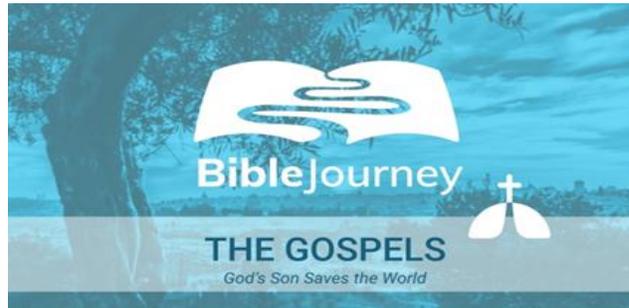


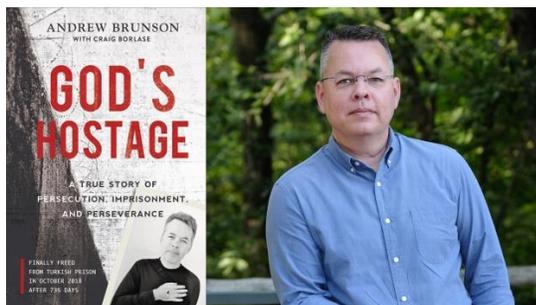
***The King Saves the Lost***  
**March-April Sermon Series**  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
April 25, 2021

**TEXT: Luke 1:1-4**



Good morning, Beloved. We are in the Gospels because we've taken seriously the good news of Holy Week, that Jesus died and rose again. That news is news that should be studied, but also shared. We've been following up on Easter and learning how to share Christ with the world. The gospel writers, the evangelists, give us models for how to communicate the identity of Jesus to a world that knows nothing about Him. That is an increasing opportunity for us. Fifty percent of Americans now do not identify with Christianity in any way. That means, for one out of every two people you meet, you have the opportunity to introduce them to Jesus. It doesn't mean you have to win an apologetic argument. It doesn't mean you have to overwhelm them with your personal godliness. If we look at the Gospel writers, what they do is talk about who Jesus was and what He did and what He said. It's Jesus who is compelling. We saw that Jesus saves the fearful, and we saw that Jesus heals the sick.

This morning we look at the Gospel of Luke, and we discover that Jesus finds the lost. Luke's preface is what we just heard read, and I want to ask you if you typically read the preface of a book? There's a debate in our house. We are on either side of this. I read the preface; my wife reads the conclusion. I love to find out who the person is that I'm listening to. Three books that



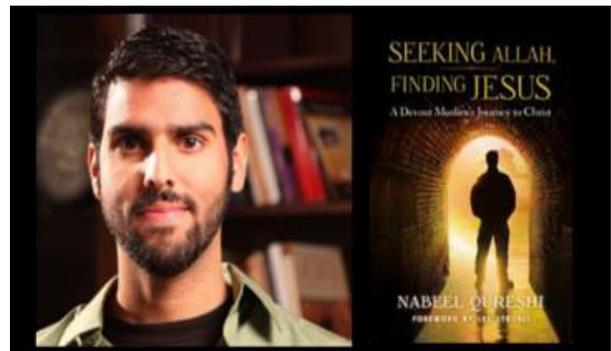
I've read recently highlight the importance of a preface and how much it shows us about the author. By the way, all these books I'm mentioning have pastoral endorsements for your reading. They are challenging and very helpful. I just finished *God's Hostage* by Andrew Brunson. It's the story of a pastor from North Carolina, who served as a missionary for many, many years in Turkey. He was arrested, together with his wife, and they

were imprisoned in Turkey for number of days. On our last trip with the journeys of Paul, we were in Izmir, and we paused to pray for him, because we knew that he was in prison while we were there in the city. He was in prison for 775 days. His book tells that story and how God met him and the maturity of faith that shines forth from his experience. This is evident even in the preface. The preface says:

“To our beautiful children, Jordan, Jacqueline, Kevin and Blaise, and to our Christian brothers and sisters in Turkey. The prayer I prayed often for myself and over my family while in prison I now pray for you as well: Father God, pour out on your sons and daughters the courage, strength, confidence, perseverance, endurance and the steadfastness of Jesus, that we may run the race set before us and finish well, purified in the fires of faithful obedience, tested and found worthy of Jesus, the King of glory.”

I'm ready to put myself in the hands of someone who prays like that for people who would persecute him. There is much to learn about how to respond when we face cultural headwinds or opposition. It's a powerful, powerful book.

The second preface is from Nabeel Qureshi's book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. This is a profound book that tells the autobiographical story of a Pakistani Muslim, part of the Ahmadiyya sect, who over a very long journey, came to faith in Jesus Christ. Instrumental in his conversion was a young college student named David, who grew up in a trailer park and came to faith himself later in life. I loved seeing how God used David, how God used Christian writing and many others to draw Nabeel over several years to faith in Christ. When he made that decision, the hardest part of all was the that he knew this would be devastating for his family. In the preface of the book he writes:

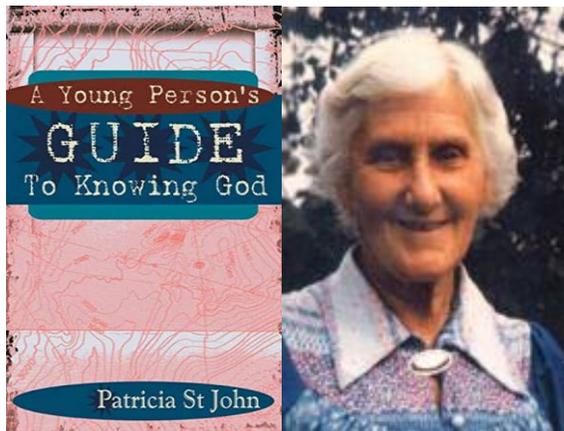


“This book is dedicated to my parents, Ammi and Abba, your undying love for me, even when you feel I have sinned against you, is second only to God's love for His children. I pray you will realize one day His love, that His love is truly unconditional, that He has offered forgiveness to us all. On that day, I pray that you would accept His redemption so that we might be a family once again. I love you with all my heart.”

I'm ready to entrust myself as a reader to someone who prays like that.

The third book I have reread recently. It's one of my favorite books. It's called *A Young Person's Guide to Knowing God*, and you don't have to be young to benefit from it. It's a fantastic read for parents to read at night to their children, or grandparents to their grandchildren. It was

written by Patricia St. John, who is an English missionary in North Africa and in England. In the



preface of this book, her sister Hazel says:

“Patricia St. John had a special gift for storytelling and for drawing people to Jesus. She made Bible stories come alive in a way that some of them still claim they have never forgotten. The street children in Morocco, where she did medical work, gathered to hear her stories. Later the children in Coventry would crowd into her home and listen at bedtime. Shortly before she died, one headmaster wrote to tell her, ‘I only wish that you could have seen the 180 pairs of attentive eyes. When the story reached its climax, the place was absolutely silent with rapt attention.’”

This book takes the Apostles’ Creed and illustrates it with stories. It is a great introduction to the God that we meet in the Bible, so I’m ready to entrust myself to her as guide.

What do we find when we read Luke’s preface? Luke’s preface in Luke 1:1-4 is one sentence:

*“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”*

It’s a great sentence. It takes four verses in English to translate this one sentence. It’s a bit of a flashy start. It starts with that word that we use rarely: “inasmuch.” Do you use that often—“inasmuch”? The translators make that choice with the word that Luke uses here, and it is actually the only time the entire Bible that this word is used. It’s a fancy literary word that you might encounter.

We read the front cover of a book to look for the endorsements. Sometimes we flip to the back to see who else likes this. We look at online reviews. In antiquity, if you want to check to see if a book is worth reading, you unroll it just a little, and you read the first few lines. Luke starts with the indication that he is a person of learning. It’s a literary endeavor. He says many have undertaken to compile a narrative of “the things that have been accomplished among us,” even better translated as “the things that been fulfilled among us.” Many, he says, have written a narrative. Christianity is dependent on textual transmission. We do not rely on just oral

accounts. We certainly don't interpret Jesus or present Jesus based on our own opinions. We can never remake or repackage Jesus by the cultural preferences of the day. Luke says, even in his day, there are narratives that people have put together, narratives and accounts that are rooted in eyewitness testimony. There were eyewitnesses from the beginning, and notice in verse two that Luke says they became ministers of the word. Those who saw Jesus heard His voice. They became servants of the Word and committed the teaching of Jesus, the actions of Jesus, the events of Holy Week, the accounts of His resurrection into writing, and they passed it on. Our faith is not based on hearsay or one opinion versus the other. Luke says there are many accounts and narratives. They been handed down faithfully from eyewitness accounts.

Then he says in Luke 1:3 that “it seemed good to me also, because I followed everything closely. I’ve been gripped by this story from the start. I followed it from beginning to end, and it has seemed good to me.” The Holy Spirit birthed the desire in Luke to record this account. He says, “I’m writing to you an orderly account,” according to the ESV. The word that Luke uses here is a word that signals an account that is sequential, an account that follows one step after another. Luke's account begins earlier than that of Matthew and Mark and John in many ways. Luke uniquely records the events around the birth of John the Baptist. Luke's sequential or orderly account, from the beginning, has in mind a two-volume set. Luke's account from the beginning is: “Let me tell you about what Jesus began to do and teach.” From the beginning, Luke is planning to tell the story of the book of Acts, which we will start next week. He wants to include that book of Acts, because that's when the story reached him. It reached him through faithful witness of others, who transmitted the gospel and who proclaimed it and taught it. Halfway through the book of Acts, Luke himself enters the narrative as someone who receives the Word of the cross, the good news of Jesus, the gospel that is shared with him. It is through these accounts, through these texts, through these narratives, through these words, that Luke writes. He says, “I want to give you a sequential thing; I want to put it in order for you.” It doesn't imply a deficiency in the other Gospels. It just says, “I want you to know everything that's happened in order,” but the real punchline of this great opening sentence is Luke 1:4:

*“...that you might have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”*

Luke's Gospel, Luke's preface, is: “I followed everything from the beginning. Things have been fulfilled among us, and I want you to know for certain about what you've been taught. I want you to have assurance and confidence that what you've learned about Jesus is true, that you can risk your life, your eternal life, on it.”

Has he grabbed you with his opening line? Are you ready to place yourself in his hands? I would be. What do we find, then, when we look and listen to Luke's telling, his presentation of Jesus, and what can we learn from it? A central theme that is unique to Luke, and that is very

prominent, is that *the lost are found*. I think this theme unlocks Luke's Gospel for us in a way that reflects Luke's own experience. Luke is the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament, and, as such, he is the only Gospel writer who, as Paul describes in Ephesians 2:12, was at one time:

*“. . . separated from Christ. . .having no hope and without God in the world.”*

A lost man is found in Jesus Christ, and his narrative reflects that. Let's open this theme a little bit more closely. It emerges in some of the unique passages in the Gospel of Luke, and I want to point out three of them for us.

The first is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is one of Jesus' most well-known parables, but we know the story only from Luke. In Luke 10:29, we read concerning the lawyer who came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life:

*“But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”*

He wanted to justify himself, to set the limits or boundaries, as we talked about last Sunday. Sometimes we get to that bounded set mentality, where we just want to defend the perimeter. “Who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus starts a parable, and when He starts a parable, we always have to be ready, to hold on. In Luke 10:30, Jesus begins:

*“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.”*

This man is lost. Jesus doesn't use the word “lost,” but he was going down that great road from Jerusalem to Jericho. That road is called the “Way of Blood,” because there are so many robberies there. He is accosted, assaulted, beaten, stripped, and left for dead. He is lost. Will he be found? In Luke 10:31-32, Jesus says:

*“Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. “*

In Luke 10:33-35, the story continues:

*“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’”*

In Luke 10:36, Jesus then asked:

*“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among*

*the robbers?"*

The man responded in Luke 10:37:

*"The one who showed him mercy."*

He was the one who showed him mercy, and he was the one who saw a man who was lost and would have died without his intervention. He was found by this man who saw him in need, noticed him, and took the risk of investing his own time, energy, and resources. This man who was lost is found.

There was a young adult named Stephen in our church a number of years ago. He was a young adult who had been on one of these large journeys with ups and downs, getting close to the Lord, moving far away, trying to figure out who he was in Christ. His mother was very strong in her faith and prayed for him. He finally said, "You know, I need to get some time away. I need to clear my head. I'm going to go out to Colorado." He went to Colorado, and he was hiking in the mountains, asking all of the big questions of life: Does God care about me? Does God see me? Who is God? What does He have for me? He was thinking about all these things as he was hiking on the mountains, and he took a step too far from a striking vista and fell off the mountain. He fell several hundred feet. Just as he hit the ground in this scarcely populated wilderness area, two EMTs were riding trail bikes recreationally through the mountains. He landed, and they were right there. They bound his wounds, and they saved his life. Stephen found in that great fall and in God's sovereign direction of the universe that "He does care for me, and He knows me." Stephen is serving Him this day—the recovery of the lost.

A second unique passage to Luke is Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. This is later in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 19, Jesus entered Jericho. He's on His way back up that dangerous road, passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. There was a man named Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector who was wealthy. He wanted to see Jesus but could not see Him in the crowds, because he was small in stature. Zacchaeus climbs up into a tree, and he sees Jesus. When Jesus came and He saw Zacchaeus, He looked up in the tree and, in Luke 19:5, Jesus said:

*"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."*

Zacchaeus, thinking he was hiding in the tree, hurried down and received Him joyfully. When the people saw this, they grumbled that Jesus would go to eat and be the guest of a man who is a sinner. In the midst of the banquet, Zacchaeus stood up and said in Luke 19:8:

*"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."*

He doesn't just want to pay it back. He wants to pay it back with interest. Restoration in the Bible is not just restoring what was lost, but compensation. Zacchaeus reveals the reality of the

gospel's coming into his heart and the commitment to following Him. Jesus interprets what is happening, and He says in Luke 19:9:

*"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."*

Then we read this unique line in Luke 19:10:

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Do you hear this recurring theme? It is unique to Luke. *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* If you are lost this morning and you're hearing the Gospel of Luke, I have good news for you and that is that Jesus Christ is seeking you. He's not trying to capture you in a net and drag you, but He is seeking after you. If you've lost your way, and you're not sure what the next step is, the Jesus that we meet in the Gospel of Luke seeks after the lost, the disoriented, the confused, and finds them. And when He finds them, He brings them into His family with great, great joy.

This theme we see in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and we see it in the encounter with Zacchaeus, but most dramatically, we see it in Luke 15. In Luke 15, Jesus tells a set of three parables. The first two I will introduce very briefly. In Luke 15:4-5, Jesus says:

*"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."*

He comes back and announces to his community in Luke 15:6 and says:

*"Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."*

Something of value is lost, a costly search begins, and there is a great celebration in the end.

This theme keeps repeating in Luke's Gospel. Jesus tells it a second time, although He raises the stakes. Instead of one out a hundred, it's one out of ten. Jesus says in Luke 15:8:

*"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?"*

A woman having ten silver coins loses one. Jesus says that she lights a lamp. She sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it. Have you ever lost something? When you lose something, it's discouraging, especially if it's something particularly valuable, like a passport or your car keys or something that you really need for later in the day.

I was repairing a ceiling fan in our home recently. I was extending my skill set, ever so slightly. The fan was spinning and making a sound. I thought, "I can do this; I know I can do this." I took one layer apart, and then I faced that risky moment: Do I take the next layer apart? I thought, "I

can do this.” Then I saw a way to fix it. I could just take these four screws off and adjust this piece, and that grinding sound will stop. I unscrewed the first screw, and it bounced on the ladder. I looked all around, and I just couldn't see it. I thought, “Where could it be; it’s in the house.” I looked on the ladder, and I looked on the carpet. It was nowhere. So I took the other three screws off, and then I replaced the three. I wondered if my wife would notice that the fourth screw is gone. I can answer that, because my wife has 15/20 vision and is a very perceptive person. She would notice that, but I kept it to myself for a while, hoping the screw would just appear. Finally, later in the day, I reached for my car keys, and there was the screw—in my pocket. It had bounced off the ladder and gone through a very improbable trajectory, right into my pocket. Can you technically say that you lost it, when you had it the whole time? I had great joy in finding this.

Luke 15 continues to the climactic parable. The center of gravity of Luke's whole presentation of Jesus is the third of these lost and found parables. It's Jesus' most famous parable. It's a parable that we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It's His longest parable. He raises the intensity again. Instead of losing one out of a hundred or one out of ten, now it's one out of two. Instead of a sheep or a coin, it's about losing a child, losing a son. Some of you know the anguish of a son who has gone astray. You don't know where they are with the Lord. Jesus doesn't really tell us about how the sheep was lost or how the coin was lost, but the loss of a child requires explanation. He tells us that there was a man with two sons and that the younger son asked his father: “Give me the share of property that is coming to me.” It's a dramatic and public insult.

Kenneth Bailey, who lived his childhood in the Middle East, has asked hundreds of villagers in the Middle East: “Have you ever heard of a child asking for their inheritance while the father was still alive?” They all laughed and said that no one has ever asked for this. It's a request that the father would be dead.

Astonishingly, the father gives the inheritance. The son takes the right of possession, and he also claims the right of disposition. He takes the ancestral estate and liquidates it. The possession of property and land is so valuable in this part of the world that God in His Word makes provision for property to return to families if it is lost within a generation. The son takes the ancestral property and liquidates it. The father's humiliation and shame and insult are exponentially increased. He turns the estate into cash, travels far from home for a distant country, and he wastes his inheritance. The NIV calls it “wild living,” and we are left to imagine what that is. The ESV says “reckless living.” The Greek word that Luke uses is *asotos*, which is like the opposite of salvation. It is the opposite of healthy, safe, right, godly. It is maybe best translated as “destructive living.” It's the New King James that renders it as “prodigal living,”

and that's why we call it the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He spends all he has, and he begins to be in need when a famine strikes the land in the parable. He is the first to feel the need. A man in the country hires him to feed the pigs, and he accepts. The famine grows more intense, and he begins to look longingly at the pods that the pigs are feasting on. These are carob pods from a prickly bush that grows about eighteen inches high. It's a bush with briars and thorns and bitter berries. He looks at that and thinks, "If I could just eat some of that, maybe I would live." We get a sense of how close he is, how desperate he is, and then he realizes a plan to save his life. He wonders, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and I am starving to death." So he hatches a plan. In Luke 15:18-19, he says:

*"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"*

He will come back, stay on the margins of the community, and blend in with the workers. It's a plan, not of reconciliation; it's a plan for survival. So he gets up and starts heading home. And this is where the parable really turns. It turns when the scene shifts back to the father. Just as the shepherds sought out the lost sheep, the woman sought out the lost coin, Jesus sought out Zacchaeus, and the Samaritan sought out the man who was wounded, this father never stopped scanning the horizon for his son. When the son was a long way off, he saw him. He saw the haggard young man at the point of dying. He saw him, and his heart burst, and he began to run. No Middle Eastern man of status runs publicly, and yet he runs, bearing the humiliation of his son. His robes are flowing. The people gather around, saying, "What's going on?" He meets the son at the edge of the village and falls upon him with an embrace. Luke preserves for us that he kissed him and kissed him. In Luke 15:21, the son could barely speak:

*"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

The father does not allow him to finish the speech to "hire me as one of your servants." In Luke 15:22, the father instead says publicly to his servants:

*"Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."*

He clothes him. He re-inherits him. He embraces him. The father has received him and is launching into a community celebration, and Jesus speaks to us the meaning of the father's actions in Luke 15:24:

*"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."*

The son's return and re-inheritance launches a community celebration. The elder son is scandalized by the father's love and generosity, and the father goes out to plead with him to

come in and join in the party. Again, he tells the elder son in Luke 15:32:

*“It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”*

Luke tells us that this is the Jesus that we meet in the narrative: the Jesus who seeks the lost and finds them and rejoices. Luke writes that we would have assurance of who Jesus is, and he has presented Him to us in a compelling and vivid way.

I want to close this morning by coming back to one of the books I mentioned at the beginning. One of my favorite illustrations of the character and identity of God that I have ever encountered is in Patricia St. John's book, *A Young Person's Guide to Knowing God*. It's a story of a man she knew, and it's her way of illustrating “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” Who is He? What's He like? He seeks the lost and rejoices in finding them. She tells the story of a man she knew, a man who sat on the pavement beside the bus stop, staring at the stones. A few people turned to look at him, his unshaven face, his slumped shoulders, his broken shoes. I want to invite you, as I tell this story, if you would, just close your eyes and try to picture this scene with me.

“He was not aware of their glances, because he was reliving his life. For a few minutes, he was no longer the hungry tramp who slept last night under the railway bridge. He was a boy who lived in a small red brick house, up the next street, twenty years ago. Perhaps they had bulldozed over the house by now. He hoped they hadn't crushed the pansies. It was strange how well he could remember the pansies and the swing his dad had made for him and the path where he had learned to ride his bike. They had saved for months to buy that bike. He shrugged impatiently, for the brightness of those pictures hurt him. His memory traveled on another ten years. The bike was exchanged for a motorcycle. He began to come home less often. He had a job by then and plenty of friends. Mom and dad seemed a bit sad and gray. He did not want to remember those years, nor the day when his debts piled high and he had gone home to ask for money. His parents had made him a cup of tea. He had not liked to mention why he had come. He knew exactly where his dad kept the money, and when they were out in the garden, it was easy to help himself. That was the last time he had seen his parents. He had not wanted to go home after that. They had lost track of him. He had gone abroad, and they knew nothing about the years of wandering, nor about the prison sentence.

“Locked in his cell at night, he had thought of them. Sometimes, when he tossed awake and the moonlight moved across the wall, he used to wonder how, once free, he would love to see them again if they were still alive, always supposing they still wanted to see him. When his time was up, he found a job in town but could not settle. Something seemed to be drawing him home, an urge he could not get away from. Every time he went for a

walk, something reminded him of that small red brick house: a clump of pansies, a child on a swing, a little boy running home from school. He did not want to arrive penniless, so he walked and hitched a good deal of the way home. He could have arrived earlier, but twenty miles away he was suddenly overcome with misgivings. What right had he to walk into their lives? Could they ever reconcile the haggard man he had become with the boy they had loved, that had so bitterly disappointed them? He bought some food and spent most of the day sitting under a tree. The letter he posted was quite short, but it had taken him hours to write. It ended with these words: 'I know it is unreasonable of me to suppose that you want to see me, so it is up to you. I will come to the end of the road early Thursday morning. If you want me home, hang a white handkerchief in the window of my old bedroom. If it's there, I will come. If not, I will wave goodbye to the old house and go on my way.'

"Now it's Thursday morning. He had arrived at the end of the street. It was still there, but having got there, he felt in no hurry at all. He just sat down on the pavement and stared at the stones. He could not put it off forever. After all, they might've moved. If the handkerchief was not there, he would make a few inquiries before leaving the town. He did not yet have the courage to face what he would do if they were there and simply did not want him. He got up painfully, for he was stiff from sleeping outside. The street was still in the shadows. Shivering a little, he walked slowly toward the old flame tree, where he knew he could see the old house as clear as clear. He would not look up or lift his eyes until he got there. He stood under the boughs with his eyes shut for a long time. Finally, summoning the courage, he drew a long breath and looked, and he stood staring and staring. The sun was already shining on the little red brick house, but it no longer seemed a little red brick house, for every wall was festooned with light, every window hung with sheets, pillowcases, towels, tablecloths, handkerchiefs, and table napkins. White muslin curtains trailed across the roof line. It looked like a snow house, gleaming in the morning light. His parents were taking no risks. He threw back his head and gave a cry of relief. He ran up the street and straight into the open front door."

*"This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost, and he has been found, and so we had to celebrate." "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things fulfilled among us, it seemed good to me, also, that you may have assurance, certainty, about what you've been taught."* If you are here this morning and unsure of what you will find if you turn to Jesus Christ, then you will find One who seeks the lost and loves to recover them. Beloved, the gospel is meant to be studied and shared, heard and done, learned and lived.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.