

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Storyline – The Lord's Prayer

Pastor Mark Batterson

Well, welcome to all of our campuses. If you are a guest we are so honored that you would spend your Easter with us. And before we dive into the message this weekend I want to say a huge thanks, we had hundreds of NCCers over the last 2 weekends pull off six Easter extravaganzas, 57,000 eggs were hunted and we blessed 9,750 people and so can we just give it up to those who served at our extravaganzas. And then this is a special weekend I want to let you know that 29 NCCers are getting baptized this weekend, I think that's worth celebrating at all of our campuses.

If you have a Bible you can meet me in Matthew chapter 28. Two years ago this month I flew to England and was speaking at a conference and one of the great joys of that trip was meeting someone that I had long admired Nicky Gumbel is the Rector of Holy Trinity Brompton in London. He and his wife Pippa lead Alpha, a course that has now been taken by twenty-four million people including hundreds of NCCers. So, a few years ago the BBC actually did a 10 part television series on Alpha. David Frost and the film crew actually went on the Holy Spirit retreat. And Nicky said to me of the 77 retreats that they have led it was by far the worst. Of course, it was because it was being filmed. Nicky said he thought it was the end of Alpha and that's when his wise and witty wife Pippa said you know Nicky it didn't look good at the crucifixion either. Drop the mike, right. I still remember that 2 years later and it comes to mind often when I find myself in situations where it doesn't look good, listen it did not look good. I know this weekend we celebrate an empty tomb. We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ; it is the thrill of victory. But it follows on the heels of the agony of defeat. I don't know that we can recreate what those disciples felt but when Jesus said it is finished they took it literally, they took it emotionally, it was game over. They were going to the tomb to grieve and that's where we pick up the story.

Matthew 28:1 "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and, I like this part, sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

The Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler was famous for beginning every counseling session with the new client the same way. He would ask this question what's your earliest memory and no matter what that client would share his response was always the same, and so life is. What he meant by that is this, our earliest memories leave a lasting imprint on our souls, those memories create a baseline, a trend line you could even say a storyline. Let me give you an example, one of my earliest memories happened when I was four years old. My neighbor who lived four doors down, rode his bike over to my house

and made a pronouncement, 'you can't ride my bike anymore'. I said, 'why?' He said, 'because my dad took off the training wheels.' He got back on his banana seat bike and rode home and I immediately marched down to his house I got on his bike and I rode his bike without training wheels back to my house and kicked down the kickstand in my driveway. If you want to get into my mind if you want to understand the psychology of your pastor that's all you need to know. If you want me to do something do not tell me to do it, totally demotivating. Tell me it can't be done, you can't do the dishes; you can't take out the garbage in ten seconds. Now I'm having a little bit of fun. But here's my point that story isn't just a story, it's a story-line it's a piece of my personality, it's the way that I'm wired. And so here's a question this weekend. What's the story-line of your life? I know that there are plots and subplots but what's the metanarrative? And I'll come back to that.

Elon Musk is the founder of three multi-billion-dollar companies. PayPal, Tesla and SpaceX. If you walked into the headquarters of SpaceX you'll find two giant posters of Mars. One poster is of Mars as is, a cold barren planet, the other poster is Mars as Elon Musk envisions it. It looks an awful lot like earth. It's a planet that has been colonized by humans. That is Elon Musk's stated purpose in life. Would it be fair to say this weekend that most of us aren't dreaming quite that big? This week Lora and I cleaned our garage. It is not colonizing a planet but a tremendous sense of accomplishment. You know most of us, come on, we're cleaning the house, we're paying the bills, we're trying to raise our kids to be semi-civilized children and if we can accomplish that we feel pretty good. My question is who dreams of colonizing a planet and what inspires that kind of dream? I have a theory and it's based on his biography. In 1950 Elon Musk's grandparents decided to move from Canada to South Africa having never been to South Africa. His grandfather disassembled the 1948 Balanica Cruz Air airplane, put it into crates and shipped it to Africa. He then reassembled the plane and in 1954 Elon Musk's grandparents flew 30,000 miles to Australia and back. Just to put that in perspective, this was only 27 years after Lindberg's transatlantic flight and Musk's grandparents flew about 10 times further. They're believed to be the only private pilots to ever make that flight in a single-engine airplane. Let me connect the dots. I don't think Elon Musk's dream of colonizing a planet was conceived in a vacuum. Elon heard the stories of his grandparent's adventures over and over again. Who dreams of shooting a rocket into space and colonizing another planet? I'll tell you who. Someone whose grandparents pick up and move halfway around the world to another continent who fly thirty thousand miles in a single-engine airplane. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. Elon's father once said of Elon's grandparents, we were left with the impression that we were capable of anything. What I'm getting at is this, those stories of his grandparents were more than stories, they become story-lines, they were more than narratives, they become metanarratives.

Now, why am I telling you that story what does it have to do with Matthew 28? Well, I think for some the resurrection story just a story, it's a nice narrative on Easter something we might think about once a year. But let's be honest we treat it like fake news, but it is the central fact of history this is what underpins all of Christianity. See we don't just believe in a philosophy or a theology or a morality we believe in an empty tomb. We just don't always live like it. But here's the deal when Jesus walked out of that tomb two thousand years ago all bets are off, all things are possible. You might even say we're left

with the impression that we're capable of anything. Now I know that an empty tomb is a leap of faith. And I get that for some it's very difficult for this kind of miracle to fit within the logical constraints of your left brain but that's what a miracle is. God doesn't exist within the four space-time dimensions that he created and let's be honest with each other I can't prove it any more than you can disprove it. It's a tenet of faith either way but I think the evidence points to an empty tomb. If you are placing bets on what would last the longest the Roman Empire or Jesus, his disciples and this thing called Christianity. You are going to place your bets on the Roman Empire. The two thousand years later the Roman Empire is long gone and there are two billion people who claim to follow a man named Jesus of Nazareth who claimed to be the Son of God. I think the only explanation for that is an empty tomb and the good news is this. The same spirit that raised Christ from the dead it dwells in us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ reframes our reality. The resurrection of Jesus Christ redefines possibility. It's not just the story, it's a story-line. The question is, is it the story-line of your life?

This weekend 29 NCCers will get baptized. Let me tell you why we get wet. When a person goes under the water it symbolizes death to self and when they come back up it symbolizes the new life that we have in Jesus Christ. Everybody getting baptized this weekend what you're saying is this it's not just a story it's my story-line this changes everything.

More than a hundred years ago Richmond Mayo-Smith said this. The underlying cause of our difficulties may be that we're living the wrong story. How we think, how we feel and how we behave is a function of the stories that we tell ourselves. If you want to change someone's behavior don't try to change their behavior change their story. The therapists call it story editing and the key is something called cognitive reappraisal. A fancy phrase, it simply means this, it's telling yourself a different story. Stick with me I'll give you a classic example. In 1944 Battle of the Bulge, bitter cold, supplies are low, morale is even lower, American troops are completely surrounded in Bastogne, Belgium. The German commander demands immediate surrender and that's when the American General Anthony McAuliffe assembles the hundred and first airborne division and says men we are surrounded by the enemy. We have the greatest opportunity ever presented in army we can attack in any direction. They chose to fight, they won that battle and it may be why we won World War II. How did it happen? What was the turning point? What was the tipping point? It wasn't more ammunition, it wasn't reinforcements, it was cognitive reappraisal. Instead of saying we're surrounded let's surrender you could tell that story but there was a different story to be told and so they told a different story we're surrounded we can attack in any direction.

Cognitive reappraisal is certainly a function of focus and your focus will determine your reality. That's why Philippians 4 says "brothers and sisters if anything is good or right or pure or just or noble or lovely or admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things." It's easy for us to get focused on the wrong thing, isn't it? What happened when Peter focused on Jesus? Well, he walked on water. What happened when he focused on the wind and the waves? He sunk. It's that simple. Cognitive reappraisal is a function of focus but it's more than that, it's about the stories that we are telling

ourselves. You got to make sure that you're telling yourself the right story, the true story. And it's really nothing new this is as old as Genesis 50:20. There's a story in the Bible about a man named Joseph, his brothers fake his death, sell him into slavery, he's falsely accused, he's found guilty of a crime he didn't commit and he ends up in Egyptian dungeon for 13 years. Things go from bad to worse but then unbelievable, he interprets a dream, ends up second in command to Pharaoh if you study political science quite the path to power, to say the least. I want you to listen to what he says to his brothers 13 years after the fact. I mean can you imagine the bitterness? I mean there is a debt to be paid and now he has the power to even the score but here's what he says to his brothers who initiated the negative chain reaction. He said you intended to harm me, that's the narrative, but here's the metanarrative but God intended it for good, the saving of many lives. What is Joseph doing here? He is reappraising his past based on the promises of God. This is not the power of positive thinking, this is not a Jedi mind trick, this is fixing your eyes on Jesus. It's a different story, it's a true story and Hebrews 12 says it this way, "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily and let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us." How? By fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

Listen to me this weekend maybe you need a cognitive reappraisal in your life. I want to tell you how it happens, it happens when you go back to the foot of the cross the place where God proves his love. It happens when you go back to the empty tomb the place where God proves his power. It cannot be a footnote in your life it can't just be a story it's got to be the story-line, it's got to get in your head, it's got to get in your heart, it's got to get in your blood, it's got to get in your bones. It's got to be the reality that defines who you are and what you're about. You're a child of God, you're the apple of God's eye, you are God's workmanship and you are more than a conqueror, and that's the tip of the iceberg. That's who you are.

Now let me go back to Matthew 28 if ever there was a cognitive reappraisal this is it; Mary and Mary are going to the tomb to grieve. This is a tragedy the story is two days dead the credits have already run but it's not over until God says it's over. God turns a tragedy into a comedy, he gets the last laugh, he is the God who turns mourning into dancing, the God who turns ashes into beauty, the God who gives the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And just when you think its game over, no, it's game on. See when you put your faith in Christ here's what happens you get grafted into the story. His story becomes your story and your story becomes his story. "I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you not to harm you plans to give you hope and a future." Psalm 139, "all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Can I tell you who Jesus is? Well he's the son of God, he proved his love on a cross, he proved his power with an empty tomb but he's also the author and perfecter of our faith.

Can I tell you this weekend that God has a script for your life but you've got to give him complete editorial control? Listen I've written 15 books and there comes a moment with each book where you've got to let go of the rough draft. It's hard because I'm a perfectionist. But you've got to let go of the rough draft and I'll tell you why because

you're not capable of making it any better than it is. What you have to do is you've got to put that manuscript into the hands of an editor who can make it better than you are. That's who Jesus is, that's what Jesus does. You are not the labels people put on you. You are not the mistakes you have made. You are who God says you are and he wants to write his story through your life.

Let me close with this. Go all the way back to that conference in England two years ago. I spoke right after the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and he talked a little bit about what it was like living in Lambeth Castle. It's been the residence of Archbishop since the year 1200. He said it's a little bit like Hogwarts. He said there's this one hallway where they're the portraits of all 105 Archbishops. He said if you want to be humble he said walk down that corridor that starts with Augustine and includes Cranmer and Cornwallis and St Anselm and ends with your name. Then he told the story, it's a story that's been told since 1171 the king of England got into a little squabble with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. The king's knights went into the castle beheaded Becket at the altar and on the anniversary of that assassination every year that scene is reenacted right where the blood stained the floor. And the presiding Archbishop, they play the role of Becket every year in the words Justin Welby it's a profound reminder what we believe is worth dying for. Why would you re-enact that gruesome story? Because it's more than a story it's a story-line. It's a profound reminder that what we believe is worth dying for and I might add is worth living for. I mean come on, why would we hang crosses a symbol of ancient torture? Because it's a symbol of God's love, it's a symbol of hope, it's not just the story it's a story-line.

I came across a fascinating study this week and I'll close with this. Let me tell you the best predictor of a child's emotional well being. Would you be interested in that? If you're a parent I bet you would. It's not hugs, those help, it's not Pixar movies, those are great, it's not getting them into the right daycare or them having the right friends. According to researchers at Emory University the number one indicator of emotional well being in a child, are you ready for this? Is knowing their family history. I was thinking about that. I think it's because kids need to know the story that they're part of and they need to know that they're part of a story that's bigger than they are, like Elon Musko those stories give them a sense of history and a sense of destiny. Here's my prayer for you this weekend, my prayer is that this story wouldn't just be a story. Why? Because it's family history. Why? Because John 1 says "to as many as have received him to him gave the power to become children of God." When you put your faith in Jesus Christ you get grafted into the family, you get grafted into the story. His story becomes your story and your story becomes his story. If the tomb is empty why don't we start living like it? Why don't we live like Jesus was crucified yesterday, rose from the dead today and is coming back tomorrow?

Let's pray. Father thank you for the joy and privilege of knowing you, following you, serving you. God, I pray this weekend for those who maybe walked into one of our campuses and if they're being honest they're living the wrong story. Maybe they're hearing this story for the first time or maybe it's just been a story. God, I pray this weekend it would become a story-line. Thank you for the promise of Romans 10, "if we

confess with our mouths Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead we shall be saved. Lord, I pray for those who are making that decision this weekend. With the angels in heaven, we rejoice. God, we thank you for the story that you're going to begin to write in and through their lives. And we say to each one 'welcome to the family'. In Jesus name, Amen.