

April 2nd AD 30

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Bible Text: Mark 11:1-21; Luke 24:13-24

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Our Scripture text is taken from the 11th chapter of Mark, and if you're using the Bibles in the pews, you'll find this on page 1,572. Mark chapter 11, beginning at verse 1.

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' 4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 10 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!' 'Hosanna in the highest!' (Mark 11:1-10)

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

Lord, help me to condense a 66-minute sermon into roughly 20 minutes and may I hit the important points and omit the things that are not germane to today, that people's attention may be wrapped with the wonderful story of the Lord Jesus Christ on what was both a week from hell and a week from

heaven. Lord, help us to understand this Holy Week. In Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen.

First of all, I want to thank Ben House for filling in for me last Sunday as I was in the hospital. Wow! I lost two units of blood, and I'm still building it back. So, pray for me. And here's a printout (holding the manuscript, <https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/490614251.pdf>). I sent it out to you: 66 minutes.

So how did people ever put up with you?

Well, they did and part of it was I became a friend to people, and part of it was they treated me at times like a rich old uncle that they kept locked away in the attic—66 minutes. I couldn't believe it when I checked it myself. I preached this sermon 18 years ago, so don't worry (<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=49061425>).

But one thing I appreciated about Ben's sermon last Lord's Day on "Suffered Under Pontius Pilate" was that he illustrated that the gospels are grounded in real history, and that's the reason for the title of the sermon.

The title of the sermon is "April 2nd, AD 30," because the gospels are not like Greek mythology or the stories from Hinduism or any of those things. The gospels are grounded in real history. Now, our system of dating was off because we didn't take into consideration certain things. I'm not talking about ours. I'm talking about some people that lived a long time ago and they failed to understand that Christ was born "Before Christ." And why do we know this date of AD 30? And I'll give you a simple statement and that is found if you turn to the right to the gospel of John chapter 2 and verse 20, John 2:20, gives us the basic scenario. That's page 1,649:

Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' (John 2:20)

And the point I want to make is this, we know from historical records that in the year 19 BC, Herod the Great began a great remodeling program.

You know, the Jewish temple was destroyed on the ninth day of Av in the year 586 BC. And when the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland, they rebuilt the temple, and it was finished in 516 BC, 70 years after it was destroyed.

But the temple was not particularly fancy in those days. In fact, when people saw the foundation laid, people rejoiced, but the old people were crying. People rejoiced, but the old people were crying. Those who had seen Solomon's temple wept because they saw how poor a reflection this temple was compared to Solomon's temple (Ezra 3:10-13).

Well, this Edomite, half Edomite, half Jewish man, by the name of Herod the Great, a great political opportunist, decided to go on a great building program, and so he built up around the temple. In fact, the only thing left of the Jewish temple today is the foundation that Herod the Great built around it. Those foundation stones are still there, and we call it the Wailing Wall.

I've been to the Wailing Wall.

And so anyhow, Herod goes on this massive reconstruction program in 19 BC and so if you subtract that, you end up with AD 30. And that's significant, and everything fits into that date far better than 33 AD.

And so why I've entitled a sermon, "April 2nd, AD 30," is simply subtracting from Easter because we do know we can narrow down the date of Easter to April the 9th, AD 30. And I've subtracted it.

Now there's one little hitch. Palm Sunday may not have happened on a Sunday. If it happened on a Sunday, then it happened on April 2nd AD 30. And so what I'm trying to stress here is the historicity of the gospels. The gospels are grounded in historical fact and reality. That's very important as we move towards Easter because the resurrection of Jesus is not simply some symbolic thing. It's a thing that actually happened in real space and time. And so AD 30, April the 2nd.

Now, there's some things here I just want to go through with you briefly about Holy Week. Holy Week begins today on Palm Sunday, and it goes on until Easter Sunday, a week from today. Notice that Jesus rides into Jerusalem, and if you look across the page to verse 11, Mark 11:11, on page 1,573, you discover that Jesus did not cleanse the temple on Palm Sunday.

What did Jesus do? He got into Jerusalem late, he went to the temple and looked around, and then it says in verse 11, Mark 11:11, page 1,573:

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. (Mark 11:11)

That means he went back up the Mount of Olives.

Now, I've been on the Mount of Olives, and the Mount of Olives overlooks Jerusalem. When you're standing there, you can see what was once the temple. That is, you see the platform, but instead of seeing the temple, you see two sacred objects or two sacred buildings, the Mosque of Omar and the Dome of the Rock.

And the Dome of the Rock is where, according to Muslim legend, Muhammad decided to ride his horse, al-Baruq, who was a flying horse, and he decided to ride al-Baruq to heaven and on the way to heaven, Mohammed's horse decided that he would touch down on the Dome of the Rock.

The Rock is that place where evidently Abraham took Isaac to offer him up to the Lord before the Lord interrupted him and said, "Stay your hand" (Genesis 22:2, 10-14). And that Dome of the Rock is where the angel of the Lord stopped when the plague was sent on Jerusalem and David offered sacrifice there and that's where the temple was built (2 Samuel 24:15-25; 1 Chronicles 21:14-28).

But the Dome of the Rock—I didn't go in there, I would have liked to have gone in there, but our Israeli tour guide, who was an American citizen and served in the Israeli Defense Force said, "We don't want to go in there." But I would have liked to have seen it. But supposedly in the top of the Dome of the Rock is a hoof print, left by al-Baruq, Muhammad's wonderful flying horse, who then took him on to heaven and then brought him back to Mecca.

So it is the third holiest site in Islam. The holiest is Mecca, where there was a shrine to the moon god. The second holiest is what is now called Medina. That's when Islam really began because they invited the Prophet Muhammad to come and be a political leader.

Islam is dated on the political calendar. It's not dated when Muhammad was born or when he had the visions outside of Mecca; it's dated when it became a political force. That's important to assert because Islam is a political movement with a religious base, and if we don't understand that, we'll never in any way understand what's going on over there today.

So the third holiest site is where al-Baruq dropped down and left a hoof print, and then there's the Mosque of Omar next to it. So that's what you see when you see a picture of modern Jerusalem, and so there we go.

So Jesus goes back. Now notice in verse 12, Mark 11 and verse 12, "The next day as they were leaving Bethany"—and so what happens—this is on Monday, and this would have been on April the 3rd, AD 30, if again Sunday is Palm Sunday. But it's the day after his triumphal ride in Jerusalem. He sees a fig tree, and it's not the season for figs, and Jesus was hungry, and he goes to it, and there are no figs on it because there are only leaves, because it's not the season for figs. And he curses it.

Now, you know, you look at that and you think, why would he do that? I mean, you know, would I go and curse the local convenience store because they didn't have any bread? Why is he doing it? Have you ever thought about why did Jesus curse that fig tree? He cursed the fig tree as an object lesson to the people of Israel, and the object lesson is this: you and I must bear fruit always, in season and out of season, and there's no exception to that (Luke 13:6-9).

I must be a fruit bearer on Sunday morning and on Monday morning and on Tuesday evening and on Saturday morning. I must bear fruit.

And so what God is doing here in the person of his Son is giving an object lesson to the Jewish people, "You are fruitless. You are in danger of being utterly, totally, and completely wiped out."

And so that's what he's doing, he's giving an object lesson, and the thing begins to die instantly. The disciples notice it the next day, which would be Tuesday.

So the moment that Jesus issued the curse—remember that the power of life and death is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), and no one had greater power in his tongue than that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he speaks the curse; the tree is withered; the disciples notice it the next day Tuesday. And then he goes in and he's dealing with what's going on in the temple. Now this is a very striking thing. You see there in verse 15 of Mark 11:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers."' (Mark 11:15-17)

Now I want you to reflect on this for a moment. First of all, a couple of weeks ago, I talked about a Roman coin, whose image is on it, and the point I want to make is that you could not use Roman coins to make your contribution to the temple because the Romans regarded their emperors as gods and so in effect when you had a Roman coin you had an idol and you can't admit an idol into the temple of God.

Now, the coin of the realm would have said . . . on the coin, "*TI CAESAR DIVI AUG F AUGUSTUS*," which means "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, meaning that this was a coin proclaiming the image on it as a son of a god, as a son of a god.
(<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=131241650274792>)

So therefore, they had money changers, and like in every situation if you've ever traveled abroad and changed currency into another currency, everybody gets a little cut. So they had those, the money changers are taking the idols, the idol coins, and giving them kosher coins, *Kosher l'Pesach* (כֹּשֶׁר לַפֶּסַח). They're giving them kosher coins, if you want to put it that way, and they're getting a little cut on it.

Now then, the other thing is this. Imagine that you're a Jewish person who lives in the Galilee. The Galilee is that part of northern Israel where many Jewish people lived, but you had to travel, unless you crossed the Jordan River and then recrossed it to get to Jerusalem, you had to go through Samaria.

And Samaria was like, what's the worst section of this area? I'm not going to ask. But I know where it is in New Orleans because I've been in the Ninth Ward. And you had to travel through a place that's not just dangerous because the Samaritans hated the Jewish people, and the Jewish people hated the Samaritans, and they had no dealings with each other (John 4:9).

So you travel through a place that's not only dangerous, but is filthy, that is, it'll contaminate you. It's like going into a hospital during the days of COVID. I was so grateful when I went into the hospital Friday morning of last week that that was over. So anyhow, it's like going into a horrible place, you're going to get contaminated, but it's not just contamination physically, it's religious contamination. So they don't want to what?

They don't want to bring their animals from the Galilee going through Samaria where the Samaritans might have decided that they're going to do a lamb-jack or a bull-jack, a carjacking, and take your animals.

So what they did, they brought sufficient money to buy local animals that were guaranteed to be kosher, that is, without a blemish. If you're going to sacrifice a lamb at Passover, it had to be without blemish (Exodus 12:3-5). So these are certified pure animals.

So you've got to understand something of what's going on, and Jesus looks at this, and Jesus has a concern for what? He has a concern for poor people. For poor people. You know, most people around the world are poor people.

All of you here are far richer than you think you are because when you compare what you've got with what most of the world today has, you're all really rich, and so am I. And so you understand that greed, which is a huge force, greed is what set this whole system up this way where everybody got a cut. And who's involved in it?

Well, the Sadducees were the minority rich party. They were the minority rich party. They had made a league with Rome, and Rome backed them up, and the high priestly family belonged to the Sadducees.

Now the Pharisees, on the other hand, were more the party of the common folk. And you can just imagine the Pharisees often cheering Jesus on, “Yeah, go for them! Those wicked Sadducees, they’re super rich. We hate rich people after all. We want to tax them to death and take their money!”

And so those are the Pharisees, and the Pharisees believed that the whole Bible, that is the whole Tanakh, the Torah (תּוֹרָה), the Nevi'im (נְבִיאִים), the Ketuvim (כְּתוּבִים) was the word of God, infallible. They accepted it all. They believed in predestination. They believed in life after death. They believed in the resurrection of the body. They believed in angels and demons (Acts 23:8). Those are the Pharisees. And you could say, well, you know, Jesus must have been a Pharisee. He believed like the Pharisees to a great extent. Unlike the Sad-You-Sees (Someone said that years ago)—they didn’t believe in the resurrection. They didn’t believe in life after death, and they only accepted the first five books, the Torah, as God’s word and so they were sad, you see.

Now, I had a really good friend who was a rabbi in Alexandria, and I’d eaten in his home, and he’d eaten in my home, and we were friends, and he would have been very much like the Sadducees. He didn’t really believe in praying, but in reciting a prayer. He would recite blessings. He once gave a great blessing to me, but I won’t go into that story.

But anyhow, he didn’t believe those things. He accepted, because he was Jewish, he accepted traditions of a certain way of acting and being, and so on, but the finer points he was, in essence, a Sadducee.

Now here we come to it. Think of Jesus. He’s ridden into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and on Monday, he’s coming and doing this. Do you realize what he was doing? He was upsetting the apple cart. It’s almost like going into a bank and grabbing the money and throwing it all over the floor.

Not robbing but throwing the money in the bank all over the floor, saying, “You know, this shouldn’t be because you take advantage of poor people.” I mean, I’m not saying that’s what he did. I’m saying it’s almost like that

because when you hit somebody in his pocketbook, you have really hit that person.

And this whole thing was built around money for the elite, for the Sadducee party, for the high priestly family, and people wanted to be on their good side because there's all kinds of *lagniappe*, that's a little something extra in Louisiana—there's always *lagniappe*, if you're connected to the high priestly family. So when Jesus overturns the money changers' tables, when he releases the doves and drives the animals out—and Jesus didn't take a whip to people, Jesus was nonviolent, but he did use a whip to get the animals out of the temple and said, “You've made it a den of thieves.”

And so in the morning the next day, verse 20, they see the withered tree (Mark 11:20).

I want you to think about the crucifixion of Jesus and why it happened.

If you consider what he did, if you turn back to the right for a moment to Matthew 23, he has some very terrible things to say. If you look at chapter 23, just a couple. Verse 13, Matthew 23:13, page 1,536.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You
yourselves do not enter, and you're not willing to let those enter
who are trying to. (Matthew 23:13-14)

Now I want you to reflect for a moment. Everybody, the Pharisees that got on Jesus' side in the beginning, except they're disturbed that he's not really kosher, and he's taken on the Sadducees, now I want you to imagine, who is Jesus?

Jesus is a radical. Jesus turned on the very people whose party—he, in a sense, supported their doctrines. But he's just too radical. You know what Jesus did? In effect, he pointed his finger at all of us here and he said, “You deserve to go to hell.” Nobody likes to hear that, not me. Like a certain man who is running for office, “I've never asked anybody's forgiveness.”

Well, you're going to go to hell, Donald. You're going to go to hell, Donald, unless you repent and ask God's forgiveness for your sins and wickedness.

You're no different than Joe Biden, Donald Trump. You both deserve to go to hell. And so does every other person.

In other words, do you want to hear that you deserve to go to hell? That's what Jesus is saying, and so these people hated Jesus. They came to regard him as horrible, as evil.

So you've got to see in the natural realm two things are going on. He's upset the apple cart of the political class, the moneyed class, because he's hit him where it hurts, and then he's turned on all the good people. "I thank thee, God, I'm not like other people" (Luke 18:10-12). You are like other people. That's the big problem. You are like other people, and that's the thing. He was like other people and didn't understand it.

So Jesus has angered people. People who thought of him as great, the people who were out there Palm Sunday, they had heard about Lazarus. He had raised Lazarus from the dead after Lazarus had been dead four days and so they're there to see him (John 11:43-46; 12:9-15, 17-18). "Oh, we've got to see this young rabbi, this amazing man who's from Nazareth. He's in town. He's here for the Passover. We've got to see him."

And they're so excited that they cut palm branches. They throw their garments in the road (Mark 11:7-9). Imagine it. The donkey—you don't think he was totally sanitary, and he's riding on a donkey, and the donkey messes on their clothes. But they're so excited. They're so excited about Jesus. But what? Holy Week: Jesus reveals who he really is. He's a person that summons every single one of us and says, "Until you acknowledge that you deserve no less fate than to burn in hell forever, you will never go to heaven!"

So they were angry, and the Sadducees have been hit in the pocketbook, and Jesus' object lesson of cursing the fig tree, you can see all of that, but there's something else at work. See, this is the week from heaven as well as the week from hell. We'll get to that point in just a minute.

But there's something else at work. If you look, you see clearly that Satan is at work in all these things. It's amazing. Satan enters into Judas at the Last Supper. Wow. Satan enters into Judas (John 13:27). Now Satan had put it in Judas' heart to betray Jesus (John 13:2). Why? I can't get inside the head of Judas, but we know he was a thief, and he got upset when Jesus was

anointed and said, “This could have been sold for a lot of money to help the poor” (Mark 14:4-11).

And never forget this, those that are most concerned about the poor with their mouths, generally are pilfering from the poor in their actual lives. So Satan’s involved in this. This is a week from heaven. This is a week from hell. What do we mean when we say it’s from heaven? Heaven stands for God himself, and hell stands for Satan himself. He’s engineering the whole thing. He stirred up the crowd. He stirred up Judas, and he actually literally entered inside of a man when Judas took the sop in the Last Supper. When Jesus took it, at that moment, the sacrament that was designed for life became a sacrament of death. Satan is involved in it.

Now, so we see these two things at work, but there’s something else, and I’ll rapidly move to the third point. The week from hell is also a reflection of this war between Christ and Satan and finally, it is this, it is a week from heaven because God is orchestrating all of this. Turn with me, if you will, to the book of Acts for a moment. First, Acts chapter 2 on Peter’s Pentecost Sunday as he explains this, Acts chapter 2. And he says this, he says in Acts chapter 2 that God raised Jesus from the dead. In verse 22, Acts 2:22:

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge (We’ll find out what that means in a second), and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (Acts 2:22-23)

And then you turn over to chapter 4, where they expound on it even fuller when they suffer and here’s what they say on their release, Acts chapter 4, page 1,697, and they say, beginning in verse 25:

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.” (Acts 4:25-26)

Now look at verse 27:

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. (Acts 4:27)

Now look at verse 28. I want you to understand that this natural event, because you can understand the crucifixion completely by natural phenomena, crossing people on their money, insulting people, and telling them they're liable for hell and no better than anybody else, and this conflict between Christ and Satan, which is obviously there throughout the whole story. Now notice verse 28. You should memorize this verse.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:28)

You see, the week from hell is also the week from heaven. The week from hell, this horrible week, we call it Holy Week, but it's really a horrible week, climaxing in the arrest of Jesus probably after midnight on Friday morning, and the horrible things they did to Jesus, and Jesus dying on Friday afternoon, that's day one, and remember the Jewish day begins at sunset and being in the tomb Friday evening, on the Jewish Sabbath, which began at sundown on our Friday and continued on until sundown the next day, and then on the third day, Easter Sunday, he rises from the dead.

It's three Jewish days. But this week, this week of conflict, you understand it naturally. You understand it with Satan. But notice here, he says, they say as they're praying, in verse 28:

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:28)

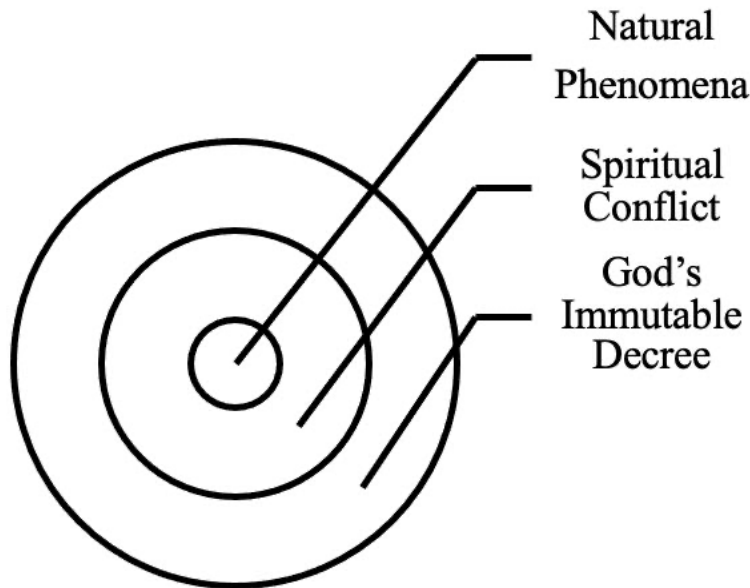
Now listen, let's think about this just for a moment practically, and I think I've cut this 66-minute sermon down to about 20 minutes. I think so. And so what is the practical application of this?

What's this week going to bring to you? Wow! When I was last here two weeks ago, I had no idea what would unfold. I had no idea that Thursday evening I would begin passing blood, that Friday we would go to the doctor, and he would immediately have me admitted to Rapids Regional Hospital. I had no idea that I would lose two units of blood. I had no idea. I had no idea that instead of preaching here on St. Patrick's Day—a sermon that I'll

probably never preach now—that I would be in the hospital having had a colonoscopy. I had no idea.

What is this week going to bring? What is this week going to bring for you? I don't know. Think of what the week of April the 2nd, 30 AD brought for Jesus. All of those things. And yet, in all of it, God had a plan. And this is our great comfort in afflictions, Dear Ones.

Everything can be understood as natural. Everything can be understood with this great war between Christ and Satan. The final analysis, as in the case of Job, all the things that happened to him happened by the determined will and decree of God.



You see there are mysteries here because we like to think like the Greeks instead of thinking like the people of the Old Testament, people in the Middle East. Mystery.

I can't reconcile everything. Jesus is fully God; he's fully human; in one person. Can I reconcile that? No, it's a paradox.

Remember, the Bible is a "both/and" book rather than an "either/or" book, and in this wonderful, amazing book, a week from hell can be a week from heaven because God is working out his eternal, immutable decree. Never forget that. There's an eternal, immutable, that means unchangeable, decree and nothing you do, or I do can alter that determined will of God. Do I

understand that? No, I don't, but I know it's true, and so my comfort in affliction is this: God's got a plan for my life. God's got a plan for your life.

God is working his purpose out. Even when you're in a hospital, even when the doctor says, "I'm not going to let you go home," and then they ran another test and discovered in spite of all the blood I lost, I wasn't anemic. So he let us go home and get our things as a tornado warning is coming. Wow, I had no idea.

Even in that, even in that, God used that event to establish some relationships with people, believe it or not.

And again, I so appreciate, Ben, that you'd returned from a trip to fill this pulpit. That was a great blessing. That's a blessing for your life, and that's a blessing for all of you.

The final thought is this: no matter what hell is throwing at you, no matter what Satan is throwing at you, or all the imps that are under his control are throwing at you, no matter what the world is throwing at you, no matter how sad the events of life may be in this coming week, remember this, God is working his purpose out as year succeeds year. God's working that purpose out.

His purpose is to bless you. He wants you to know him and to love him. He wants your children to know him and love him. He is orchestrating things so that we would know him and love him.

And if you're watching on the internet, know this: God loves you. God has a plan for your life. You'll never know that plan. And this sounds all paradoxical when you hear everything I've said, you'll never know that plan until you bow your knees before the Lord and say, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Embrace the will of God for your life. and you will discover the most amazing adventure of life that you can be happy even in the storms of life, you can be at peace even in the storms of life.

Trust in the Lord with all in your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Lord, bless this word that has been proclaimed to us today and may we walk in the reality of who you are. For Jesus' sake, amen.