

Pastor Charley: Hello, it's so good for you to join us here at Johns Creek United Methodist Church for worship. I'm Pastor Charley, one of the pastors of this great church and it's just a pleasure to welcome you for remote worship. Whether you're joining us in the morning, afternoon, or evening alone or with friends and loved ones, we're glad that you've connected with us and we hope this is a fruitful time for you, this time of worship as you rest in the Savior's arms and you are sustained and challenged in your faith.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Lord, we're so grateful for You and for Your love for us. We're grateful that we have the opportunity to come and worship You. And now, Lord, You've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching Your Word to my friends and Your servants, a task that, well, Lord, I can't do on my own strength, I need Your strength, and power, and wisdom to do it. So Lord, speak to me and through me in such a way that all of us receive a word from You that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Well, as some of you know, I enjoy golf, I like to play golf. And I recall one time, Brandon and I were on vacation somewhere and I played a course at a resort or something like that, it was on vacation, of course I hadn't played before. And I was by myself and they paired me up as they often do when you're a single. And I was paired up with a guy who was a successful businessman, got to know him as we played the round. Of course, I waited for a while before I told him I was a minister. You see, as an aside, when you do that, people sometimes change the way they behave on the golf course when they found out you're a pastor. I could preach many sermons about that.

But towards the end of the round, he asked me what I did for a living and I told him I was a pastor. And of course as many do when they discover that, he asked me all kinds of theological questions about religion, and faith, and God. He said he grew up in church when he was a kid but when he became a teenager, he never went to church and he hasn't been back. Then on the 18th hole, I'll never forget a question he asked me and I reflected on him and who he was as me asked as he asked me this question. You see, he was very successful, had attained a great achievement in his life. But he looked at me on the 18th green and he asked me, "Charley, what can the Christian faith give me that I don't already have?" I thought that was a spectacular question.

Now, those of you who are Christians who are watching me or listening to me right now, could you answer that question to somebody who asked you about your faith? What if someone approached you who was very successful and very fulfilled in life, they got everything they seem to want and they asked you, "What can the Christian faith give to me that I don't already have?" Well, I'm going to share with you what I told that man on the golf course that day and I believe it's going to be helpful to you, for some of you to be able to respond to someone who may ask you that question sometime and for others of you who are watching or listening who have never really made a commitment to the

Christian faith because you've often wondered that. "What in the world does this faith business have to do with me and why is it so important or so significant and why should I care?"

So I'm going to share with you the answer to that question. Because you see, when God took human form 2,000 years ago in Jesus Christ, He'd said something very, very fascinating. He told us exactly why He had come in one sentence. John 10:10, we find it. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it in all of its abundance." You see, God wants us to have an abundant life. Did you know that? That means God wants us to have a life that's overflowing with joy, and peace, and wholeness, and healing in our lives. That's what God wants for us. And why? Well, believe it or not, God loves you. That's why. God loves you.

Now, I'll tell you, I've been doing ministry for over 25 years and there are many difficult things about being the pastor of a local church and I can name them for the next several hours, many challenging things. But I'll tell you one of the most challenging things that it's the very top of the list, has been trying to convince people of that truth that God loves them, that God cares about them, that they are God's children. And to me, I believe that's one of the reasons why there's so much trouble in this world, is because so many people don't know or don't believe that they are loved, that they are loved by God. And maybe you're one of them.

I don't know what kind of images of God you have in your mind, and in your soul, and in your spirit. Maybe like many you think God is some angry judge in heaven somewhere waiting for you to break the rules so He can pounce on you. Maybe your religious upbringing was very strict and presented an image of God which quite frankly was vicious. Well, I'm going to dispel that myth right now. Because the God I know and the God I love and the God I have a relationship with is not that kind of God. You see for thousands of years, scholars and theologians have filled books trying to explain to us who God is and God's nature. But did you know this? Despite how profound their writings are, despite how significant their thoughts are, it doesn't come close to what the Bible says about God, what the Bible explains who God is.

And three words, God is love. You can look it up. 1 John 4:16, "God is love." You see, God is in love with you. You are made by God's love for this world. And if that's something that you don't know, I hope by the end of this message, that is something you not only believe, but something you come to embody. And if you embrace that truth today, I want to share with you what you're going to find, three key things to the abundant life I want to share with you today. If you embrace that love that God has for you, one of the things you're going to find in terms of this abundant life is you're going to find a self you can live with.

Now, there's a great old story about the late actor Kirk Douglas. He was driving around a California highway one day and he picked up a hitchhiker, back in the

days when you could do that safely. And so the hitchhiker, he thanked the driver. He didn't know who the driver was at first and he kind of settled in, took his coat off, and then he looked to the driver and all of a sudden he realized, "Oh my gosh, that's Kirk Douglas. Can you believe that Kirk Douglas actually picked me up as a hitchhiker?" And then finally he was so overwhelmed by it, he turned to the driver and said, "Do you know who you are?"

I want to ask you that question today, do you know who you really are? Some people believe they are what they do. We are doctors, and lawyers, and businessmen, and pastors, and mechanics or fill in the blank. And so many of us find our identity in our jobs and what we do. But what happens when we retire? What happens when we lose our jobs? And I know some of you are asking that question right now. Then there are other people who believe that we are what we own. We are our bank accounts or what is in our bank accounts, we are what we drive, we are our material success. But what happens during a pandemic when we lose it all? What happens during a financial crisis when we lose it all? Does having nothing means we don't exist?

I'm going to tell you who you are. You're a child of God. Before you were weary with work and wounded by other people and preoccupied by possessions, you were made by love, by a loving God. Before we were sinners, before we became cynical in this world, we were made by a loving God. You are a child of God. And when you embrace the Christian faith, one of the things that you come to grips with and understand is that you're a child of God and you no longer have to prove yourself worthy. You no longer have to run the rat race of trying to accomplish so many things to feel like you're worthy, that you're an important human being, because you already are. You are made by God. You are a precious child of God. And when you embrace God's love for you, you do find a self you can live with.

But you also find something else. When you embrace God's love for you in Jesus Christ, not only do you find a self you can live with, but you find a purpose you can live for. Now, many years ago, there was a survey done of many successful people in America who had accomplished many things across the spectrum. And as they interviewed them, they found one common denominator to all of them. All of them had found their life purpose. You see folks, the purpose of life is to live a life of purpose. God wants us to live a life on purpose. And when you embrace God's love for you in Christ, you find that purpose.

Now, I know some of you watched Pastor Allen's video that he shared a couple days ago. And when I began to think about today's message and this portion of it, I recall what he shared when he was in that bar early in his life trying to figure out life. And he said as he sat there in that particular bar, he asked himself this question, "Is this all there is? Is this all there is to life?" And maybe you're asking that question today. You're someone who's just floundered around in life, kind of drifted through life, never really made a commitment to Christ, never really

made a commitment to anything, you're just surviving. And maybe you're at a point where you're asking, "Is this all there is to life?" No.

Lou Holtz, that great college football coach, tells a funny story on himself. Early in his career, he was the assistant coach at University of South Carolina, but he wasn't there for long as an assistant coach. You see, shortly after he arrived, the head coach was fired and of course he was left with no job and he was discouraged, and despondent, and depressed. So much so that his wife bought him a book, probably out of exasperation, on goal setting. And she gave it to him and said, "Lou read this." So he read it cover to cover. And he was so excited about the book that he set 107 goals for himself. He was going to fly an airplane, he was going to skydive, he was going to learn how to fish, and learn how to play golf and on and on and on.

And he shared these goals with his wife and said, "Honey, thank you for this book. I love it. You see, I have 107 goals for myself." And Lou's wife said, honey, that's wonderful. That's great." Then she grabbed his pen and wrote on a piece of paper, "108, get a job." You see, it's important for us to write down our goals. It's important for us to write down our dreams. But the first goal we must figure out, the first goal we have to put down in our life is our life purpose. Because you will never be fulfilled until you discover your purpose in life. And maybe you were thinking, "Well, Charley, that's complicated. How do I find my purpose in life?"

Well, honestly, it takes many shapes and many forms. But as a Christ follower, no matter what form it takes, we all have the same purpose. You know what it is? To share God's love in this world. That's our purpose. And no matter what vocation you choose, no matter what you feel called to do or what you're skilled to do, no matter what you're passionate about, it all comes down to that. God wants us to be the change that He wants to see in the world, to share God's love. In fact, 1 John 4:11-12, say this, "Beloved, since God loves us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us and His love is perfected in us."

You see, I know many people who want to experience God. And you know what? They'll go to exotic places and mission trips to try to do that. They'll go to Bible study conferences and they'll go all over the world trying to find God and to experience God. But you want to know the easiest, the quickest way to experience God in your life right now today? Find someone to love. The Bible is clear. The gospel message is clear. God is love. And when we embrace that love and give that love away, we experience God. I guarantee you, when you share God's love, you're going to experience God. And I'll tell you this, you haven't lived until you have loved. And if you haven't loved, you haven't lived.

And the more we express God's love, the more love we experience. The more love we experience, the more fulfilled we are and the more we can give away. And I'll tell you folks, this is what life's all about. It's not about achieving things,

it's not about being successful, it's not about driving the best car or making the most money. If you haven't figured out that the purpose of life is to share God's love, to experience it, and to give it away, then you are not living. And if there's one thing you want to hear today from my message is, stop this trivial living, wasting your time on needless pursuits. The quickest way to find fulfillment is to share God's love in this world. That is your purpose.

And there's so many people who are desperate for it. So many people around you are desperate to know that they are loved. Now, Tony Campolo used to tell a story often when he was in the speaker circuit. He talked about his good friend Claire, who was a pastor, and she used to like to window-shop at very nice malls. And one day, she found herself in a women's apartment store where there were a bunch of very nice dresses, very expensive dresses. And she couldn't afford any of these dresses but she decided she would just walk around and people watch and look at the dresses.

As she was doing it, she found an older lady who had wandered into that particular store. And Claire said she looked strung out on drugs. She was dirty, she smelled, you could tell she came from the streets. And Claire was amazed as she watched this older lady who came from the outside engage one of the saleswoman, and she couldn't believe how that saleswoman treated that other woman. She said, "Welcome. We're so glad that you've come to the store. Is there something I can help you with?" And Claire's like, "What is going on?" "Is there something, can I show you a dress?" And the woman said, "Yeah, I'd like to get a cocktail dress."

Well, you could tell there's no way she could have afforded. But the saleslady said, "Oh, that's great. We have so many variety of dresses. Let me show you a few." And so the saleslady, she picked up a few dresses, she picked a few beautiful dresses out, and she handed him to the lady and said, "Why don't you go to the dressing room and try these on?" Claire couldn't believe it. And so after a few moments, the lady from the streets came back from the dressing room and said, "Here, I don't want them," and left. And the saleslady said, "Oh, that's okay. Before you leave, let me give you my card and the next time you come in, ask for me because it would be a pleasure for me to wait on you."

Well, Claire couldn't believe it. What was wrong with this woman? And she began to approach the sales lady. And when she looked at her, she figured it all out. There was a pin on her blouse that read WWJD, what would Jesus do? I came across the perfect definition of love. I love this. Love is showing someone their beauty. Love is when you show someone else how beautiful they are. And you know what? They cannot discover it themselves. Another human being has to do it. When one human being shows another human being their beauty, then love happens. Is there someone in your life who needs to know how beautiful they are? That's love.

Well, when you embrace God's love for you in Christ, not only do you find a self you can live with and you find a purpose you can live for, well, perhaps most importantly, you know what you discover? You find a God you can count on. I've discovered over the years that many people are turned off by the Christian faith. And I could preach a bunch of sermons on that very subject why. But you know what I've discovered? One of the biggest reasons why people are so turned off by the Christian faith is that so often the church makes it complicated. Our faith is not complicated. In fact, I'm going to tell you right now the summation of my Christian education. I'm going to tell you now my summation of all that I've learned about God spiritually in seminary, in undergrad, in religion, and through doctor work.

You don't have to pay for any of that, I'm going to share with you right now what the Christian faith is all about. You see, Christianity is not a set of rules. It is not dogma, it is not a creed, it is not a liturgy. The Christian faith isn't a bunch of rules and regulations. The Christian faith is really not a religion. The Christian faith is a vital connection with God almighty. Some might call it a relationship, a relationship with the one who loves you more than you can imagine, a relationship with one who created you by His love, a relationship with the one who has given you a purpose for living, a relationship with one who will never let you go. That is the Christian faith.

You see folks, Christians aren't perfect. Christians don't have all the answers. Christians can't give you the perfect answer to every theological question. Christians aren't people who are in control. Christians are not people who are better than anyone else. You know what Christians are? Christians are people who have learned that God can be trusted. God can be trusted to be with you in the midst of any storm. God can be trusted to take any evil that befalls you and transform it into good. God can be trusted to give you joy. God can be trusted to give you strength. God can be trusted to give you peace. God can be trusted to receive you when you die. God can be trusted.

And I'll tell you this, if you trust God and His love today revealed in Jesus Christ, you will experience that abundant life, you'll find a self you can live with, a purpose you can live for and a God you can count on. And all you have to do is surrender to that love. You don't have to do anything. You just have to open your heart to that love. Let's pray. Perhaps you're someone who has come to the place in your life where you realize that "There's got to be something more. There's got to be something more than I'm experiencing." Well, there is.

And if you'd like to experience that abundant life in Jesus Christ, all you have to do right now is to pray this prayer silently after me. Oh Lord, I'm tired of not feeling fulfilled. I'm tired of feeling like my life is meaningless. I'm tired of running after success and achievement, trying to feel worthy or whole. Nothing seems to fulfill me, Lord. So now, Lord I've come to a moment of clarity, a moment of truth where I realize that experiencing Your love and giving away

that love is really what life is all about. And so I put all that stuff in my life down and I lay my heart before You, Lord.

Lord, I ask You to forgive me of all my sins. Wash me clean. Now ask for Your Spirit to indwell me, to penetrate my soul. I confess that I cannot save myself, only Your love, Your gracious love can save me. And so I lay myself bare before You and say, "Lord, I surrender to You as Lord and Savior." Fill me with Your Spirit. Empower me to live life with joy, and peace, and healing, and wholeness. Empower me to share Your love with the world. And so in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Receive this benediction. And now may that mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you also, may the love of God our Heavenly Father abide with you this day and through this week. May the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit fall fresh upon you and the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ go with you and sustain you both now and forevermore. Amen.