April 16/17, 2022

Draw Near

Easter Sunday

Hebrews 10:19-23

Pastor Josh Luse

Good morning. Either maybe you came by yourself or maybe somebody drug you here, or maybe you came just pumped to sing about your risen Savior. Whatever reason you came, we're so glad that you're here today. We're going to be flying through this book today, so if you have a Bible, you can try to keep up. If it's too tough, you can just listen along as I read. But I want to start with a question for you this morning.

What does it mean to be close to someone…what does it mean to be close to someone? Some might say it's proximity, and it's that for sure, right? But have you ever noticed when we speak about closeness with somebody in proximity, it's usually somebody that we're not very close to? Somebody famous or some celebrity and we're like, "I was, like, ten feet away from them," or, "I was so close that I gave him a high five," or, "I shook their hand!" We're so close to them and yet, we're not very close with them. But there's another kind of closeness, isn't there? It's not proximity it's intimacy. This is a totally different kind of closeness. This is a heart-level closeness, a closeness that knits and melts our hearts together. It's something that, at times, is hard for us even to put words into, but it's something that, when you experience it, you know it. Maybe you've seen those videos over time where they have a surprise reunion. Maybe somebody from the military is coming back and that loved one has waited for them, wondering if they will see them again, longing for that day when they will once again be close. Those things can be dangerous. This lady had a mug of coffee in her hand and the soldier came behind her. She turns around. She's jumping! She's screaming! Coffee is flying everywhere! The dog is going crazy! There's emotion; there's tears; there's joy.

What if you could have that kind of closeness to God? That's what we want to talk about a little bit this morning. If you have your Bibles, you can turn to the very first page of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, verse 1: It tells us this, in that verse:

> **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** (*ESV, Genesis 1:1)

And why did God do this? God did not need anything. God wasn't homeless. It wasn't like He needed to make a place for Him to live. In fact, God was so overjoyed with existence, and creativity, and with everything that He was experiencing in community, that He created this garden as a place for us—His creation—to live with Him. In fact, the Bible tells us this place was called Eden, which means delight or pleasure. It was a type of sanctuary where we could live and dwell with God and experience all of His blessing, because all of blessing is tied to God. That is His essence. There is no blessing apart from God. And Adam and Eve experienced this in its fullness.

In fact, as we flip the page to chapter three, we find that in verse eight they would walk with God. They would experience His presence, His nearness. And all of this was a gift. Except for that tree—the tree of knowledge of good and evil—that was not a gift. And yet, they took it anyway. And from that time on, sin and brokenness and isolation and decay started to rip this beautiful world

apart. God had told them how to live in a flourishing relationship with Him, but it wasn't without choice. God is not forcing anyone to be with Him. Adam and Eve had a choice. They could either trust that God is who He said He is, and choose to submit to Him, and follow Him, and live life with Him, or they could reject Him. They could turn from Him; they could follow their own way. You know the story. They choose to reject God, and brokenness enters this world. In fact, at the end of chapter 3 and verse 22, it says this:

> **"Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever"- therefore, the Lord God sent him out of the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the Garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.** (Genesis 3:22-24)

Now first, when we read this, it seems like God is somehow keeping something from them. It seems like this is God withholding something from them. But He's not withholding from them; He's actually looking out for them. It kind of reminds me of that kid at the zoo that is trying to climb over this fence, and the parent keeps keeping them from climbing over this fence. And the child is frustrated, yelling, "Why is my parent not letting me go in and play with these snuggly bears down there?" The parent is guarding them. He's looking out for them. In the same way, God is looking out for Adam and Eve. That's why the cherubim with flaming swords are there. He knew that had they gone and eaten of the tree of life, that they would have lived forever in their sin.

God longed to be with them, but sin and God's holiness cannot mix. In God's holiness, there is justice and wholeness. There's truth, everything that sin is not. And God's holiness and sin cannot live in harmony with each other. In fact, they're in conflict. And ultimately, God's holiness will prevail.

Maybe picture it this way. God's holiness is to a flame what sin is to dried grass. I don't know if anybody else has been watching their lawn just struggle through this season. But that's been me. I know, this rain in the last couple days and this last week have helped out tremendously. But just a few weeks ago, I was taking my dog outside on a leash and I was barefoot. As I was walking across my lawn, I could hear the grass just crumbling under every step. It was like I was walking across a pile of Rice Krispies: Crunch, crunch, crunch! And the grass was just disintegrating underneath. It was so dead, and so dry, and so windy at that time. I just thought, if there was a spark that came with this wind in this dry grass, it would just incinerate instantly. It wouldn't stand a chance.

God's holiness cannot live in harmony with sin. And so we're left with a mess. God created these people to live with Him, and yet sin now separates them from Him. Someone once said it this way. "If God created us, it means either one of two things. He is extremely needy and uses us for His own satisfaction. (And there may be some of you in this room that picture God in that way.) Or it means another thing. It means that He's an extremely generous God, that created us only because He wanted to share His goodness. If He was needy, at our first sin, He would have abandoned us. But if He's good, He would come and He would rescue us."

So from there, our story continues, and we realize that this holy God created us to be with Him and now is separated from us because of our sin. Did sin change God? Absolutely not! But did sin

change us? Absolutely! So to protect them, He ushers them out of the garden, apart from Him, ultimately so that we would realize that there is no life found except with Him. And He makes a plan to win us back.

Can you imagine what Adam and Eve felt like at that point? They're walking away from the garden, looking back at all that they had had and experienced with God, but now feeling this deep sense of loneliness and isolation, and this void.

For some of us in this room, that's not hard to imagine. Deep within your soul, you experienced that. You know that. You have this feeling as though something is missing. There's a void; there's an emptiness. God is not content to let it remain that way. So, as the story continues, He chooses a man named Abraham. He says that He's going to bless him and that all of the world would be blessed by him. Abraham's family grows and becomes known as the nation of Israel, the Jewish people. At some point, they find themselves as slaves in Egypt and God comes and rescues them out. And He tells their leader at that time, Moses, to go into the desert to make Him a tabernacle. In fact, Exodus, chapter 25, verse 8 talks about this and it says this:

> **And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and all of its furniture, so shall you make it.** (Exodus 25:8-9)

Now in these verses, when it says **tabernacle**, it literally means a *dwelling place*. And when He says **sanctuary**, it means *a holy place*. So, what is God saying here? He's saying, "Moses, this is a place where the holy One can once again dwell in your midst."

He literally has them construct this fabric fence in the shape of a rectangle. And in the middle of this fence, at the end, he has them construct this elaborate tent—forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide. And it is filled with all these symbols and icons of God's journey that point back to the garden. And as you enter this tabernacle, this tent, the first room was called the Holy Place. And then at the end of that room, there was this curtain. And behind that curtain was the second room called the Holy of Holies. And this is the place where God's presence now dwells here on earth. Hebrews, chapter 9, actually talks about this in verses 2-8. I'll read it. It gives us more description in detail about this tent. It says this:

> **For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.** (Hebrews 9:2-8)

Essentially he's saying there are all these symbols, these things from their journey, that remind them both of God and His presence with them, and of the garden going back. In fact, this cherubim was there, the place where God would rest, and it was called the mercy seat. How fitting of a place

for this God of mercy to dwell with His people. But what were they doing in this place? Verse 6 goes on to say:

> **These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing the ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself, and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy place is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing.** (Hebrews 9:6-8)

What is he saying? He's saying, there's not a way for everyone to go into God's presence, only the high priest, only after sacrifices. Now this temple, this tabernacle, would not have been all that odd. Because, since Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, people continued to try and make their own gods, be their own gods. In fact, they would carve out these images; they would melt out these images, and they would have a tent or a temple much like this. At the end of their temple, they would put this image that had no life, and they would worship it and offer sacrifices to it. But for God's temple, there is no image because He's only made one image, and that's you and me. We are to reflect Him and His glory.

Now, all these things may seem a bit odd to you if you did not grow up in the church. Kind of a churchy language: tabernacles, and animal sacrifices, and blood offerings, and sanctuaries. It all seems a bit odd. I'm with you. When I was growing up, I went to a church and in the name of the church was "Tabernacle". Actually, the room where we would gather—we call this the auditorium—they would call it the sanctuary. It was a good church, but there were a lot of odd things I didn't quite understand. As you went into the sanctuary, they had these long benches. They called them pews. As a kid, I thought that was a weird word for the name of a seat. They had red carpet. It seemed like there were all these unwritten rules when you came into that building, like you were supposed to wear your best clothes, and you weren't supposed to run in the sanctuary. And there was a sense of respect you were supposed to maintain in that place. And I remember as the preacher would get up to preach, there'd be some people that were nodding off. And as a kid, there'd be a point where I just got so bored because that guy was so long winded, unlike any preachers you know, I'm sure.

And I would crawl down under the pew, and I would pull out the toy that I brought to keep me occupied and start to play. But I wasn't alone. I had a younger friend across the aisle. He would do the exact same thing. We'd kind of make eye contact. He'd be under the pews over there. I'm under the pews over here. We're playing, and he'd kind of move around at different points. But one day, I remember making eye contact with him, and I could tell he was up to something. He kind of looked over at me, looked up at the front of the room, and I could tell he was going to do it. He was going to try and get all the way to the front pew. And I thought, "Don't do it!" *(laugher)* And he looked over at me, and he said, "I'm doing it." *(laughter)* And he started army-crawling underneath the pews. And I saw his legs going, going, gone. And I got up and looked over the back of the pew, and I could see heads looking down to see what was brushing by their feet underneath. He gets all the way to the front of the room, and I know it because the preacher is preaching, and all of a sudden something catches his attention as he sees legs flip around and start to head back. I go back down underneath a pew, and I'm looking, and as he comes back, he's got

this sense of victory on his face…until he looks up at his parents. *(laughter)* His dad had a conversation with him, and for some reason, he never tried to advance that record beyond that, once again. That was the farthest he ever got.

Now the sanctuary in that room was nothing compared to what he's telling us in Hebrews 9. This is the place where God's presence dwelt with His people, and they would center their whole lives around it. Like, they would put this tabernacle in the middle of their camp, and every one of their homes, their tents, would surround it, having the openings of their tents facing it, because they knew that's the place where God was. They were so close, and yet still there was distance. They couldn't go all the way in.

Later, Solomon would make a temple, a permanent building that mirrored the tabernacle, and it was just as elaborate. After it was destroyed, Herod would make another temple. And it was huge. It was massive. The temple courts and the temple itself was bigger than a football field. And all of it, if you were a Jew, would continue to remind you and bring symbolism to what God was trying to help them remember. Because, as you would enter into this temple, there were decorations. You know what they were? Pictures of fruit trees, and flowers, all adorned in gold that would sparkle. It would remind them of the garden.

And in front, there was this huge curtain, sixty-foot-high. Jewish tradition tells us it was almost soundproof. It was almost four inches thick, and embroidered on this curtain were cherubim, to protect the people from God's holiness, His presence that rested behind it. Kind of reminds you of another story, doesn't it? Back in Genesis chapter three? And not everyone could go into this place. Only a certain tribe from the nation of Israel, the Levites, the priests. Not priests like you're thinking. These weren't dudes walking around with black robes and a white collar. These priests actually had colorful clothes. The robes were blue and purple and scarlet, embroidered with gold. They actually had stones that adorned, representing the twelve tribes of the nation. All of this was to let the people remember that these priests were a type of a middleman, a mediator between a holy God and a sinful people. God had made a way for them once again to be with Him. Hebrews 7:27 tells us this: The priest would offer sacrifices daily for the sins of the people. It wouldn't take the sins away, but it would cover them up so God could abide with them.

And there was one day, that one day once a year, called The Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, where not only could priests go into the temple in the first place, but the high priest, one person, after doing the ceremonial washings and making sacrificial offerings to cleanse from sin, he would get to go into the Holy of Holies, the very room where God's presence dwelt. It wasn't without terror. Jewish tradition tells us that they would tie a rope around his leg. They put bells around his waist, in case for some reason he had not offered sacrifices in the right way for his sin. And when he went in, if his sin did not allow him to be in God's presence, he would die instantly. No one else could go in there after him, so they would have a rope so they could pull him out. The problem is, after that was done that day, the priests would have to continue to make more offerings. And this would happen year after year. Why? Because the people would continue to sin. So many barriers, so much distance from God. There had to be a way that we could actually get close to God. And there was that day where John 3:16 tells us this:

> **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only son.** (John 3:16)

A few chapters before that, in John chapter 1, verse 14, he puts it in this way.

> **The Word [meaning God] became flesh and dwelt among us**. (John 1:14)

In other words, God became flesh. He wrapped His Son, Jesus, in flesh, and Jesus dwelt among us. The literal word that's used in this verse is He *tabernacled* among us. Now we're getting somewhere. Do you see what's happening? This God that's been so distant, it seems that we can't get to because of our sin, He's now here. He's a God that we can see. We can hear; we can touch; we know His presence, *fully God, and yet fully human.* And this God was different. This Person was different, completely sinless. He didn't have any need for sacrifices to be made on His behalf. He lived a perfect life so He could Himself be a sacrifice for you and for me. Why? Because God wants you back. Hebrews 9:22 says,

> **Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.**

So, on that Friday, the same Friday we celebrated two days ago, that we refer to as Good Friday, God provided the ultimate sacrifice.

Mark chapter 15, verse 25, says this:

> **And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,** [make note of that]**, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.** [What's it say?] **And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!"** (Mark 15:25-39)

We've been talking a whole lot about temples. See what just took place there. At first, they were making fun of him. Jesus had said something about the temple, that He would tear it down and rebuild it once again. But remember this. God Himself is there. Jesus is tabernacling with them. He's the temple. In fact, remember earlier when He went to the temple, and He got so angry because those corrupt leaders were using this temple as a place for their own profit? They were actually keeping people from God, not bringing people to God. And do you remember what He referred to

the temple as? His house. “My” house. And now He Himself, God's presence, is on that cross, ready to die and be buried for three days, and then raised again.

What else did it say happened? Verse 38 says that at the moment of his death, the **curtain of that temple was torn in two from top to bottom.** Not from bottom to top. Not as though it was some kind of byproduct of the earthquake that came during Jesus’ death. No, it was as if the author is trying to say, “God ripped the curtain open to invite us into His very presence.” The final sacrifice has been made: the perfect sacrifice, not just to cover sin, but to take it away completely. God has made a way for us to be now in His very presence, to be known by Him and to know Him. To be fully known and fully loved.

Timothy Keller puts it this way: “To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known, and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God.” *

I have a friend named Cassie, and she's experienced this love through her story. I'd like for you to take a look at it right now.

(Video)

Cassie: I want you to close your eyes and think of a time where you felt alone, where you felt not seen, where you felt ‘not enough’. Can you remember what it felt like?

So, one of my best friends in elementary school, she said something really rude, and it really hurt. So I said something really rude back. Next thing we knew, we weren't friends anymore and I walked around school just wondering what people were thinking, what they thought of me, just feeling very alone.

Moving into middle school, I made friends quickly, but I always kept them at an arm's length distance because I didn't want to let them get close enough in order to hurt me again. So it was this weird tension in my mind of wanting that love and wanting that closeness, but also being scared of it, that it would hurt me and that I would be left even more scarred than I was before. The hurt of that little girl felt very alone and unloved. That just left me feeling like God didn't care and so why should I care?

So I started off college like that, not caring. And it led me to make decisions that I never thought that I would make. And it led me to isolate myself even more from my family, and what I thought would bring me clarity of living in my own intention, just brought me more confusion and a stronger sense of loss.

I remember when it all came crumbling down. After I came home another day exhausted emotionally, physically, all of those things, and I couldn't even sleep that night, I woke up gasping and I was just lying there empty and didn't have anything left to give, it felt like. And I just fell on my knees, and I started praying, and I started saying, “Lord, I've made a complete mess out of my life, and I don't know if You still love me. I don't know if You want me, but I can't do this on my own. I feel so alone. I feel so lost. It feels so empty.” And as I was praying, it felt like I experienced

someone giving me a hug. And I opened up my eyes and I looked around. And I was like, I'm by myself; I feel crazy. But it really clicked in my mind at that point that it was more than being a good girl, and it was more than being all these things, all these pressures that I'd put on myself.

It felt like the intimacy that I was looking for, that God was saying that, "I see you, and I love you, and I do want you. And so that's when I knew that I had it all wrong and I didn't understand what having a relationship with Jesus meant. And so that's what I wanted to learn. That's what I wanted to figure out. And it took shutting off a lot of the things and the decisions that I made and the digging, opening up my Bible and actually reading it for what it says, not what I think that it says or what I want it to say. And getting in community and having people point out who Jesus is to me, and just show me, allow people to get close enough to see me for who I am and to show me that they still love me.

I've walked through some really hard things where I've had to just invite Jesus into and know that He's there and that He sits with me. And whatever I walk through, I can still experience His nearness.

I want you to open up your eyes and imagine that there is someone who already knows you intimately and already loves you unconditionally despite decisions that you've made, despite things that have happened to you.

I'm telling you from the deepest part of my soul, in my heart, that I have found that in Jesus. And He is the one that has been by my side through everything that I've walked through. And now that is something that's worth holding on to.

Josh: Cassie is not talking about proximity. Sure, God is near, but when she's talking, she's talking about intimacy. Jesus is real for her.

Jesus is real for hundreds of people in this room. The question you have to ask yourself is, "Is this Jesus real for you?" He's made a way to have intimacy with Him. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19, says it this way:

> **Therefore, brothers...** (What's the therefore there for? Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, His death, His burial, and His resurrection? What' does that make possible?) **…since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.** (Hebrews 10:19-23)

He promised He would make a way, and He has. *Draw near* literally means *approaching one.* God has done it all and made a way for us to be with Him. God went from being among His people in a tabernacle, to being with His people in the person of Jesus, to now living in His people through His Spirit. 1 Corinthians, chapter 3 actually tells us that our bodies are His temple, that His very Spirit can live within us. Ephesians 3 tells us that He makes a home to dwell in our hearts if we

invite Him in. God has relentlessly pursued you, but He's giving you a choice. Much like the choice He gave Adam and Eve, He's not going to force anyone. James 4:8 says this,

> **Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.**

So I have to ask you this question this morning: "Are you close with God?" The reality is every single one of us is sinful. We've made mistakes; we've screwed up. And on our own, there's nothing we can do to make it right before God. We're helpless. And yet He came to us, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose again so that through that, He would pay for our sins. And anyone who trusts in Him alone will receive salvation—life with Him—both here now and forever.

So you're faced with a decision right here this morning. Will you choose to put your trust and your faith in Jesus Christ, and live with Him both now and for eternity? Or will you continue to choose to go your own way, living with that void and emptiness, separate from God both here now and for eternity? In your very seat, right now, you can make that, simply by acknowledging in the quietness of your heart, "God, I choose to trust in You and You alone for my salvation. I accept You as my Savior and I want to follow you." I beg of you to make that choice. Romans 10:9 says:

> **If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**

Christians in this room, let us not forget that God is not some kind of distant roommate, somebody that we cohabitate with, that we see in passing, that we talk to when we need things. We're there but not present with Him. We see Him but we're not living life with Him. May He remind us here this morning that He is in our midst, that He dwells within us, that He's made a way for us to draw near. May He awaken our hearts for the desire to be close to Him, much like the psalmist says in Psalm 27:4:

> **One thing have I asked of the LORD, that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.**

To be with Him. What a gift!

As the story continues on, it tells us that Jesus will come again, and what He wants and desires for us in community will be established in its fullness in the last pages of the Bible in Revelation. He continues with this temple language. In Revelation chapter 21, verse 3, this is what He says:

> **And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.**

Easter means that Jesus is alive. But not only that. Easter means that God is near. But not only that. Easter means that we can draw near to God. And there is nothing, absolutely nothing better than living this full, grace-filled, colorful, beautiful life with God, to praise God here now and on into an eternity. What a gift to be close with God. Would you pray with me?

God, thank You that You have made a way for us to be with You. God, may we not forget the cost of Your Son, that we would not forget the celebration of the reality of Your victory through His death and resurrection, to give us the ability to be with You. God, awaken our hearts to Your presence. God, we want You to be central in our life in all that we do. We want to walk with You. We want to listen to You. We want to talk with You. We want to enjoy our life with You because You are good. What a good God. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

"Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2022 – Josh Luse. All rights reserved.

***Timothy Keller, <u>The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God</u>**
Copyright 2011 By Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller
Penguin Books, New York, New York