

Father God, here we are, here we are, and we are Yours. We come to You this day as we do every day when we wake up and we give ourselves to You, we are intentional about saying, "Let Your will be done through me today, Lord." We pray for that today as you lead this church in prayer, in music, in Your Word, and in fellowship. Lord, we are so grateful for everything that we have, everything that You give, everything that You give through the people who are so committed to this congregation, to this body, to this channeling. Thank you so much. Lord, we look forward with great anticipation, not only to celebrate the incarnation of the Christ that was, but the coming of Christ that is yet to be. In Jesus' name, Amen. We open with the words of the prophet Isaiah. In chapter 65, beginning with verse 13, Isaiah is speaking about the good and the wicked that are in the world, speaking about the good things and the bad things that can happen to you as an individual and to us as a nation that are in the world. And then this prophecy comes. And remember that prophecy is always for the time that it is intended. It is intended for the extended time period, the era, and it is a part of our holy scriptures because the prophecy is also relevant to us today. Either we're going to learn something about God in scripture, or there is the prophecy of something that is going to happen in our future. Many letters to the prophecy and to the prophet Isaiah in particular verse 13. But because the rest of you have forsaken the Lord, this is verse 11, and have forgotten his temple, and because you have prepared feast to honor the God of fate and have offered mixed wine to the God of destiny, now I will destin you for the sword. All of you will bow down before the executioner, for when I called you did not answer. When I spoke you did not listen. You deliberately sinned before my very eyes and chose to do what you know I despise. Therefore, he says in verse 13, this is what the sovereign Lord says, my servants will eat, but you will starve. My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. My servants will rejoice, but you will be sad and ashamed. My servants will sing for joy, but you will cry in sorrow and despair. Your name will be a curse word among my people, for the sovereign Lord will destroy you and will call you his true servants by another name. All who invoke a blessing or take an oath will do so by the God of truth, for I will put aside my anger and forget the evil of earlier days. Look, I am creating a new heaven and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. Be glad, rejoice forever in my creation, and look, I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people, and the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred. Only the cursed will die that young. In those days people will live in the houses they built and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards, for my people will live as long as trees, and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won games. They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune, for they are people blessed by the Lord, and their children too will be blessed. I will answer them before they even call to me while they are still talking about their needs. I will go ahead and answer their prayers. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat hay like a cow, but the snakes will eat dust. In those days no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I the Lord have spoken. Let's look around you. The church is full. Your voices were loud. The brass and the piano. Praise be to God. Do you think that that was not the blessing for us and that He was pleased? That was very pleasing. And maybe we should just do that. If I'm playing the guitar, we turn it up because you guys rose to the occasion and I heard every hymn coming over and it was magnificent, absolutely magnificent. I mean seriously. I'm fired up now. I lost my voice singing, but I'm all fired up now. So I don't know. This year our children's ministry really took off. I talked about this a little bit earlier in the announcements. This year Pears and Spares Young Adult ministry really took off. This year we tried to be intentional with the men about meeting two or three times during the year, learning some stuff and doing some stuff. But one of the ministries that has been foundational to this church since I have been the pastor, since before I was the pastor, is the Sisters in Grace ministry. It is an absolute model for the way ministry should be done. The foundation of Sisters in Grace is the Word of God. And the foundation of every time that they

get together is sharing the Word of God and carrying each other's burdens when they get together. They don't progress any farther in any of their meals or their meetings unless they know everybody is okay, spiritually, physically, mentally. It is foundational to the church in many different ways. And so as you have noticed from the various ministries of the church, Church Council, of which Taylor is a part, and Taylor and Morgan shared the first word of the first Sunday of Advent. And then last week with the children's ministry, and we saw and experienced what happened here with Valerie and her crew and all of the children. This week, well I guess Audrey asked or I asked, we thought of, Melissa has sort of become the reader here around Christmas time. It's kind of cool. And she is going to be representing Sisters in Grace, and she is going to be reading the scripture and the prayer, and as the brass plays "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," we're not singing it today, we're listening to it today. She will light the three Advent candles. So Melissa Myers, please. In a little while you won't see me anymore, but a little while after that you will see me again. Some of the disciples asked each other, "What does he mean when he says, 'In a little while you won't see me, but then you will see me?'" And I am going to the Father. And what does he mean by a little while? We don't understand." Jesus realized they wanted to ask him about it. So he said, "Are you asking yourselves what I meant? I said in a little while you won't see me, but a little while after that you will see me again. I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy. It will be like a woman suffering the pains of labor. When her child is born, her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again. Then you will rejoice and no one can rob you of that joy. At that time you won't need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth. You will ask the Father directly and he will grant your request because you've used my name. You haven't done this before. Ask using my name and you will receive and you will have abundant joy. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, let all who took refuge in you be glad. Let them ever sing for joy. Please fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Grant that as Jesus promised, his joy may be in us and our joy may be complete. Follow his promise that though we may grieve, our grief will turn to joy and no one will take away our joy. Teach us to always pray with joy, giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light and grant us such love and faith in you that we may be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. Amen. Let us see if you remember these words. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness covered the deep waters and the sphere of God was hovering over the surface. When the Lord God made the earth and heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth for the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils and the man became a living person. Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he placed the man he had made. The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground, trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river flowed from the land of Eden watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. The first branch called the Pishon flowed around the entire land of Abalah where gold is found. The gold of that land is exceptionally pure, aromatic resin and onyx stone are all found there. The second branch is called the Gihon flowed around the entire land of Cush. The third branch called the Tigris flowed east of the land of Asher. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates. The Lord God placed the man in the garden of Eden to tend and watch over it but the Lord God warned him, "You may eat freely of the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat this fruit you are surely to die." The Lord God said, "It's not good for man to be alone. I'll make a helper who is just right for him." So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, the wild animals. But still there was no helper for him. So the

Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib and he brought her to Adam. "At last," the man exclaimed, "this one is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh. She will be called woman because she was taken from man. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife." And the two were united into one. Now the man and his wife were both naked. They felt no shame. They dwelled in the garden of Eden with no shame and no sin. Their bodies were perfect and the earth was perfect and their relationship with their Creator was perfect. Then there's Genesis chapter 3. Now I told you that Isaiah 65 was in the in-between time and so is the reading from John in the in-between time. When Jesus speaks of the joy that people will experience when they experience his resurrection and then later as he ascends, as we, the church, experience his resurrection power, the power of God's Holy Spirit within us. But it's very, very interesting. I don't know if you've ever thought of the Bible this way and I don't know how big your Bibles are but does this say their average size? The first two pages of your Bible and the last two pages of your Bible represent the perfect relationship between God and man. The first two pages of your Bible and the last two pages of your Bible represent all things that God created in their perfect state. Everything else in the middle is a mess. That's where we live. That's where John lived. And although he was professing the joy of salvation, the joy of knowing your salvation through the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, though he was professing and there's prophecy and there of the Spirit of God and the joy of the Lord being in individuals, possessing literally individuals that God's will may be done on earth now as it is in heaven, it is still a mess. You know that and I know that. I like to think that I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I like to think that I am very intentional with my relationship and you should see me throughout the course of a week. I'm a mess and I need to be very intentional one step at a time, one word at a time, one thought at a time, one prayer at a time, one forgive me Lord at a time. The joy of the Lord undoubtedly is upon us as we are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. The kingdom of heaven is undoubtedly broken through, has undoubtedly broken through on earth through the creation of this church. We've said that many times as Paul teaches. The great secret that God was keeping from everybody was how is this all going to work? How are you going to move beyond the Jews and share the gospel throughout the world? The great secret, the great vehicle, the great vessel is his church and the creation of the church. And as people of the church, we are representative of the kingdom of God now. But when we look outside and we see the world as we say, or we turn on the news and we see that mess every day, we understand that the kingdom of God is not fully established on this earth. We are lights. We are representatives. We are called to live according to his will as submitted followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to live a holy life and we talk a lot about what that looks like and what that sounds like. We are called to share the gospel with those who do not know Jesus Christ to be sure. This is, we dwell in, if I may, the final stages of that in between time. In between the time that sin befell mankind and this. Now we read in Revelation 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared and the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people. He will live with them and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." So we see Isaiah's prophecy is incomplete. He's dwelling in that in between time. He's speaking of the power of God to lead individuals and he's speaking of the completion as we know it today of the individual who chooses to follow the ways of Yahweh at that time. So we read in Revelation the recreation of the heavens and the earth. The recreation of the spiritual and the physical. And we notice in Revelation that this is not just a matter of the church being raptured to heaven or whatever that means. God is coming down because this is his temple. This is of all of the planets his special creation. Of all of the living things you are his special creation. Of all of the planets this is his special creation. And in the Old Testament he dwelled with the people in the holy of holies and only a few people could ever get that close if they did all of the holy things to make them holy

to get them that close. And now his kingdom has broken into the world and represented by those who will believe and are indwelt by his holy spirit but there will come a day when he returns to earth and he will not need a building to live in nor will he need a human heart to dwell in because we will be redeemed fully unto him physically and spiritually and we will walk with him in the new heavens and the new earth as it was in the beginning at that time and now and ever shall be. So just now we can preach and we can teach and we can hang on to this idea and it's valid. It's true. The joy of the Lord supersedes human circumstances. We say that about peace. We say that about love. We say that about joy. We say that about hope. We say that about faith. Supersedes that which the world knows. Supersedes those circumstances in which we live. And that's a wonderful thing but it is only a foretaste. If I live in that now in the love and the hope and the peace, if I had all of the faith then I wouldn't be such a mess. My encouragement is the power of God that raised Christ from the dead lives in you. That joy of the Lord will never go away but we as the broken vessels we are must turn to him intentionally as we submit, as we open, as we pray for his leadership, his guidance. We pray for that joy to supersede that diagnosis. We pray for that joy to supersede our financial circumstances. We pray for that joy to supersede difficult times with our families. I said it before, I said it again, this time of year is difficult for a lot of different reasons not the least of which is that families get together. You say well that's a good thing and it is a good thing but it can be very tenuous, it can be very stress filled when you have believers and non-believers, when you have those believers and not just non-believers but individuals in your family who are antagonistic to your faith and you're sitting around the table being the light, being the joy, holding on to the peace. You don't have to shake your head and raise your hand but you need to be intentional, don't you? Yes, there will come a time when you don't need to be intentional in that way. There will come a time in your redeemed flesh and in your redeemed spirit as God comes down and dwells among his people and all is restored that the joy of the Lord will be a condition of life. It will be one of the things that describes us, not one of the things that we are intentional about opening our hearts up, the power of God. It will be a defining factor of his special creation, his joy, his love, his peace. The first two pages and the last two pages. We're a little farther along in the book in the New Testament church. So we're here somewhere, here's writings about the church and of course Revelation opens up with writings about the church first. So we're there, we got all that, we got this to go but we're still in that in-between time. People are messed up, churches can get messed up, even those, like what happened? We are following, we're praying, we're reading, we're doing all of the things. And we turn around and we're like, where are you Lord? Where are we? What's going on? We still must do that as we look in the mirror each day individually as families and as churches. So just as I said before, I long for the day when I will be faithless because I will be walking with the Lord. Long for the day when part of the description of me is his reflection of the joy of the Lord. Period. Heart stopped. Not his reflection of the joy of the Lord when it's happening, when I'm feeling it, when he's moving in me. Because he can do that and he can make me a light and I can go do those things. And then here comes the enemy saying, you look like a fool, get back in your house. Stop saying that. Don't go to church when your family comes over because they'll think that you're some sort of Jesus freak Bible thumper. You don't want to cause any problems in your family. I said it before, wag my finger. This is my teacher finger. I'm wagging. That's 13 years. The single biggest reason people don't come to church at Christmas and Easter is because they have family over. Don't want to be, don't, they don't want to be the ones that cause any contention. You're not being the ones who are causing contention. You are the ones who are demonstrating peace, demonstrating love, demonstrating joy. You are the light. You may be the only Bible that that visitor to your home or that family member that you have not seen in years, you may be the only Bible that they read. And for you to say, this is not very important to me. So what? I don't want to be that. The first two pages in the last two pages in between, we pray for the joy of the Lord because we know the power of the resurrected Lord in between week we reflect and we are joyful on Christmas morning on that first advent, Emmanuel, God with us. And we know what that ushers in in the period of time in which we live. We rejoice that that baby is born. God has become incarnate. We rejoice that as his life is death, his resurrection

and the power of God's Holy Spirit, we actually experienced. We have tastes. We have reflections of, we have a foretaste of God's love and peace and joy of the age to come when those who died in the Lord are risen and go to meet him in the sky. Not so we can get wings and flap around in heaven, but we go up and we meet our Lord and savior and we return to his temple with him. That's a glorious picture. That's a lot better than these things that you, that's a glorious picture. All those who have been saved, his church, his body, his bride will rise to meet him in the sky and return to the earth. The new heavens and the new earth, the new spiritual and the new physical. Everything in between the beginning and the end is not only the story of God's special creation and their relationship with him. There's a lot of story there. There's a lot of instruction there. There's a lot of encouragement there. There's a lot of reality there. We're living in it. We're living in it. We're talking this week about just sort of things, people, relationships, been talking about really, really good solid pillars of the faith and they get sick. Why? We need to answer those questions. The answer is because that person is a great pillar of the faith and they got sick because they're not living in the garden at any then and they're not living in the age to come. That's why they got sick. They live in that fragile clay jar that is susceptible to not only the spiritual wickedness that comes our way, the constant spiritual warfare, but every other elemental thing that can invade our bodies and make it run well. I wish I had a better answer. I could be one of those faith healers or faith prosperity. "Oh, you got to pray hard enough, you'll be fine." "Oh, you're not fine?" "Well, you didn't pray hard enough." "Not my fault." No. That's... Open your eyes. That's probably 60% of the preaching I hear. Garbage like that. It's better for the Christian to know all of the stuff that's in between the first two pages and the last two pages and have faith. That to live here now is to live with the Lord Jesus Christ because He indwells you. And to be free of this body is to be living spiritually with the Lord. So whether to live here or whether to die, I am with the Lord and there will come a day in my resurrected, perfected, redeemed body that I will meet the Lord in the sky and return to His temple on earth and dwell in the house of the Lord forever. When the Lord's Prayer says, "Your kingdom come, your will be done," it is speaking about the now and the yet to come. When we pray that today, think about the now, your kingdom come. Here we are. Your will be done. Yes, let's go. But it is also speaking of the age to come. Your kingdom come, Lord. Your sovereign reign forever. That's exciting. I look like I'm the only one excited because nobody's smiling. Like the joy of the Lord. That's what my uncle used to say, right? Somebody better notify your face. He would say that in the middle of a sermon. He does. He probably still does. The joy of the Lord, you always make people feel the joy of the Lord. Hands would go up. Somebody better notify your face. We should live with the joy of the Lord that supersedes all of our human defects, all of our circumstances, and all of the wickedness that presses in because this is the final point because this irritates me about more than anything is that we've grown. We collectively I'm using this term as like modern Christian theology. Let's sit inside these four walls and wait for the Lord to come. That is not what scripture teaches. You are the kingdom wherever you are, whatever you're doing, wherever you're playing, wherever you're working, whatever you're doing, you are the kingdom. You are the light. You are moving. It is a verb and the church of God is on the move and what does scripture say? The gates of hell will not prevail against it. It doesn't mean that Satan's up here with some gate from hell beating on us. It means that the church is moving by the power of God and pressing in and the gates of hell will not prevail against the bride of Christ. It's who we need to be. It's who we need to be in our individual quiet times when you're with your immediate family, during the holidays when you're with extended family, when you're at work, all of that. It's who we need to be. The full armor of the Lord contains both the defensive and offensive weaponry. So, take heart. Go check your Bibles and see if I'm right. If nothing else, you can check to see if it actually is the first two pages in the last two pages. I took a guess, but I think the point is very clear. Here we are, everything else in the middle. Here it is, the only thing left to be fulfilled in this entire book, the only thing left to be fulfilled. Everything else has come to pass. If your faith doesn't tell you that this will come to pass, go to a mirror right now and pray. It will be and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.