

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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NCC Easter Message

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Well, thank you so much for joining us for Easter online. This was not plan A. In fact, I was invited to speak at the Easter sunrise service this year at the Lincoln Memorial. I am not there I am here with 10 of my closest friends keeping six foot distance and you are there sheltered at home you're dressed up for Easter and nowhere to go or maybe you're dressed down, let's be honest. One way or the other it's a joy to be together online as a spiritual family. This weekend we wrap up a series called 'The Jesus Way'. I want you to know that next weekend we kick off 'Valleys', and so we'll meet right back here at [live.national.cc](http://live.national.cc).

I think this weekend we find ourselves in a situation, not unlike the disciples after the crucifixion. They are sheltered in place; they are scared for their lives. Now, a week earlier, Jesus had made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They're throwing down palm branches, his popularity ratings are off the chart and one week later, he's hanging on a cross between two thieves. When Jesus breathes his last breath, it's like everything the disciples believed in is like a house of cards that comes crashing down. Doesn't it feel a little bit that way right now? According to the World Health Organization, more than 1.5 million confirmed cases of the corona virus; nearly 100,000 deaths; 10% of the American workforce out of a job in the last three weeks; entire industries in jeopardy; small businesses on the brink. The stock market registers on the Richter scale almost every day. And as a sports fan, I can't believe no March Madness, no opening day for the NATS, no Masters Golf tournament. Right now so much uncertainty, so much fear, so much grief and it keeps getting closer and closer as people we know and people we love are infected or affected by this virus. What do you do when the world turns upside down? What do you do when everything is on shaky ground? Well, I think for starters, you do a 40 day prayer challenge, and you start on Easter Sunday. I think it's time for us to circle this crisis, to circle this virus, to circle churches and businesses and families and our future in prayer. We are here for such a time as this. We are here for such a place as this. And so we're going to step into the gap and we're gonna press in and pray through.

Can I invite you to sign up if you're at our online campus, you'll see it [ncc.re/pray](http://ncc.re/pray). And the challenge is pretty simple. We're going to kneel and pray at 7:14am for 40 days. Now I'll actually share a prayer every day, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, you pick your platform, 7:14am Now I'm gonna do it in Eastern time. I know that our online family, we are all around the world and so you pick your local time zone. But it's not just the time it's a text, we're going to stand on a promise. And the promise is this: "If, if my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land."

If you've been a part of NCC for any length of time, you know, we work like it depends on us. Well, what does that look like right now? Probably looks like practicing the protocol that the CDC and our government agencies are giving to us. I think social distancing is a form of social justice. It's pretty protecting the most vulnerable amongst us. But we also need to pray like it depends on God.

Can I just say how grateful I am; how grateful we are for the medical community, for government officials making difficult decisions, for essential workers putting themselves in harm's way. And we want you to know, we're not just applauding you, we are praying for you. We're going to circle you in prayer over these next 40 days. Are you in? Come on? Let's, let's pray the price.

In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 27, it says, "All of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain." I think we find ourselves in a Hebrews 12:27 moment. We have a tendency, I think, especially in the Western first world countries to trust in temporal things, to trust in material things. And then this happens, and it shakes our false sense of security. It shakes our illusion of control. But let me tell you what it doesn't shake.

The psalmist said some trust in chariots, some trust in horses. We trust in the name of the Lord our God more than 400 names for God in Scripture. So which one? Well, I think right now, all of them. He is Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. He is the Ancient of Days. He is the Rock of Ages. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. At Bethlehem, he is God with us, at Calvary, he is God for us and at Pentecost, he is God in us and the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us. And that's why Oswald Chambers said, "No power on earth or in hell can conquer the Spirit of God. In a human spirit is an inner unconquerable-ness."

I serve a risen Savior; He's in the world today  
I know that He is living, whatever men may say  
I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer  
And just the time I need Him He's always near

2000 years ago, two earthquakes rocked the city of Jerusalem three days apart. I have no idea what they registered on the Richter scale, but they rank as the two most significant earthquakes in human history. The first earthquake happens at a place called Golgotha, the place of the skull, we call it, Calvary. Jesus cries out in a loud voice and it's the same voice that said, "Let there be light." And those four words still creating galaxies at the outer edge of the universe. It's the same voice that said to a storm on the Sea of Galilee. "Peace. Be still". It's the same voice that said to a man four days dead, "Lazarus, come forth." It's that voice that on the cross said, "It is finished." It's all he could do to catch his breath. Crucifixion always ended in asphyxiation. Jesus takes a painful breath and then he utters these words, "It is finished" - three words in English, one word in Greek 'tetelestai'. It's an accounting term. It's the last payment on a debt owed. Archaeologists have actually found ancient receipts with this word written on it, it meant paid in full.

A lot of people right now don't know where that next paycheck is coming from. Not sure when the stimulus check will arrive. Not sure how to pay rent or pay the bills and I can't answer all of those questions. Now we want to help with our Relief Fund. But here's what I know for for sure, my sin and your sin is paid in full. And I think that's a reason to rejoice.

Jesus is on the cross and it's almost like his creation is grieving and groaning it has this meteorological and geological effect. Scripture says that from noon until three darkness came over the land, like this supernatural shadow. And at that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now the curtain, it was this dividing wall between man and God, only the high priests was allowed behind that curtain. And he could only go once a year into the Holy of Holies. Ephesians 2:14 says that Jesus destroyed the barrier. He made a way into the Holy of Holies for each one of us an all access pass because of his righteousness. That's how, and that's why we can approach this throne of grace that the writer of Hebrews talks about. He said, approach it with boldness and confidence so that you might receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need. We can approach that throne of grace because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

So darkness descends, the veil is torn from top to bottom and it says, the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. And they ran out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. Have you read the Bible lately? Like I mean what the what??? Like this is unbelievable. I mean, the power of what happened, causes this spontaneous resurrection. And it's so momentous that it says when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake, the earthquake, and all that had happened they were terrified and exclaimed, "Surely, this was the son of God".

It reminds me of this moment in the Chronicles of Narnia when Aslan the Christ figure, offers himself as a sacrifice in the place of the traitor, Edmund. The White Witch thinks that it is game over but no, there is an ancient prophecy inscribed on the stone table that she knows nothing about. There is a deep magic that she is not familiar with. I love the way that Aslan describes her short sightedness. Her knowledge only goes back to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little farther back into the stillness and the darkness before time dawned, she would have read a very different incantation there. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in the traitors stead the stone table would crack and death itself would start working backwards. That is what happened at the cross. At the cross the curse was broken. The victory over sin and death was won. And it doesn't always seem like it but I want you to know, Heaven is invading earth, eternity is invading time, his kingdom is going to come and his will is going to be done.

The dust had barely settled on that first earthquake. It's dawn on the first day and the city of Jerusalem wakes up to a second earthquake. 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 the

Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning. 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, fear not, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here he is risen, just as he said.

We all want a miracle. We just don't want to be in a situation that necessitates one. I think that's where we find ourselves right now. Not just as a nation, but really as a world. We have been humbled by this invisible virus and we need a miracle.

Let me back up just a little bit. For nearly 30 years the one who created the universe with his voice crafted furniture with his hands, and he was good at what he did. No crooked table legs or ill fitted drawers ever came out of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. But he was more than a master carpenter, He was God incarnate and for 30 years He was God, incognito. I think his miraculous powers may rank as history's best kept secret for about 30 years. Then one day, water blushed in the face of its creator. Jesus is at a wedding feast and what does he do? Well, they run out of wine. It's not the end of the world, but it's a little embarrassing for the bride and groom, okay. So, he turns water into wine. It's the first of 34 recorded miracles but seven miracles in John's Gospel. We'll come back to those signs in just a second.

In John's Gospel, Jesus also makes seven declarations. He says, I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the vine. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life. And I want you to know Jesus isn't just the way he is the way maker. When you run out of wine, I think you're out of wine. There's no way you're going to get more wine out of water, no way, way. Because Jesus changes the molecular structure of water turns it into wine because every atom is subject to the authority of its creator. In John six Jesus is surrounded by 5,000 hungry people. A little boy gives him his lunch, five loaves, two fish. That's great. Not gonna go very far with five... no way you feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, no way, way. Because if you put what you have in your hand into God's hands, then five plus two doesn't equal seven anymore. Five plus two equals 5,000 remainder 12 and you have more leftover than you started with. In John seven Jesus walks on water, no way, way. In John nine Jesus encounters a man born blind. If you are born blind, it means there is no synaptic connection between the optic nerve visual cortex in the brain. There is no way you're ever going to see again No way, way. Jesus doesn't just heal in a stigmatism installs a synaptic pathway in this blind man's brain. And then in John 11, Lazarus, four days dead, you are never going to see the light of day, again. No way, way. Don't put a period where God puts the comma. It's not over until God says, it's over. Jesus says, "Lazarus come forth", and he obeys the resurrection and the life. Jesus didn't just come to make bad people good, he came to bring dead people to life and not just life. He wants to give you life and life more abundant. He's the God who makes sidewalks through the sea.

He's the God who makes iron axe heads float. He's the God who says sun stand still. But let's go back to the tomb for just a moment. The cross is not what makes Jesus unique. Lots of people died on Roman

crosses, some archaeologists estimate about 1,000 people every year in Judea crucified, that's about three per day. And so Jesus crucified between two thieves is par for the course. Lots of people died on Roman crosses, but none of them predicted their own resurrection and then pulled it off. That's what makes Jesus unique. That's what makes Jesus the way maker.

Christianity is not a moral code. Yes, we have a great commandment. *"Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself."* Yes, we try to live by this thing called the Sermon on the Mount; it is our rule of life. We go the extra mile, we turn the other cheek. We pray for those who persecute us. We love our enemies but the foundation of our faith is not a moral code. The foundation of our faith is an empty tomb.

I'm not sure who said it first but we are an Easter people living in a Good Friday world. It sure feels like that when I watch the news at night. And I'll say this; I think faith often looks foolish for a few days, or a few weeks or a few months, sometimes even a few years. But when Jesus walks out of the tomb, the word impossible is taken out of our vocabulary; all things are possible nothing is impossible. He redefines reality, redefines possibility. Even when it looks like all is lost; the best is yet to come. That doesn't mean that there won't be death but we believe in life after death. It doesn't mean that there won't be pain and suffering but we believe in healing and deliverance. Jesus said in this world, you will have trouble. I think our current circumstances qualify. But he didn't stop there. He said, "Take heart, because I have overcome the world". I don't know what questions you have. Jesus is the answer. I don't know what problems you have. Jesus is the answer. I don't know what miracle you need but Jesus is the way maker, the miracle worker, the promise keeper.

If you're at our online campus this weekend, I want to give you two opportunities. I think one; maybe this is your moment. I don't know where you are in your spiritual journey. But I wonder if your next step is Romans 10. It says, "If we confess with our mouth, that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we shall be saved." If that's you this weekend, I want to invite you to actually raise your hand online, you'll see it right there. I think it's a way of saying, hey, I want to take a step of faith and we want to help you. Take that next step in your spiritual journey. I want to help you find faith with your fingerprint on it. We have some resources that we want to give to you. And so if you would just raise your hand, let us know.

And then if you need prayer, opportunity, we have people our prayer team that would love to pray with you. And of course, if you have a need, we'd love to help out [ncc.re/needs](http://ncc.re/needs).

Finally, maybe you find yourself in a place where you're exploring this thing called Christianity. We have a wonderful opportunity coming up, it's alpha online, it's a place where you can ask some honest questions, get some honest answers. And so [ncc.re/alpha](http://ncc.re/alpha)

Let me share one final thought. It's a little scary right now. I can't imagine working in an ICU unit, scary place to be, a lot of fear, financially, a lot of fears that relates to employment and where that next paycheck might come from, a lot of fear when it comes to our health and maybe even our ability to fight off this virus. I think there's fear on every front. And you know what fear eats the soul. Now I have to say, I went out to the Glenstone Museum right before this COVID-19 hit and I just I saw this T shirt it said fear eats the soul and I had no idea how prophetic it would be. I want you to hear what I'm about to say. First John 4:18 says that perfect love casts out all fear. I want want you to know that God doesn't just love you? He likes you. He likes you. In fact, you mean the cross to Christ. And it's as we grow in a relationship with him and discover his love for us that the net result is fearlessness. It doesn't mean that it's not a scary situation. It just means we don't let fear dictate our decision. What do we do? We keep going back to an empty tomb. We are not a people who panic. We're a people who pray. We're a people who love. We're a people who believe that the best is yet to come. Why? Because the tomb is still empty and that's what we celebrate every day in every way. In Jesus name, Amen.