frozen or stuck in time, but I think they would want us to not only continue living but to make a difference because they made a difference in our lives. I talk about this at almost every funeral that I do, especially for the funeral of someone who is young. I have reminded many people as we sat at the graveside

or in our columbarium of these words from Jesus in a parable that he tells his followers in John 12 as he is preparing them for his death on the cross the night before he is arrested.

BIBLE

> [24] **I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.**

God doesn't cause this pain, but God can redeem it and if we place it in his hands God can bring about something beautiful, something new. God does this by using people as we allow that kernel of wheat to grow in our heart and to grow in our lives even after the person that we loved is gone. What we believe is that we are called to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven because Jesus came to connect this life to eternity. That's why the apostle Paul could say these words in Romans 8.

BIBLE

> [28] **And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.**

Again, notice that it does not say God causes everything, but that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love him. Shortly after this verse are words we often read at funerals and especially at ones that are tragic. This is where we find our memory verse and where I want to end this message by reminding us of why the worst thing is never the last thing and it leads to the best thing.

BIBLE

> [31] **What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?** [32] **Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?**

BIBLE

35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

BIBLE

37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

BIBLE

38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow— not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.

BIBLE

39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Darry and Juanita Ferguson are wonderful members who gave me this gift last month. It is a crucifix made by Brother Mel Who is an artist and part of the Catholic order called Marianists. It is a teaching order that believes strongly in living in the world and engaging others through their community as educators. They call each other brothers instead of monks and they focus on the arts and literature. In our Protestant traditions we don't typically have Jesus on the cross like they do in the Roman Catholic Church, but I love this crucifix because it reminds me of something very important about the cross. Brother Mal uses recycled materials and metal that has been discarded by others to make his creations. He also is known for his colorful guitars and polka dot bicycles in his artwork, so he does a variety of different things.

GRAPHIC Brother Mel Artist

GRAPHIC Brother Mel Art

GRAPHIC Brother Mel's Crucifix

But whenever I look at this cross, I am reminded that Jesus took all our pain in brokenness that we would like to discard and brought about something beautiful. He sacrificed himself so that it would wash over us like a beautiful work of art when we look at the cross and it would touch our hearts and change us from the inside out and remind us that even death does not have the final word. We are reminded that God picks us off the scrap heap and makes something beautiful out of our lives when we are willing to take the broken places of our past and allow God to mold them and shape them and use them. Brother Mel has used his gifts to mold and shape this cross, and it reminds me that Jesus took a symbol of torture and shame and death and turned it into a symbol of resurrection and new life.

As I look back over my own life, the most painful experiences I have experienced are the ones that have shaped me the most and made me the person I am today. I hate this in some ways but I'm also grateful for it and it's true. Going through a divorce as a child Brought my great grandmother grace Berry to be my nanny and she taught me the importance of reading the Bible and having a memory verse that I still have today from Psalm 118. I still carry this verse today and it has carried me and invited me to be grateful and rejoice even when it feels like the bottom is falling out of the world.

BIBLE

24 **This is the day the Lord has made.**
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Living with an alcoholic stepfather and dealing with the abuse and the trauma pushed me to youth group into church in a way I never would have been. I have been able to connect with people who are

struggling with addiction or dealing with family members who have an addiction in ways I never would have been able to. Having family members who struggle with mental illness has shaped me and giving me a sense of compassion that I wouldn't have for those who are struggling. We had 7 members of my high school class die during my four years and I saw death early in life and while I would never wish that on anyone it's made me not afraid to be around death. My first funeral was a double funeral for my grandparents and while that was tough and a bit strange it also taught me the beauty of being in those holy moments with people.

I shared last week about my friend Chuck who took his life and while I wish he hadn't, it made me not afraid to talk about suicide and in many ways made me want to do that to make sure we could prevent that wherever we can. The first place I served as a youth pastor full time the lead pastor who was my mentor was removed from misconduct, and it was so painful and I wanted to quit ministry. I'm grateful to those who came alongside me and encouraged me not to, but I also know now the sacredness of this office that I get to hold and that it's a privilege and not a right. I also know the importance of taking care of myself and having my staff do that, so we don't cause damage to the body of Christ because of misconduct.

The adoption of our children it was filled with ups and downs and challenges, and we almost gave up on the process just before we were invited to Ukraine and for some reason, they handed us two children even though we were not prepared for it at all. Yes, it was painful to lose our son and something I would never want for anyone, but he also was my greatest teacher, and I learned how little control I have in the world and how much I need God.

I look at our confirmation students today and I get the privilege of placing them in the water and helping them claim Jesus Christ as Lord and savior of their lives, hoping beyond hope that they will remember that when we are afraid, God is with us. There will be times in your life

where things will not go as planned. You will get criticized. You will experience loss and grief. You will see dreams shattered. You will see relationships disintegrate that you thought would last forever. But I hope you will remember is that God promises to walk with us through everything and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

I pray you will be able to turn from asking the question "why," to the question "what now?" When you do that and you hold on to your faith and you give God thanks in all circumstances, you become the answer to people's prayers in the world around you and you changed the world. I pray you will look to the cross in those times when life doesn't go as planned and know that our God is one who can take something as ugly and horrid and torturous that was used for killing criminals and turn it into a symbol of beauty. God can take and twist and shape anything and bring about beauty for ashes.

Most of all, I hope each of you will remember as you experienced the waters of baptism at the worst thing will never be the last thing, and it will always lead to the best thing. Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

God, I remember that you walk with me always.

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.

Work through me as I work with others.

May I be a miracle to someone each day.

Jesus, redeem any places of hurt or pain in my life.

Give me hope for the future.

May I always know that nothing can separate me from you…

…that the worst thing is never the last thing.

May that truth leads to the best thing.

We pray this in your holy name. Amen.

November 14-15 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – "Graves into Gardens"
4. Song – "Worthy of It All"
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
    A. QR Code
    B. Connect Card
    C. Lighting Work
    D. Invites people to greet each other
6. Sermon Video Intro
7. Sermon
8. Prayer
9. Invite Confirmation Students forward
10. Med Moments
11. Offering (Flood Recovery)
12. (Possible Confirmation Video while students come forward)
13. Baptisms on Saturday; Confirmation on Sunday.
14. Song – "Good, Good Father"
15. Prayer and Lord's Prayer
16. Care Ministers
17. The Bridge
18. Closing Prayer