

The world is hard. That's kind of all I actually want to say this morning, because lately that has felt a little bit like one of the few truths that are tangible and real and able to be comprehended. In a world that has gone a little bit wonky, the one thing that we can all probably agree on is that the world is hard. Plain and simple. The past week alone has been enough to highlight what I think most of us have already known about the world we live in, that no matter what there are going to be things that turn us upside down and inside out and make it feel like we can't quite fathom what is going on around us for more than a few seconds.

A month ago, I think a lot of us were feeling like we were starting to find that light at the end of the tunnel of Covid. Sure, things weren't ideal yet, but it felt like we were getting somewhere, like there was hope on the horizon. And now, here we are. The Delta variant is swirling, numbers are spiking, we're prepping for a surge to follow kids going back to school, and suddenly that hope seems a bit further off than we would like it to be. We continue to fight and argue over masks, over vaccines, over what is safe and what isn't, over everything because people are stressed and anxious and after 18 months of this it's hard to imagine we're still doing it. It's hard to imagine that we might have to keep doing it for longer than we can fathom.

Let's face it, a global pandemic should be enough. Flat out. That should be our cap on the too much to deal with meter. But then, why not throw another log on the fire in the shape of Afghanistan? And I'm not an international relations, military intelligence person, so I can't even begin to pretend that I have the last ounce of a clue on what is the right thing here. And honestly, I don't know if there is a right answer. All I know is that our military personnel are hurting. Thousands of women in Afghanistan are fearing for their lives in ways they haven't had to in decades, and terrorism feels like it could rear its ugly head in ways we haven't seen in a really long time, and that is terrifying.

Ok, a global pandemic and an international affairs mess of epic proportions. That should be enough. Well, let's throw in an earthquake in Haiti, wildfires that continue to rage, and just, ya know...life. We all have stress and pain and frustration that is hard enough to handle on a good day. We have loved ones who are sick, kids who are going back to school, jobs with protocols that seem to change on a daily basis, on top of any number of our own personal issues that we have to deal with. Then you throw on there the reality that there are still dinners to cook and laundry to do and bills that have to be paid and every other normal thing that we all have to handle for regular life to just keep on moving that it just kind of makes you want to

throw up your hands and cry uncle. It's too much. The world and the stress of it and the number of things that we as humans have to process is just flat out, plain and simple, way too much.

Now, I'm going to take some creative license here, but I have to imagine that somewhere in the midst of this crowd of people that Joshua is addressing this morning, there is someone who feels the same way. There has to be at least one person who looks around and listens to Joshua and is like, "Really, man? After all we've been through, now is the time you're asking us to make a decision? I can't decide what I'm going to eat for dinner, but sure, ask me to make some massive faith decision *right now*, in the midst of *all of this!*" And honestly, that one person would be totally within their rights to feel that way.

The Israelites haven't exactly had the easiest road to where they find themselves this morning. You are dealing with multiple generations who are carrying the weight and trauma of slavery, a nomadic existence, trying to figure out how exactly to function as a community, who have only entered this land God promised them decades ago after having to fight their way through enemies and multiple stands of resistance. They've been through battles and exhaustion and violence and just *life*. They have to be tired. They have to be feeling like if they have to make one more decision, even if

it's as simple as whether they want to stand up or sit down, that one decision would be one decision too many. Yet, here before them, Joshua stands.

Joshua tells them that after everything they have been through, after everything that God has led them through, it's time to make a final, be all, end all decision when it comes to faith. Joshua doesn't tell them they have to choose God, but they have to choose something. They can choose the gods of their ancestors, the gods of Egypt, the gods of those who lived in this land before them, or God who has walked with them through the wilderness. It doesn't matter what they choose, but they have to choose something. Joshua doesn't pressure them, he simply says, he and his family know what they're going to do. They know the things God has done for them and their ancestors, so as for him and his house, they're choosing God.

We see a very similar situation happen in the gospel. Jesus has just finished up an extremely lengthy speech to this crowd. A speech about his flesh being bread, and not just any bread, but bread that gives them eternal life. A speech about never being hungry again and figuring out what it means for God to abide with, for, and within them. It's confusing and kind of weird and a bit rambling and some in the crowd stand there a bit like, this is way too much to take in, this is way too hard to understand. They can't comprehend if Jesus is talking to them about bread like the manna their

ancestors received in the wilderness, but Jesus tells them that this bread is entirely different from that bread, and some of them stand there dumbfounded and incapable figuring out what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus watches as some of those who have been following him turn around and walk in the other direction. They've hit the point of no return. They have hit the point where it all has become too hard and they can't have their horses hitched to Jesus' wagon anymore. They flat out tell him, this is difficult to accept, and then they leave. Jesus, like Joshua before him, turns to the twelve and tells them that the choice is theirs too. I imagine Jesus asking them with a little bit of a catch in his throat, wondering if he is going to have to do this all on his own from this point on, "Do you also wish to go away?" He doesn't pressure them or make an argument for why they should stay. He just asks them if they want to go. And God bless Peter, who doesn't know what the rest of the disciples will say, if he will be the only one who stays, but he steps forward and declares what he and his house will stand for. He asks Jesus where else they are supposed to go? Jesus is the one that has brought them hope and eternal life. No matter how hard things get, no matter how confusing things get, no matter what, Peter is choosing Jesus. To stay put, to stand up, to believe even when it's difficult.

Sometimes, belief is the hardest thing we are asked to do. Sometimes, belief is the boldest thing we can do. Sometimes, belief is the only thing that we are capable of. Neither Joshua nor Jesus were offering those standing in front of them an easy way out, a life filled with solutions, a grand cosmic fix to every problem they might ever face. What they were offering them was a little bit of hope, a small glimmer of light, a tiny promise that there can be something beyond the hard. Joshua reminds everyone of all the things God has done, which makes them have to trust that God will continue to do incredible things in the face of the impossible and the difficult. Jesus stands there as a testament to the fact that he has told the disciples he has come to bring them life and will abide with them always, even if he has to physically leave them, even if things are going to be so very hard as they finish this journey together. Neither of them say, believe and everything will make sense. Believe and everything will be easy. Believe and all the hard will go away. Believe and suddenly it will all be so simple. They simply say, believe. Believe and God will go with you...through the hard, through the impossible, through the unthinkable, through the unfixable.

The world is hard. Life is hard. Each of us is carrying more things than we can ever imagine, some big, some small, but always something. And I know...we so desperately want God to just wave a magic wand and

fix all the hard. I wish more than anything that it worked that way. I wish prayer was a simple ask and get an immediate answer situation. I wish that the evil of this world wasn't so powerful. I wish that all of our brokenness could just be glued together and made perfect once again. I wish more than anything that things weren't so hard. But they are. It's a fact.

But that isn't the only fact. Here are some other facts I know. I know that somewhere out in this world are Felix and Sebastian, boys who ask me to FaceTime to watch TV with them and see me and immediately say, "Aunt Tina do the airplane thing." I know that each of us has someone, a friend, a spouse, a parent, a kid, a partner, a workout buddy that makes the world feel a little bit easier. I know that the sun rose today. I know that each of us sitting here is breathing, we might be breathing through a mask but we're breathing. I know that medicine and doctors and scientists exist. I know that people smarter than me ultimately strive to make decisions to the best of their ability for the sake of the world. I know that agencies like LDR and LWR exist. I know that in the simplicity of bread and wine each of us are reminded we are loved. I know that we wish each other peace. I know that God is here. I know God is here, because you all are here. The world is hard. But God is stronger. We are stronger. So...as for me and my house... Everyday, I try to be bold enough to just say, I believe. **AMEN!!!**