

Good morning. She had mentioned. Shawna had mentioned. It's family Sunday, which basically means fifth Sunday of the month. So that's where we don't have kids ministry.

But if you're a kid and you grab one of these things, it's like a worksheet. I'll go ahead and give you a couple answers. So if you're an adult, just don't need to listen. The first answer is this. Today's Bible verses is mark 1, 14 and 15.

Oh, by the way, if you didn't grab them, they have these cool pens back there, too. So even if you're an adult with no kids, it's one of these kind of pens that has, like, five colors, right? And a veggie tail. Anyway, but then the next part says, my favorite part of the sermon, you can write down when Pastor Matt was done. That's what you can write down.

But anyway, so this is for the kids. But again, the pens are cool, too. So, anyway, I'll put those down here. So. Question for the day.

I've started my sermons lately with questions. Here's the question for the day. Can you relate to the struggles that Mr. C.H. had?

I'm getting some blank stares. Can you relate to the struggles that Mr. Chambers had? He had a lot of struggles with God. Maybe it would help if I told you who it was.

His name was Oswald Chambers. He was a pastor, a theologian, a teacher in Great Britain in the late 1800s, early 1900s. He wrote a book called My Utmost for his highest million sold, translated into 35 languages. Really, really deeply spiritual guy. He actually died during World War I as a chaplain for the British military.

But when I was reading his biography, I like reading biographies of Christians because you find out they were real people with real struggles. Cause one of the things he wrote in his journals that showed up in the book was this was his struggle. If what I have is all the Christianity there is, then this thing is a fraud. He's a Bible teacher, right? Then he said this.

Either Christianity is a downright fraud, or I haven't got ahold of the right end of the stick.

It's a struggle. And it was one of my favorite parts of the book because it's like, oh, it's okay to have struggles at times. It's okay to have questions. It's okay to have those kind of doubts, even. So this series is called Frontlines.

And the idea is kind of like, we're told this in church. We know the Bible says this about God and about us, but on the front Lines of daily life and Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and work and family

and whatever. I'm still struggling. And what I'm told here doesn't seem to match here. And so on the front lines of life, I'm just kind of barely making it.

And that's kind of what Oswald Chamber is struggling with. What I've been told and what I'm experiencing is not the same. So what we've done, we've identified. There's four different kind of motivation things that we think a lot of you, us, I, what we struggle with, what you struggle with, and probably most of your non Christian friends struggle with. So I'm a sign guy, so I thought I'd do these signs.

First one is a lot of us struggle with guilt. Right. I'm told during the Sunday that God forgives my sin. But during the week, I struggle a lot with shame and guilt. I don't know if I belong in church.

Right. Second one is peace. We're often told, hey, Jesus said peace, you can have peace from God. But yet I still feel anxious and troubled on Wednesday afternoons. I feel anxious and troubled about this or whatever.

And so it's like a disconnect. The front lines of life. I struggle with this. I know what Jesus says is this, but I can't quite figure out why it's not my reality. All right, two more.

This one is connection. I only have the word connect. Cause it was too hard to get the letters all on there, right. But the struggle we have is, I'm told I'm part of the family of Jesus, the body of Christ. But yet during the week, I feel kind of isolated and alone.

And I don't know what I need to do to connect with people. For that matter, connect with God again. These are my struggles. These are your struggles. These are your neighbors and coworkers struggles.

Right. Last one is image.

I know I should know I'm accepted by God no matter what. But yet during the week, my image really matters. I wanna come across, feel like I know what I'm doing and I'm a good person, even though I know I'm not. And I care too much about what other people think about me. So those are Oswald Chambers struggles for doubts.

These are similar struggles. And then our passage today starts with another struggle. So again, we're kind of putting this frontline struggles against. With what do I do with it? So here's the passage right here.

Shawna, just read it. But I'm gonna just. Is it on the screen? No, it's not on the Screen, obviously. Cause I can see.

Can it be on the screen? Like, can it be on the screen? Yes. It should

be the one that starts with John. My bad.

Should say John after John was put into prison. Maybe we don't have that one. Should be like one of the first ones. I'll just tell you what it says then. All right.

The passage starts with. This is the early part of Gospel of. Well, that. Yeah, this is. Anyway, this is good.

This is actually straight from your Bibles in the pews. Right after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come. He said, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.

That's the passage for today. Okay, what is the good news? How does that fit with my struggles and reality? I always tell people to be curious when you read the Bible. You know what stood out to me right away with this passage?

The opening line. After John was put in prison. It didn't say after John left for dinner. After John was put in prison. If you know the story, John later was beheaded.

It was John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus, forerunner of Jesus, preaching about Jesus. And he's in prison. And if you know much about the Gospels, there's actually a time where he sends his disciples to Jesus. Cause John's having doubts and he's like, can you ask Jesus if he really is the one? Cause I kind of gave my life to this, but now I'm stuck in prison.

So whether it's Oswald Chambers or John the Baptist or you or me, we have these frontline struggles. What do I do with that? How does that. How does this, what I'm told in the Bible, and this with my life, how does that come together as one whole? So now we'll look at the rest of the passage.

Go fit that back up there so I can find it there. There we go. We'll just go from this one. This will be the only slide. We'll have the rest of this.

No, but I just. This was my mistake. I made a mistake at sending the wrong slides to someone this week. And I thought I corrected it. So just tell me.

Great job, Matt. Yeah, I made a mistake. I made a mistake. Sorry. Don't ever tell my wife I admitted making a mistake, though.

So anyway, not really. Okay, so this is the opening sermon of Jesus. This is his coming out sermon. The time has come.

The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. He repeats this basic sermon one line sermon 14 times in the book of Mark, when he Sends the disciples out to go. 72 people to go out and kind of send the message. He tells them, here's what you should preach.

Preach. The kingdom of heaven is near. Kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are interchangeable. Kingdom of heaven is how Matthew talked about it. Mark, Luke and John say the kingdom of God, but they're talking about the same thing.

Even when John the Baptist preached, he preached about the kingdom of God. So we read that, and this is the good news. If I were to ask, most of us, myself included, from years ago, if I said, hey, what's the gospel? Gospel is same word for good news. Most of us would say, well, the gospel is, Jesus died for our sins, so if I trust him, I'll go to heaven after I die.

True statement. It's not the good news Jesus is talking about. So when Jesus said to the people, the kingdom of heaven is near, the kingdom of God is now near.

The average person in the crowd didn't say, oh, listen, he's telling us how to go to heaven after we die. That's not what was going through their heads. Yes, it's a true reality. We find out later in the Gospels. But when Jesus was announcing, the kingdom of heaven is near, this is what the average Jewish person would have been hearing.

Because they'd been taught from childhood there was going to be a day where the kingdom of God would finally come back into power. Israel was occupied by Rome. They hated the Romans. They would remember the fact that years, you know, hundreds of years ago, King David had a kingdom and everything was right. They were flourishing.

There was peace, there was joy. So they were taught from early childhood that there will be a time when the kingdom of God comes back into play. So when Jesus said that, that's what they were thinking. Oh, the world's gonna be turned right side up again. Oh, peace and joy and hope are gonna be realities again.

So he had their attention, and he said, it's near. Sometimes we think. I think growing up, I thought, well, he's talking about, you know, heaven after we die. After we die, we go to heaven and we're in the kingdom of God. No, when Jesus said, it's near, it's almost like, if I were to say, hey, the coffee's right out there.

It's near. It's accessible to you. It's not later. It's not like, hey, sometime when you die, you'll get coffee. No, I'd say, no, right now.

It's near. Go get it. So when Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven is

near, the Kingdom of God is near. He's saying this life you've always wanted, where joy and peace and hope rule the day, it's accessible to you now. And of course he's saying through me, trust me and I will lead you to that.

Now we often talk about eternal life. Maybe a better way to think about it. It's an eternal kind of now life. It's living now in a reality of the goodness of God. So that peace and joy and all those opposite things from these four different things I had up there.

No more shame, no more guilt, no more anxiety, but a life of peace and joy. Actually, the book of Romans Paul says the kingdom of God is peace and joy and inner goodness, righteousness. Even. When Jesus comes on the scene to pronounce the good news, it's all about healing, restoration and recovery. And he's saying you can live in those realities now.

Joy, peace, hope. You can be a good person in a solid way. And there's healing and there's hope and there's transformation. That's what life in the kingdom of God is like. Don't you want to live there?

And I'm not talking about then in the sweet vine, I'm talking about now. Cause that's what Jesus was saying. So what's the kingdom? Let's just do some definitions here. A kingdom is where the king has his way.

That's what a kingdom is. A kingdom is whatever the king says is done. That's a kingdom. Now, unfortunately, from history and from Hollywood, most of our experiences of kings are that they're like ruthless, power hungry, deceitful, arrogant, tyrannical. So whether it's the Emperor Commodus and Gladiator, or King Oakenshield and the Hobbit, they're not good people.

And so when the king's not good or powerful, then the culture of the kingdom becomes one of fear and uncertainty. But we're talking about the kingdom of God. And we know from scripture what God is like. God is the most joyous being in the universe. God is full of incredible peace.

He's so deeply merciful to us. He's good and he's kind. So living in the kingdom of that king, the culture is one of life, alive, awake and free. I want to be in that kingdom. And again, please don't hear me say after you die.

Because when Jesus was saying this and scripture is clear, he's talking about right now. You can live in the culture of the king, which is one of peace and joy and goodness and hope and mercy and forgiveness. I'M assuming there's not a person in here that doesn't want that. Even when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as is in heaven. Let what's true up there

be true down here.

And what's true up there. Heaven's not really up there, but you know what I mean. What's true in heaven is what God wants done, is done. And it's a place of goodness and hope and mercy and peace. So when we pray that prayer, I want that true in me.

Now, don't you want to live there?

But here's the catch. It's not like a catch, like a bad thing. If you want to enjoy the benefits of living in the kingdom, you have to obey the king.

You might say, well, I kind of want this joy and peace and hope that Jesus talks about, but I kind of want to do it my way, so I'll figure it out. No, if you want the benefits of the kingdom, the kingdom of God, now life, if you want the benefits of that now, you have to obey the king. And let me just say this. Can we turn obedience into a freedom word and not an oppression word? We tend to hear the word obey.

Here we go. It's religious oppression. Obey. Obey is a freedom word. If you want to enjoy the benefits of living under the rule of a really good, powerful, merciful, kind king, you have to obey the king.

So let's let freedom be. Let's let obedience be a freedom word. And maybe here's some ways you might need to obey the king. These are ways to lead to freedom. This is just some that Jesus said, love your enemies, forgive others, do good to those who hate you.

This is on the pathway to freedom. Don't judge others, love one another. Jesus says a lot about obedience with our money and with our sex life. He refers back to the Ten Commandments. You know, don't steal, don't lie.

Obedience is on the pathway to living your now life in the kingdom of God. And it's a freedom word. It's not a. God's so oppressive. No, he's not that way.

We know that that's the lie of Satan. God's not looking out for you. But if you want to live in the kingdom of God now, Jesus says, you do it by relying on me. And then Jesus says, if you obey me and my command, I'll reveal myself to you. My father will reveal himself to you.

You'll have a whole different experience of life. Does it make problems go away? No. John found that out in prison problems don't go away, but you have a whole different way of experiencing those problems. And you figure out, and you understand that shame is covered because of Jesus.

You understand that anxiety can be dissolved because of Jesus, not overnight. It's. It's not like when you get out of the baptismal waters, all of a sudden life is beautiful, but you have now access to the Holy Spirit, who then can birth those things in you.

The kingdom of God is near for everyone, every person here. Life with God is accessible for you right now. And obedience is the pathway. Next, the last line. Two more lines.

Second line. Put that back up there. Whatever form you have on the slides again, my mistake. The last line of the passage says repent and believe the good news. There's another bad word.

Do we have to talk about repentance? That's another heavy word, right? I didn't make one, but you know, I was thinking about making this poster that had the word repent and like this red stencil. Repent, right. That's how we think about it.

Repent's a heavy religious word. It's an oppressive word. That's not at all what Jesus was saying. He didn't get to this point. So the kingdom of God is near.

Repent. All right. Repentance literally means change your mind. Reconsider that the way you're going is not leading you to the life you've always wanted. Reconsider it.

Change your mind. You can go that way. It's not gonna lead you where you think it's going to. So when he says repent and believe the good news again, the good news is you can have this life giving life with God now, but repentance is your step. Repentance simply means change.

You think the way you're handling your money, your sex life is gonna lead you to joy in life. It's not. Reconsider, you think. The way you're twisting and messing with the truth, when you tell people things that maybe are kind of lies or white lies, that's gonna help you be. It's not.

Reconsider that. Stop going so you can say this passage. Jesus is really saying, stop, think, turn a different direction and follow me. And it's all freedom again. Repentance is a rescue word.

It's not a slavery word. Repentance is a freedom word. Obedience is a freedom word.

So, for example, so many of you have gone to the IU pool, and in order to get to the pool, you have to cross the street to the parking lot, assembly hall, Maybe you know that. And it's always a little bit challenging with kids crossing the street, busy streets. So one time we were there with our kids years ago, and one of our kids was

crossing the street and did not look for traffic.

And she would have gotten hit. I'm not gonna say her name, but I've only got two daughters figured out she would have gotten hit. And I screamed at her. Now that I scream, you stupid idiot. No, I said, stop.

I could have easily said, repent.

Reconsider. What you're doing. Cause if you keep going, you will get hurt.

She stopped. I wasn't angry, but I said it quite intensely. Stop. All right? It's like Jesus saying, repent, Stop.

Cause if you keep going the way you're living your life now, you will go to destruction. You will not go to life. So I'm just trying to frame repentance in a different way for you, another way. So there's another repentance thing. Cause I wanted to get that word in your mind in a way that's freedom, right?

So there's a place in northern Indiana that I've taken my kids swimming before. It's called Pine Lake. It's kind of a dive, but they have. It's up where my dad grew up, but they have this diving platform that's as big as the IU diving platform outside. I mean, it's at least 500ft high.

It feels that way, right? And it's kind of rickety, and it's kind of like. So the challenge always was when we were. It really was. It was 30ft high.

The challenge was, I'm gonna jump off. And then the challenge to myself was, I'm gonna dive off. So one time we had our kids there. I don't think I dove off that in a long time. Maybe as a teenager, But I was probably 45 at the time.

And I'm up there, and I'm looking over, backing away. I'm looking over, back away. And my other daughter, Gretchen, 8 years old, probably yells up, what's the matter, dad? You scared? You know what I said?

Yes. Cause she saw me pace up and pace back to the stairway to go back down. She could have yelled to me, repent. Stop going that way. Cause I knew if I jumped, it was gonna be exhilarating.

Maybe a little scary, but exhilarating in the sense of, I did this. So if I'm turning around, going to the stairway, she could have just said, repent. That's not gonna lead you to the exhilarating, full of life. Joy that you want. Now, I'm not equating joy of jumping off 30ft to following Jesus, but you get the comparison, right?

But repentance is a freedom word. There's part of the world where the Christians for a number of years were called the repenters. Cause it's not a one time thing. I'm not nearing retirement, but when I retire, I'm not gonna retire from repentance and neither should any of you. We never retire from repentance.

Repentance is not a one time thing. It's a one period in time that continues the rest of their life. Cause Jesus is always correcting and challenging us. Cause he wants us to be free.

Please understand that Jesus corrects us and challenges us. Cause he is absolutely for our freedom. He proved it on the cross, right? He's for you. He's not against you.

So this idea of repentance, if Jesus is pointing something out to you in your life right now, that you have a sense that he wants you to stop doing or maybe something you should start doing, it's freedom. Do what he says, repent, follow him. It's good news. Okay, the last thing we're gonna go to, the first phrase in the passage, the first phrase in the passage is simply the time has come. Say that with me.

The time has come. That's what Jesus says. The time has come. The time has come. And I'm gonna say this.

Maybe the time has come for you to take that step away from a life that leads to death to a life that leads to Jesus. And I'm talking to those of you who may not be Christians. I'm talking to those who may have followed Jesus for years. But there's something, you know, God's asking you to step toward times come. Time has come.

When Jesus said that here, he's saying it's now the time where the cup of time is full. This is the crisis moment. This is the decisive moment.

And I grew up in a church where we're not gonna do this here, but I grew up in a church where we had an invitation every Sunday where you could come forward if you had one of those time is now moments.

But I'm saying you can still have that moment without. We have prayer people at the end of the service. And you may have been. There may have been something you struggle with. And maybe it's simply just you're doubting God or you're frustrated like John the Baptist, really good man, but you're doubting.

Or like Oswald Chambers, you're just struggling with stuff. Or maybe you do deal with guilt or image or feeling lonely. Those.

The first step is always gonna be a step toward Jesus and usually a step toward obedience. But that's what he's asking. The time's now,

right? Maybe now is the time. Scripture says now's the time of salvation.

Now's the time. Now's the time of freedom. So I don't know what your now's the time moment is, but I'm guessing that there are some of you here that know exactly what I'm talking about. You know exactly what God's been saying to you. The time is now.

The end of the service here. There's. We take communion in a minute, but there'll be few on the side that will be. They have lanyards on that are there to pray for you. And maybe you just.

You have some a time is now moment where you want somebody to pray for you. I'll be up in the front row. Sean's over there too, if you want to talk to either one of us. Time's now. Time's now.

Jesus wants you to be free so you can continue living your religious life of shame, isolation, anxiety, and pressure, or you can listen to Jesus reconsider, turn and follow the only one who will ever set you free. It's now life. It's healing, it's restoration, it's joy, it's hope, it's peace.

Don't you want to live that way? Just this week, I was listening on the radio, they were talking about the number of people in the country who believe they should go confess sin. And it was overwhelming the percentages. But then they said the number of people who actually choose to do anything about it was underwhelming. They all know it.

Nobody just wants. Jesus is kind, he's good, he's forgiving. Time is now.

So at the same time, we do a response at the end of the service. And the primary way is taking communion. I'm doing this because this is where the communion stands. There's some in the back. It's a cup with juice and bread in the bottom.

And we do this. Cause Jesus says, every time you eat and drink this, remember me. Remember me. And can I encourage you? The one thing to remember today is Jesus promise is the kingdom of God is now available to you.

Life with God now. Now, now is available to you. And you take this into your body as you're taking in that promise. That's one way to respond. We can respond by people on the side will have the lanyards if you want somebody to pray for you, and maybe that's the time is now for you.

It feels awkward. People may see you. Maybe the time's now. Take that step. You will not.

You will not. You will not regret it. Let's pray. So, Jesus, we.

We sang a song earlier, and one of the lines was, the church of Christ was born, and the Spirit lit the flame for all of us, myself included. Will you light and relight that flame inside of us? We want the Holy Spirit in us. We want him totally dominating our lives. And we know that's what leads.

Leads us to freedom. Thank you, Jesus. We ask this all in your name. Amen.