

Living in a Crazy, Topsy-Turvy World

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Good morning, Hosanna! Rick McKinney, here. Tony and Jo Ann are teaching this weekend so I have the opportunity to be able to share with you this morning a little bit about living in a crazy, topsy-turvy world.

The first part of this year started off just like any other, didn't it? Until sometime in March when the world as we know it seemed to turn upside-down, kind of like these houses. Now, those upside-down houses kind of represent maybe what we've been feeling over the last couple of months.

So what is the world like for you today? For me it's been kind of like *Groundhog Day*. I've wanted to look out my window and find out where Bill Murray was, but he never showed up! Sometimes you kind of feel like you're under house arrest as well. And those with young children at home and who are trying to either teach their kids or take care of preschool kids and work at the same time – it's really difficult.

You see the mountains behind me, my background? Those are the Grand Tetons. Beth and I planned to go to Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Tetons this past week – obviously that did not happen. And then you have seniors in high school and college who were unable to go through with their normal graduation ceremonies. People are out of work. Some people are in the hospital or have been in the hospital or have died of the virus.

And now, states are opening up. Some say too soon and too fast; others say not fast enough. Some people are wearing masks; others are not. And some colleges are not going to have in-person classes this fall. And what about the elementary and middle and high schools? What's going on with them? And, restaurants are opening – with new restrictions; although some restaurants are closed for good.

Will everything be different until a vaccine is available? It's very possible. How are we able to live in a world like this? A world that is crazy and topsy-turvy? Where everything has changed and there's so much unknown about the future?

So this morning, I want us to take a look at sometimes in the bible when people also faced difficult circumstances; circumstances that were very challenging as well, even if they are different from ours today. I want to begin by thinking about three questions and the first question is:

Where is God?

Have you asked yourself that question at all? Maybe not; maybe you have. Maybe you've asked it every day on a regular basis. I'm sure there are many people who are saying where is God in the midst of this pandemic, in the midst of people dying? And not only that, but where is God in the midst of demonstrations and violence over the last week?

In II Kings 6, we read about the king of Aram. He was at war with the king of Israel. The king of Aram would tell his army to set up camp in a certain location in order to do battle with the king of Israel. Prophet Elisha had a real special relationship with God, and God would tell him to tell the king of Israel to avoid the place where the army of Aram was going to be. This occurred several times until the king of Aram thought that someone in his own army was on the side of the king of Israel and was giving away the goods – telling exactly what was going to happen. One of his officers, though, found out and told the king that there was a prophet in Israel who told the king of Israel everything that was said in the king of Aram's bedroom. The king of Aram decided he was going to kidnap the prophet Elisha so he sent an army to surround the city where Elisha lived in order to capture him.

Elisha's servant woke up one morning and the army was surrounding the city. He saw the army around the city, and he went to Elisha and he said, "Look at the army that is around the city! Oh, no, my lord, what shall we do?" And the prophet said, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Elisha's servant saw the circumstances of the physical army that had come to capture his master. What about Elisha? Do you think he saw that as well? Of course. He saw the physical circumstances just as well; he was aware of that. But his focus was not on the physical circumstances, but on his God who was with him.

I have to admit I'm fortunate: I have my job, I have my paycheck, I have my health so far. But could any of these change? Absolutely. And many of you are in the same situation as I am. The coronavirus lockdown has been an inconvenience, but other than an inconvenience, you're doing okay. But for many – and possibly some of you who are listening today – this is not the case, because many have gotten sick. Many have lost friends and family due to the virus. Many are in difficult financial circumstances and situations. Many are asking, "Where is God?"

Although I'm not struggling with this question during this time, there have been situations in my life when I struggled to find what God was doing as well. When I was fired from a job without understanding why; when I was hurt deeply by a close friend; when I was unable to pay my bills in a business that I owned. In my head, I knew that God had not left me. But I struggled to see where God was in the midst of each of these situations.

In Psalm 46:10, we read, "Be still, let go, be calm, and know that I am God." During some of those times – particularly when I was struggling with the business that I owned – I would come home in the afternoon or at lunch time and I would lie on the sofa at lunch, and I would just be still and I would reach out to God.

Would you humor me for just a moment, and sit still? Would you be willing to take just a moment and close your eyes with me?

Just for a minute

Just be still

Breathe in

Breathe out

Breathe in

Breathe out

Just be still and know that the one that we worship truly is God and that He's there with us.

For Elisha, God blinded the enemy army and they did not capture or kill him. I have to admit for me, things didn't turn out the way I had prayed for in the way that I wanted them. I asked God for certain things, and it didn't happen. I lost a business; I lost a job; I ended up in debt... But in the midst of it all, God saw me through it, every step of the way.

Sometimes it might be difficult to see what God is doing when we're in the middle of a difficult situation. Sometimes we're not able to see until after we've come through that situation. And there are other times when we might not ever clearly understand. He wants us to know that he is there in all of those circumstances.

The second question I want us to think about today is, **What am I supposed to do now?** What am I supposed to do in the midst of this pandemic?

Here's a picture of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He defeated the king of Israel and took some of the young men captives as exiles to live in a foreign land, to live in Babylon. Among those that he took, were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The king placed one of his servants over them to take care of them, to watch over them, and make sure that they were well-fed. The king's servant was going to feed them from the king's table which was very rich food, and Daniel and his friends were not used to eating this rich food and didn't want to eat it. They wanted to eat vegetables and good food like they had at home. So they told the servant who was over them that they wanted to eat the vegetables, and the servant was afraid to feed them anything except the food from the king's table – afraid that these four young men might not look healthy and strong if they ate just vegetables. So Daniel and his friends said, “Give it a try for ten days, and then see what we look like.”

So, for ten days they ate the food that they were eating at home – vegetables and other good food – and at the end of the 10 days, they looked as healthy or strong or stronger than any of the other young men in the court. So they were able to do what they wanted to do as far as what they were eating.

Later on, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. This dream disturbed him greatly, so he brought his wise men together, and he said to his wise men, “I want you to tell me the meaning of my dream.”

The wise men looked at the king and said, “Oh, King, tell us your dream and we will be more than happy to tell you what the dream means.”

The King said, “No. You will come back tomorrow, and you will tell me my dream, and you will tell me what the dream means or you'll be killed.”

They came back the next day, and said, “No one can tell you what your dream means!” He looked at them and basically said, “You're not wise men if you can't tell me my dream, so I'm going to kill all of you.”

Daniel and his friends were also going to be killed along with the other wise men, and when Daniel heard about it, he said, “Tell the king that tomorrow I will come and tell him about his dream.”

God had given Daniel a special gift of being able to interpret dreams, so that night he prayed and asked God to tell him what the king's dream was. The next day, he went and told the king of Babylon all about his dream, and told him the interpretation. The king was so impressed, that he gave Daniel – as well as his friends – great responsibility.

Later on, the king built a nine foot golden statue of himself, and he decreed that everyone would bow down to that statue and worship it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down, and anyone who did not bow down was going to be thrown into the fiery furnace. So here they are being accused of not bowing down to the king's statue, and as a result of that, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. As the king watched them in the fiery furnace, he counted not one, not two, not three men – but he saw four! No one knows what the fourth figure was. Some feel like it may have been Jesus. He also noticed that the men were not being burned up in the furnace, and he had them come out of the furnace, and he told them that he would worship their God.

Now sometime later, another king became king and his name was King Darius. King Darius had some wise men in his court who did not like Daniel, so they said to King Darius, “You're the king. Everyone should worship you, so make a decree for the next 30 days that everyone in the kingdom will worship you. They will bow down to you and they will pray to you, and if they pray to anyone else other than you, then they will be thrown into the den of lions.” And the king made that decree. Now these wise men who did not like Daniel knew that Daniel would bow down and pray to his God which is exactly what happened. And these men who did not like Daniel brought him before the king and said, “King, you've decreed that anyone who does not bow down and pray to you or who prays to another God will be thrown into the den of lions, and here is Daniel,

your servant, who prayed to his God and not to you. You must throw him into the lion's den.” And that's exactly what he had to do.

Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. We all know the result: the lions did not eat Daniel. The angels closed their mouths, and the next day he was brought out of the lion's den, and he was raised to a higher position of authority.

So Daniel and his friends, although they didn't face a pandemic and they didn't face the type of crazy, topsy-turvy world that we're in today, they did face some very difficult circumstances. What did Daniel and his friends do when they faced this crazy world?

Proverbs 4:26-27 – “Be careful what you do, and always do what is right. Don't turn off the road of goodness; keep away from evil paths.”

And this is exactly what Daniel and his friends did. They continued to do what they had always done, and they did what was always right. They didn't turn away from the road of goodness. That's really good advice for us today – for us in the crazy, chaotic world that we live in; to continue moving straight forward along the path of goodness that we know that God has led us on.

John 13:34 – “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

And one important part of that path that we are living is the life of love. Sometimes it can be very difficult. If you're a person who believes that you should be wearing a mask and others are not, it might be difficult to extend them love. We're taking a look at seeing what people are doing as they are not only protesting but some people are creating violence, it might be hard to love them as well. But God has called us on the path of love, so that's what we're going to do during this crazy, topsy-turvy world, where to recognize that the God in us loves those who are around us and we are to express that love to them in all that we do.

A final question today is: **Is God doing a new thing?** Something new in your life during this time?

Isaiah 43:19 – “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not believe it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

I'd like you to imagine with me for just a moment that you are one of Jesus' disciples, and you have been with Jesus for the past three years. You're asking yourself the question is Jesus the Messiah or not? You've had these discussions with others; you've had these discussions with your fellow disciples. And then one day, toward the end of that three years, Jesus says, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (and he's referring to himself of course.)

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered (of course he is the one who answered!), “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” So Peter expressed the truth that Jesus was the Messiah, and you were there with Peter. And maybe you're agreeing with him, and saying Peter is expressing my own thoughts. He's saying exactly what I'm feeling and thinking, “Jesus, you are the Messiah.”

But not only did Jesus immediate disciples and feel like and believe he was the Messiah, we read that when Jesus stood for Pilate, Pilate asked the crowd,

Matthew 27:17 – “Which one of you do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

So Pilate knew that others were calling Jesus the Messiah as well.

What did Jesus contemporaries believe the Messiah would be like? They thought he would be a conquering king. Israel was under the rule of the Roman government during this time. The Jews believed that the Messiah would lead an army that would overthrow the Roman oppressors and would lead Israel to a place of prominence among the nations. What happened? Jesus' followers found a teacher who confounded the religious leaders of his day with his wisdom. They saw a man who was able to heal the sick, cast out demons, raise the dead... They might not have believed Jesus was the Messiah in the beginning, but after three years they were convinced that he was the Messiah. When he entered Jerusalem riding a donkey on that fateful week, his followers participated with an expectant crowd proclaiming him to be the king of Israel.

And yet, later on in that week,

Mark 8:31-33 – From then on, Jesus began to tell his disciples that he, the Son of Man, was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer great injustice from the elders, leading priests, and religious scholars. He also explained that he would be killed and three days later be raised to life again. Jesus opened his heart and spoke freely with his disciples, explaining all these things to them.

Then Peter took him aside and rebuked him. But Jesus turned around, and glancing at all the other disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, “Get out of my sight, Satan! For your heart is not set on God's plan but man's!”

I just said this was that week they were in Jerusalem – this is prior to that. But Jesus rebuked Peter, and Peter rebuked Jesus to start off with. What does it mean? What is a rebuke? To rebuke someone is to express sharp disapproval or criticism. Jesus said to his disciples that he would die and he would come back to life in three days. Jesus had raised the dead before so maybe it was not as big a stretch as it could be, but yet the disciples – in particular, Peter – said, “No, Lord, that's not going to happen to you. You are not going to go to Jerusalem; you are not going to die. You're the Messiah.”

And during the final week, Jesus went to the temple and threw out the money changers. On Thursday evening, you eat the Passover meal with Jesus. He washes your feet, and later that evening you're there as the soldiers come and arrest Jesus.

On Friday, Jesus is tried, dies on the cross, and is placed in a tomb.

On Saturday nothing is happening. Jesus is dead and in the tomb. Everything is totally different.

Then on Sunday, there's a rumor that Jesus is alive and some of the women have seen him. Your world has been totally turned upside-down. The one that you believed was the Messiah has been crucified on a cross. He's gone. And then the women say, he's back – he's raised again! How could any of this happen? And yet, in Isaiah we read, “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it?”

Our world has gone topsy-turvy. It's chaotic – not like anything we expected. In the midst of this, let me ask the question, “Is God doing something new in your life?”

I have two brothers and two sisters who live in Texas. As adults we really have not spent a lot of time together, and we haven't spent a lot of time contacting each other. When our parents were living, the times that we spent together were basically at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and possibly a funeral or a wedding. Both of my parents are now in heaven, and a few weeks ago one of my sisters suggested that we get together on a Zoom call. We scheduled a call for a Sunday afternoon and spent an hour and 15 minutes together. We met again two weeks later for 45 minutes until we were kicked off due to an issue with Zoom. When all of this is over, I believe that this will be a new thing for myself and my siblings. I believe we will continue this practice of getting together on a regular basis even if it's not every two weeks. This situation has provided my family a desire to connect with each other in a way that we have not found previously.

So although I'm not thankful for pandemic and I'm not thankful for being locked in and I'm not thankful for all the things that have happened that have been negative in people's lives, I am thankful that in the midst of this, a new thing has happened with me and my siblings that is going to bring us together.

The disciples had a certain expectation of what Jesus would do and what he would be like as their Messiah. He turned their expectations upside-down. While the slide says, "No expectations," I think it's maybe very difficult for us to have no expectations. We all have a tendency to go into certain situations with expectations of some kind. Is it possible for us to say to God in the midst of those expectations, "God, whatever my expectations are, I'm open to what you're doing, recognizing that what you choose to do might be totally different than what I'm expecting you to do."

I can remember a time many, many years ago when Beth and I were first married, we went to seminary. There was a certain amount of money that we needed each month in order to pay our monthly expenses, and I had an expectation of how God was going to do that. God was going to give Beth the job, and she was going to make enough money while I went to school full-time in order for that to happen.

It turned out that God did meet our needs; the job that Beth got did not make enough money in order to pay all of our bills, and I ended up having two part-time jobs. So my expectations that God would take care of us were met. My expectations that he would do it my way were not met.

So how are we to live in this crazy, chaotic, topsy-turvy world? Where is God? Are you able to see him? Are you able to know that he's there with you? Are you able to see where he's working? What are we to do? How are we to live in love toward those around us? And what is God doing new in your life?

It's been a joy to be with you. I'm looking forward to seeing you one of these days soon. Even if I'm not able to hug you or give you a hand stamp at that point in time, it'll just be nice to see your smiling faces. And I'm trusting that this week, you're going to have an absolutely wonderful week in all that God is doing, and that you're going to see God continue to work in your life. Blessings to you, and have a wonderful week. Amen, and amen.