

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon: I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR THIS!

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Well, amen. Hey, Belpres. Thank you so much for letting us join you together at home and it's great to be in worship with you as always. Last week, during one of our live stream services, two ten-year-old guys, Josh and Israel were chatting back and forth. And what's really cool is each week they meet online to watch service together. I mean, how cool is that? And Josh and Israel, if you are on the chat right now, hi. Thank you guys so much for joining in. You guys are awesome. And I hope you're taking part in our listening challenge that FLM is putting on right now. So Josh attends here, he knows a bunch of people here at Belpres. But Israel, he's never attended a live service before.

The only service he's ever been to is one of our online services, but he's got some online friends and we are so excited to meet him in person when that is allowed, hopefully soon in the future. And last week during the service, Israel chatted a question and he said, "Does anyone know how COVID-19 will stop?" Yeah. If I had a dollar for every time somebody asks me that question, right? But Josh, his buddy, without skipping a beat, he replies, "Ask God." And here's a picture of their chat from last week. And you guys, I got to hand it to them because I got schooled by a pair of ten-year-olds in that moment. Because sometimes I think that I need to have all the answers.

I think that in order to be successful and to have people like me and trust me and turn to me, I need to know how to answer the question, when's COVID-19 going to stop? And it's up to me to figure out a plan, but that's a lot of me, me, me. And the one thing that I don't want to take into my new normal is more of me. So how do we respond? "I didn't sign up for this," that's one way that we can respond. I didn't sign up for this. I mean, how many times have you said that, or maybe screamed that in the midst of COVID-19. You're in the high risk group for COVID and rightly concerned. I didn't sign up for this. You're stuck at home and can't see your kids or grandkids. I didn't sign up for this.

Your college experience is now online. I didn't sign up for this. You can't see your friends at all. I didn't sign up for this. You are now preschooling your kids. I didn't sign up for this. Your job has pivoted or you're on furlough or maybe you've been let go. I didn't sign up for this. In a season where so many of us are saying, "I didn't sign up for this," how the heck are we supposed to respond? Well, if you've got a Bible handy, turn to John 19. We're going to walk through the story about the burial of Jesus. The burial of Jesus? Yeah, I know. It's an interesting story, and it actually shows up in all four gospels. And like in this COVID pandemic, we enter the scene during a time of crisis. Dan-ta-dah.

To set the stage a little bit, this story appears after Jesus has been crucified and dies, but before he's resurrected. So it happens right in the middle. And this time of crisis, because... This was a time of crisis because there were so many people that loved and followed Jesus, but then a shift happens and crowds call for him to be crucified. So if you can imagine what the city of Jerusalem was like during that time, it was chaotic. There was confusion. People were divided. I mean, this is a crisis, right? Something that maybe we're familiar with. So in the midst of this crisis, someone happens upon the scene that we haven't met before, and his name is Joseph of Arimathea. So follow along with me in John 19.

"Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and he took the body away." Okay, let's stop there for a second. Joseph of Arimathea, what do we now know about him? What did we just find out in that one verse? Well, first he was a secret disciple. A secret disciple? Yeah. Because as the text states, he was a disciple secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders, which is a group he's actually a part of. And we find that out in the gospel of Luke. He was a member of this council. He was a good and upright man who had not consented to their decision and action. So he's this scared, secret disciple. And secondly, he's a member of the Sanhedrin, that's that council of Jewish leaders. And he feared the leaders in this group because the Sanhedrin, it was that group that determined that Jesus must die. But again, as the text states, Joseph had not consented to that decision. He was not a part of the majority that wanted Jesus to die. And in his minority status, well, that would have been very public and that was risky. But regardless, Joseph was brave. And so he goes to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. He was brave? Okay. I know that the gospel of Matthew tells us that all of this was happening under the radar and happening at night.

But yeah, he was brave. It took a lot of guts and courage to go to the governor and request the body of somebody that was executed as an enemy of Rome. So he was brave. Okay, hold up, Pastor Annie. You're telling us that Joseph, he's the secret disciple who's scared, but now you're telling me that he's brave? Yeah, I am. Because if you listened to Pastor Scott a couple of weeks ago, he said it doesn't take courage to do something that you're not afraid of. Which in that sense, courage and fear, they have to coexist. So if Joseph was this secret disciple, well, then what happened to all the faithful disciples that were following Jesus all along? Where were they? Where are they in the midst of this crisis?

Well, we're going to get to them in a second, but they abandoned Jesus. They scattered in fear and here's Joseph. I can just picture him watching Jesus be crucified on the cross and dying and looking around and being like, "Where's his closest followers? Where are his dudes at? Why am I the only one here? Where are they?" Like, that would have been crazy. And if I'm Joseph, I'm probably saying over and over again, "Dude, I did not sign up for this. Where are his guys? Why aren't they here? This can't be me. This can't be my job to take." Just like in our COVID crisis response, I am sure Joseph said those words, "I didn't sign up for this," over and over again.

So when we're in those moments of, I didn't sign up for this, how do we respond? And what do we learn from Joseph of Arimathea? Well, first we learn to reinforce our relationships. Someone had to step up and take care of Jesus' body. And with Jesus' faithful disciples scattered, two secret disciples emerge. That's right. I said two. Let's keep reading. With Pilate's permission, he came and he took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. So Nicodemus, Nicodemus appears on the scene to help Joseph. And here we have the second time that Nicodemus sneaks out and appears in the middle of the night.

And if you want to find out more about the first time that Nicodemus was doing this sneaking about at night, you can visit John three. That's where you can learn more about that. So like Joseph, Nicodemus is a secret disciple. And like Joseph, he's also a member of the Sanhedrin, that council of Jewish leaders

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that determined that Jesus must die. But here's the thing about Joseph and Nicodemus. While they're secret disciples, they also know each other's secrets. They know that one another, neither of them wanted Jesus to die. Neither of them thought that that was the right thing to do. And they could rely on each other because they knew each other's secrets.

So who's in your corner during this COVID crisis? My husband recently went to Safeway to purchase a couple of groceries and he also got a bottle of wine. And while he was checking out, he learned from the checker there at Safeway that alcohol sales right now are up 700%. 700%, that's not good you all. And it also just made me wonder, what other things are up 700% right now during this crisis? Yeah, maybe some addiction stuff and numbing stuff is up, but what about fear, anxiety, depression, comparison? There're so many things that are ugly that are up 700% right now. So who's in your corner that you can talk to about those things? That you can walk with during some of those things?

We need to reinforce our relationships. And I'm not talking about your thousands of Instagram followers, those things matter. But those aren't the types of relationships that I'm talking about right now. I'm talking about the people in your life that see you, that get you, that know you through you and through, the good, the bad, the ugly. Because right now during COVID, it is all too easy to slide into the hiddenness of lockdown. So who knows you? Who do you turn to? Our lives are so hidden right now, but our lives aren't supposed to be hidden. That's not how we're supposed to live. And Jesus says, "Come out of hiding. You are safe here with me."

There's a great battle song from a couple of years ago that actually it's written in a way as if Jesus is singing his words over us. And it goes like this, "Come out of hiding, you're safe here with me. There's no need to cover what I already see. You've got your reasons, but I hold your peace. You've been on lockdown and I hold the key." So who are you talking to right now during COVID? Joseph and Nicodemus had each other. So who's in your corner? And who comes to your mind when I ask that question? And do they know that you think that they're your person? Do they know that? Tell them. When I was in high school, I swam for Interlake and in my senior year I was voted as captain, which was significant because I actually didn't attend Interlake High School.

I attended Bellevue Christian, but because Bellevue Christian didn't have a swim team, I just swam for the school I would have gone to. And so I'll never forget that our very first meet that year, we all showed up at the school to load onto the bus, to drive on over to the pool. And I got there nice and early. I wanted to meet the coach. I wanted to make sure that the bus was in the right location. I know, I've got some control issues, but one by one, I made sure every girl got on the bus and knew what they were supposed to do. And I was the last one to get on the bus. And as I got on the bus, I looked around and I saw pockets of girls sitting together, all gearing up for the meet and so excited.

And then I saw April sitting in the back of the bus all by herself. And in that moment, I knew where I was going to sit. And this might sound silly, but I also knew where I was going to sit every bus ride to every swim meet. I wanted to sit by April. I wanted to sit by April. And I'll never forget that moment because I remember this so clearly. In that moment, I knew the kind of person that I wanted to be. I knew what was tempting, I just wanted to go and sit with my friends, but I knew who I wanted to be. I wanted to be the kind of person that didn't just turn a blind eye to somebody that needed a friend. So I did, I went and I sat with April and she started calling me her big buddy. And we became friends.

And during that swim season, we helped each other out. Now, I didn't sign up to be April's big buddy, but April also didn't sign up to be on a team where she felt alone. So during that season, we became friends and she taught me a lot about what it means to lead. The relationships that we re-inforce during

COVID, we're going to carry into our new normal. So if you're alone with no one to turn to, don't hesitate to reach out because Belpres, we are in this together. So how do we re-pond when we cry out, "I didn't sign up for this?" We reinforce our relationships, and secondly, we face the unknown together. Ken Costa, who is somebody I've learned a lot from as I've been walking through this story, he says of this story in John, that it's this extraordinary calling of ordinary people. Just two ordinary guys, Joseph and Nicodemus, and yet they do something so extraordinary. So we already know that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, they forged their friendship during this crisis. But they also came together to face some fears and to face this unknown because Joseph didn't really know what the outcome was going to be when he went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. That could have gone badly. And remember, all of this was happening during the mystery of the middle of the night.

I mean, if Joseph and Nicodemus had a TikTok, they would have been filming little videos with, don't be suspicious, don't be suspicious. They're just sneaking around in the middle of the night. I mean, how are they going to pay for the tomb? Were places even going to be open? How are they going to get the resources there? They faced these questions together. We continue reading. "With Pilate's permission, Joseph came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it with the spices and strips of linen. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

And they laid Jesus there." In the fear and unknown of their crisis, they came together with their funds, with their connections, with their resources. A job that neither of them could have done alone, they were able to do together. My grandpa, Harvey, and my grandma, Nellie, they lived in a small little town in Northwest Iowa and my grandpa was a butcher. And I remember when I was little, me and my brothers, we would go to his meat market and my brothers would go to the back to see what grandpa was butchering. And I would not go to the back because I didn't want to see what grandpa was butchering. But my grandpa, he was a butcher for 35 years.

It was a job he loved. And then he had to close up his shop because grocery stores and mass production put him out of business. My grandparents had to sell the home that they loved and they had to move, but they never complained about it, which they had every right to complain. Their world had been turned upside down. But my grandparents faced this unknown together. My grandpa had a saying, he always used to say, "Keep looking up." He was a silver lining kind of guy. And they didn't look at their crisis as a difficulty, but they looked at it as an opportunity. And his perspective, my grandpa's perspective was always, I've got more stuff to do. So God will just show me what the next step is.

And the second half of their lives was an adventure. Whatever opportunity came their way, they were up for it. My grandpa, one of the first jobs that he took was a development director. He was the very first development director at the Christian school where all of his kids attended. Now, he didn't know anything about money or finances. He'd never done this job before, but he loved people and he knew how to talk to people. He also opened an antique shop. Again, not knowing that trade, but he knew how to hang out with people. At one point, they took to the road in an RV with a Christian organization called SOWERS, which stands for servants on wheels ever ready. Oh man, the stories that they could tell, right? They never had all the answers and they've never had enough money, but they always knew that God would provide for them. And they faced the unknown hand in hand together. So there's a lot of unknown that we are facing right now. Maybe something that we can take into our new normal is that we promise to never face it alone. That we promise to face it together. And that's a word that we see all over the place right now on our website, together, together at home, together we help, together we worship,

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together we support, together we grow. And Belpres, we are 10 weeks into our COVID relief response efforts. And you guys have been amazing.

Belpres, you have come together, and just listen to the stuff that we've been able to do because we've been at this together. Over 250 of you are serving weekly to provide groceries to 530 families in our community. In the last two weeks, you provided 100,000 diapers and lots of other supplies and toys to the children in our community. We've been able to fund a couple of food trucks and jubilee reach so that when families are picking up their groceries, they can also pick up a free dinner. And that also helps the food truck owners. We've supported 27 Belpres families with rent and utilities assistance. And we've enabled over \$630,000 in relief funding to 15 of our local partners and 17 of our global partners.

Belpres, we couldn't have done that apart. We had to come together in order to do that. So thank you. Belpres, you've been amazing. So we are not meant to face this crisis alone. We are meant to face it together. And in our, I didn't sign up for this exclamations, we reinforce our relationships. We face the unknown together. And third, a final way that we respond is we fail. Belpres, this is my last point, and I promise that the sermon is not going to end with a letdown. Okay? But reading and rereading through this scripture, it's very apparent who is missing, the disciples. Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, where are you guys? Well, in the next chapter in John 20, we find out where they are.

The disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. See, the disciples were on lockdown too. The disciples were all huddled together, afraid of the Jewish leaders, which is ironic because two of those Jewish leaders were the secret disciples that were the clutch characters in this story. And as clutch as they were, Joseph and Nicodemus, they really still remain this footnote in our minds. Because the Bible goes on and on to talk about the disciples, but we lose track of Joseph and Nicodemus. But the disciples, they fail Jesus and Jesus shows us yet here again, even when we fail big time, he doesn't give up on us.

Jesus appears to the disciples after he's been resurrected, and you know what he says? Well, first let's figure out, what could have Jesus said? What could have Jesus said to the disciples? He could have said something like, "Dude, where were you guys? Where were you guys? You abandoned me. Joe and Nick, they showed up and I hope they get the deposit back on the tomb. But come on, where were you guys?" That's what he could have said. He totally could have said that. But here's what he actually said. "Peace be with you." And then he says it a second time. "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, I am sending you." No rebuke, no questioning where they were. Jesus sees their environment of fear and he replaces it with peace.

And then he gives them something to do. And that's, send is the key word in verse 21. He says, "I am sending you." Jesus sends the disciples. The disciples who he appears to when they're on lock-down because they're so afraid. But in the midst of their fear and failure, it's as if Jesus says, "Yeah, I get it. I see that you're afraid. But here's some peace, and stop hiding out because I've got a job for you to do." How many of us have been responding badly during this COVID crisis? Yeah. Maybe some of us in our, I didn't sign up for this, we haven't exactly risen to the occasion. But here's the good news. Even when we fail, Jesus never gives up on us. Jesus never gives up on us. And the disciples are a great example of that.

I mean, can you imagine the course of history if in John 19 scripture just continued to follow the lives of Joseph and Nicodemus? I mean, I'm sure they did go on to do some pretty incredible things for the kingdom, but what would that have messaged to us reading the Bible so many years ago? Well, the disciples failed. So Jesus couldn't use them anymore. Wrong. Yes, the disciples failed. Yes, they failed.

But when Jesus appeared to them, he breathed on them. He filled them with peace and that fired them up for what they were about to do. From the moment that the disciples arrive on the scene, they misunderstand Jesus, they get it wrong. They act incorrectly. They abandon Jesus at the cross.

But then something happens that changes them forever. In their ultimate failure of abandoning Jesus, Jesus commissions them and puts them back in the game. And the disciples, they change from being fearful to fearless. And maybe that's something that we can learn today is that it's okay to fail. Belpres, did you hear that? It's okay to fail. Especially in this season when we don't know what the heck to do, try something. Fail at something. It's okay. Jesus doesn't give up on our failure like we do. So what would you try if you knew you wouldn't fail? Maybe start there. And if you fail, it's okay. Today is Pentecost Sunday and it's the Sunday that we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the start of the church.

And Jesus had told the disciples, "Hey guys, hang out here. Something is about to go down." And so Jesus then, he went back to heaven where he like us, continues to work from home until he comes again, work from home joke. And the disciples, they're just hanging out, waiting. And then they get blasted with the Holy Spirit. The spirit pours out on all of humanity and they get blasted. And then the church just starts to grow and starts to spread. All Jesus did was switch locations on them. He was with them physically, and now through the power of the Holy Spirit, he's with them spiritually. And that power is powerful. Their time of crisis didn't end. I mean, Christians were still being per-secuted, but the disciples made the shift.

They made the shift from, I didn't sign up for this, to, oh my gosh, I'm totally on board, and I didn't even give my life for this. How did that shift happen? It happened because of the power of the Holy Spirit. The same spirit that filled Jesus, then filled the disciples and fills us today. So in our COVID crisis, when we say, "I didn't sign up for this," how are we going to respond? How are you going to respond, Belpres? Find a friend? Face the unknown together? Maybe try something and fail? No matter how you respond, no matter what action that you take, know that through it all and through our failure, Jesus is our feel safe and he fills us with his spirit.

So God, we thank you for that word, and we thank you for your promise that you'll never leave us, that we have everything that we need because your spirit fills us today. So God, I pray for each and every person listening right now that you assure them that you are for them and not against them, and that you fill them with your peace and with your spirit. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.

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1. Why do you think Joseph asks for the body of Jesus?
2. The gospel of Mark tells us that Joseph went "boldly" to ask this of Pilate - why do you think he went boldly? (see Mark 15:43)
3. Nicodemus accompanies Joseph. Why do you think these men came forward at this time when they had nothing to gain (since Jesus was dead) and everything to lose? And where were the disciples during this time? (see John 20:19)
4. Joseph and Nicodemus' response to dealing with Jesus' body could have been "I didn't sign up for this!" During our COVID crisis, have you ever responded that way? How?
5. What does this text teach us about God, about each other, and about the current COVID crisis that we are in?