

I also want to thank Carita for being here. Hi Carita it's good to have you here. Carita I know she works at Starbucks. I've seen there before. But beyond Starbucks Carita is an artist who God has gifted obviously. And we are so thankful for the artists that God gives us. And so thankful that this morning that she's here to paint a picture that we want you to see. And to in the picture be reminded of some of what we'll get to here in a little bit. But Carita it's good to have you here thank you for being with us.

Well if you think back to the drama that we just saw. We had some. We had some wise men or wise guy who were far from home. Some shepherds were far from home. Joseph and Mary were far from home. Jesus himself was far from home. And yet God was Immanuel. God was there. God was with them. God was them because he had drawn near. And so God John 3:16. And so God having so loved the world remember this verse from last week. So God so having so loved the world and having sent his only begotten son into the world God was with them. And I want to just make sure you understand that the same God who was with the shepherds and the same God who was with the Wiseman and the same god who was with Joseph and Mary and the same God who was with Jesus is still near. He's still here. He's still with us today. Near to me. Near to you. I want you to hear that today. He's not hard to find. He's not hard to get to. my friend, God, god of the universe who sent his son is near. He's close. He's accessible. And you know what the chances are in a room this size with this many people there are some folks in here today or you're watching on the broadcast or you're listening on line and you needed to hear that. That God is near. That the God of the universe isn't far away he's not hard to get to not hard to reach. In fact he's very accessible. And he's accessible to you and you needed to hear that this morning because you to are far from home. Now these others that we mentioned who are far from home obviously the implication there is that they were far from geographically if you will. But I think you understand the way in which I used the phrase this morning. There are some here who are maybe far from home not so much geographically but spiritually, emotionally, personally. You're not all were you should be. And there's something down deep in your heart that tells you that. And you this morning you know that that's true. You're a long way away from right. You're lost. Somewhere back here maybe it was last month or maybe it was last year maybe it's been years and years and years ago but some where at some point in time you lost your way. You're distant today truth be told. Distant and detached from God and his presence and I want to take just a minute if I can to talk about and to remind you all of you how this happens. That may be you today. You may be distant and detached from him. There may be a sense in you. And often times as I talk with people in the midst of this season they'll talk about how that senses is heightened during this season. That sense of being apart from him. That sense of not being close to him. That sense of being lost. Why does this happen? Why are some of you here in this room this morning so far away from home? What happens to us that leaves us in these places so distant from the peace and thrill of the season? At a time when hearts are filled with joy why is there an empty ache in your heart? Why is there an empty ache in your heart? Three things I want you to keep in mind. There's probably four, five, or six, but three for us to think about consider this

morning. For some of you here in the room you're far from home and in a difficult place. Number one, because of sin. Let me say it to you that way. Because of sin because of your sin or maybe even maybe even because of the sin of others let's start with. Let's start with your sin. Why would sin leave you feeling far from right? Why would sin leave you feeling far from home? You know what? Because that's what sin does. Write that down. Underline that. Be aware of that this morning. It's what sin does. Sin separates us. There's that verse in Romans 3:23 that says for all have sinned. I've never met anybody in all my life that's ever argued with that. It says for all have sinned and fallen what? Say it out loud. Short, so God's you know. God's over here. And what God has required and what God desires and relationship an intimacy with him is here. And you and I in our humanness we've all sinned and fallen short. Sin just creates the gap. There's just a distance between us and God. And that's what sin produces. Sin especially patterns of sin over time hardens a heart that could be merry at this time of year. But it's not. It creates distance from that place of peace that we all know really does exist. Listen. Your sin left unaddressed unconfessed separates you. It detaches you and pulls you away from the one we call the prince of what? The prince of peace. So maybe this morning there is a sense of you being far from home. And maybe in all honesty as you think about it and consider it. It is your sin that leaves you in that place. For others of you maybe it's not so much your sin but the sin of another. Maybe it's someone else's sin. What do I mean by that? Well often times we allow the sin or mistreatment from others to produce bitterness. Bitterness we've defined it before for you. It's like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Problem is the other person doesn't die. Who dies? You die. That's right. Resentment and bitterness can lead to a hate and distain and a heart that filled with hate begins to harden and shrink and calcify. I laugh sort of. But I don't really laugh when I watch the Grinch. And there's that scene in the Grinch especially in the old Grinch that I grew up watching. There's that scene where they kind of put the x-ray thing over his heart and there you see that little tiny what? Heart, not big and full of life, but little. That's what happens when you and I allow the bitterness of unforgiveness to reign and rule in our lives because of what someone else has done because of what someone has said. Here's a Christmas reminder. For you that front this morning as it relates to others sin. The love of the God of the universe who sent his only son to a broken sin infested world just so he could reach you and the love of a savior who gave up divine privilege and position to redeem and rescue you are both bigger. The love of God and the love his son are both bigger than the pathetic sin of someone in your past. And I am so hear me, I am so. I mean hear stories all the time. I hear more stories than I wish I would hear. But I hear them. And I am so sorry for what some of you have endured. I am so sorry for the pain that you've had to work through. I'm so very sorry for some of what has been done and said and perpetrated against you over the years. But the love of God and the love of his son is bigger than the sin of someone in your past. Don't let sin yours or someone else's keep you away from home away from his presence. He is here this morning. Immanuel he's here. Near for you today. And on that first point I want to just remind you of this. He can forgive all of your sin. Doesn't matter who you are doesn't matter where you been doesn't matter what you've done he can forgive. It's a great Christmas truth. He

can forgive all of your sin. You say but wait a minute you don't what I've done. Don't need to. doesn't matter where you've been. Doesn't matter what you've done. Doesn't matter what choices you've made. When you bow the knee of your heart and you seek the forgiveness of the one who sent his son so you could have life he forgives you. He can forgive all of your sin and he can give you strength to fully forgive. Some of you need that this morning. The strength that only God provides to fully forgive the most heinous offense and the most wretched offender. You don't deal with those things you'll be left feeling far from home at a time in your life when God wants nothing more than to be near.

Some of you are far from this morning because of sin. Others of you are far from home in a difficult place today. And I want to just talk about this for just a few minutes because of sadness. Would you just write that down? Because of sadness, and I mean specifically here the sadness connected to loss. It's amazing how this comes up. It's amazing how at the forefront this becomes at this time of year. The sadness connected to loss. You know the reality of death is one of the sadness most heartbreaking realities that anyone can ever face. It really is. Some of you have lost in the last few weeks in the last few months in the last couple of years and for some it's 10, 15, 20 years ago and the hurt this time of year feels like it was just yesterday. Some of you have lost one that you loved deeply. And though it may have been some time ago the sadness has a way of creating distance and discouragement and even depression in your heart and in your life come the month of December. And I want to say to you this morning I can't say anything to you to take that ache away. There's nothing that I can do or say to make him or her come back. It may have been a spouse. It may have been a child. It may have been a dear friend. I bumped into a good friend in the in the bank yesterday. She's a dear friend and part of this family and I don't know how many years exactly she was married but I know it was a lot. I know she and her husband were married for a lot of years. And she's a good gal. and she's done well. And God's been good to her. And she's got family around her. And she's got this family around her. Her and I are gonna have lunch even I think tomorrow. And I'm so thankful for what has gone on in her life since the loss of her husband. But she just looked me right in the eye and told me all that, all that said it's just hard. These are just hard days. And there may be some of you in the room this morning who feel that hurt and that loss. And I just want to allow the word of God to encourage you this morning. Can I do that? I want you to read what it says. You'll see it on the screen. Second Corinthians 7, second Corinthians 7 verses 5 and 6. But we are we were it says there. But we were afflicted on every side conflicts without and fears within but God who comforts the depressed comforted us. My friends you have the privilege. And I have the privilege of being loved by the God who comforts. And he comforts the depressed. He comforts the distressed. He comforts the discouraged. He makes himself real to those to whom he loves and knows. And if there's a sadness in you this morning that's leaving you detached from him I would just offer him and his heart and his love and his comfort to you today. I hope you'll receive that. I hope you'll put arms around that. Isaiah 61 I love what the prophet says here in Isaiah 61 verses 1 to 3. you see it there on the screen. And this is a message for those of you who are saddened. This is a message for those of you who are

hurting. This is a message for those of you at this time of year who feel that ache in a deeper more meaningful way than ever before. The spirit of the Lord God is upon me. Isaiah said. Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. The good news of the gospel the good news about Jesus the good news of this gift whose birth we celebrate. To bring good news to the afflicted he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted. To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners. It goes on in verse 2 to say to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. And the day of vengeance of our God. To comfort all who mourn. And look at this verse 3. I love this. He wants to grant to those. To grant those who mourn in Zion giving them a garland instead of ashes the oil of gladness instead of mourning the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. Many of you in the room who are feeling this at this time of year you'd love that. Wouldn't you? You'd love the oil of gladness the mantle of praise. Maybe it's been a long time since you've been glad and since you've praised. He offers that to you. So that they will be called. I love this. So that they will be called oaks of righteousness. You may not feel like an oak today. Maybe it's been a long time since you felt like an oak of righteousness. But your sadness can disappear and the comfort that our God brings and he wants you to be an oak of righteousness the planting of the Lord. The planting of the Lord that he may be glorified. Some find themselves distant far from home emotionally spiritually personally because of sin. For some it's because of sadness. And lastly I want to just I want to add this. We added this last week. And I want to add it again this week. I want to make sure that we don't miss an opportunity to help somebody along the way on this front. In your notes it will say because of smarts. Some are, some are. Here's what I mean by that. Some are far from home today spiritually and it's because of smarts or better said the lack there of. And I'm not being demeaning here. It's just that sometimes we're distant from God. Sometimes we're far from home because we're not spiritually aware. We're just not spiritually smart. We sense in our heart some of you in the room are sensing this right now. Especially at Christmas we sense a spiritual uneasiness. Kind of a spiritual ignorance if you will in us nobody's ever helped you understand how to be close to God. Some of you might sit here in the room this morning oh come on you've got to be kidding me. I mean there's people like that? Yes, there's people like that. There may be some here today. Nobody's ever helped you connect the spiritual Christmas dots to understand and see clearly what this means what this season really, genuinely can mean to you. And I want to just remind you of some things this morning. I want to say some things to you. I want to read some things to you. But if you'll just kind of let the kind let the stage kind of represent a picture the real picture's being painted and it's just so fitting because we're gonna end with we're gonna end with this picture the Carita's painting. But allow the stage to just kind of paint a picture. And we've kind of talked about this before over the years but it's good to be reminded especially at this time of year. Man's over here. Now we're just going back to the basics. Man left to himself you and me without God you and me on our own sin we learned earlier sin separates us from God. The truth of the matter is that God is holy. God is perfect. God is without sin. And we're not. And one of the great truths that we get to be reminded of at this season is as sad as it is. I'm thankful for the ending. Romans 3:23 says that we've all sinned and fallen short.

Romans 6:23 says that the wages of that sin wages what you earn Romans 6:23 says that the wages of our sinfulness is what? Death, eternal spiritual physical eternal death and so left to ourselves. And you know what else is true? And I've seen it in every person I've ever met. I've seen it in every conversation I've ever had with somebody about this. What's true about man is that down deep inside if we're really honest. If we're really truthful there's something down in us that even over here in our sinfulness we want to get. We want to get to who? We want to get there. We want to get to him. And the world and our culture philosophy put all kinds of names to that. We know it to be. We know it to be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who created us in his image. We want to get to him. But you see no matter how athletic I might be no matter how far I might try to jump on my own no matter how fast I go. No matter how good I am. I'm always gonna fall short. So we're in trouble. And then there is the great truth of Ephesians 2. It might be on the screen. Ephesians 2:1 says you're dead. You're dead in your trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked. Dead in your trespasses and sins. And then it says in Ephesians 2:4 but God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that who so ever believeth in him should not what? Die, should not perish but have everlasting life. This is all Christmas gospel Christmas truth that you and I need to understand and hang on to. Philippians 2, we read it last week. Let me read it to you again. Philippians 2 it says in verse 5, it has this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ. How did this rescue occur? Who although he existed verse 6 in the form of god did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself. He left the sweet of heaven for the ghetto of earth. And taking the form of a bond servant and being made in the likeness of men being found verse 8 in appearance as a man as a baby he humbled himself by becoming obedient obedient to the point of death even death on a what? On a cross. On a cross. So man left to himself is lost forever eternally lost in his sin. God in his great love and mercy gives us his only son who comes at Christmas and is born but as we've said last week you can't talk about Christmas without talking about Easter. You have to know. And I'd want you to know from the very beginning if you're just learning that Jesus was born to die. That Christmas and Easter are inextricably linked. And that when you come to the realization of your standing and God's provision I love what it says in Romans 10. It says in Romans 10:9 and 10 listen. That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For with the heart a person believes this truth about Christmas resulting in righteousness. And with the mouth he confesses this truth resulting in salvation. The great truth about Christmas that I want to make sure you understand my friends. The great truth of the season that I want to make sure gets planted deep within your heart is that Jesus said I am the way. This Jesus who was born in Bethlehem. This Jesus who came to us in a manger this Jesus whose birth we celebrate this season said I am the way, the truth and the life. No man, no man comes to the father but by me. And that my friends is life saving. That my friends is eternity altering. And that is the gift that we want to make sure you understand is available to you. You may be far from home today. And it may be because of your sin. It may be because

of someone else's sin. It may be because of the despair and loneliness that comes with the broken world when people leave who shouldn't leave as soon as they did or you just miss. All of it my friends, all of it made right by the one who came to be born to live die and defeat death so you and I could have an eternity with him. Would you bow your heads right where you're at? And let me just this morning. Let me just offer a, a prayer for each of you each of those three categories. I want to say to those of you in the room this morning who find yourself distant from God and you in all honesty and sincerity it's because of your sin. I want you to know that you can, you can quietly in the quietness of your own heart right here in this moment you can say to him and if you want to this morning you can just say this. You can repeat this just quietly after me. You can say. God, god in heaven I know that my sin has separated me from you. God I know that my sin has left me lost without hope and distant from the life and the peace that you offer. Oh God in heaven thank you for giving me your son at Christmas. Thank you for the birth of a baby who came to change the world and change my life. And God this morning I accept the forgiveness of my sins made possible because of his sacrifice on that cross. Oh God I'm so thankful. Say that to him. Say God I am so thankful that he was born to die so that I could have life, meaningful life today and eternal life with you some day. Oh father in heaven thank you for saving me. Others of you in the room with your heads bowed. Others of you in the room this morning it really has been a difficult couple of weeks. And it may be a difficult couple still yet to come. The loss of one that you loved there's just no getting around the fact that at this time of year it makes it difficult as you deal with memories as you think about what you miss as you think about what could have been and we love you. I love you and want nothing more than to simply offer you the encouragement that comes from a God who comforts. And God for these people in the room this morning we would this family would simply pray God that you would in a very real and meaningful and miraculous God that you would speak into their hearts and souls. God that your word and your spirit and your people would come along side them and lift them up. God that this could be a season of great joy for them. God in the midst of missing those that they miss God would you allow them the great peace that surpasses all understanding and God would you allow your love for them and the gift of your son to trump their loneliness and their hurt and their ache. Oh god only you can do that. And we pray that you would. And God for those in the room this morning who maybe just never knew who never really understood how it all works God I pray that, that the crude simple little demonstration this morning would allow them to understand how it all fits together and how the birth of a baby means a changed life and an eternity with you. How sin is covered and hope is restored. God I pray that those in the room this morning that could use an extra dose of encouragement or reminder God that they would come forward this morning at the end of the service and visit with me and others from our team. We'd love nothing more than to put our arms around them and encourage them. And father for the morning we say thanks for all that you've shown us and all that you've reminded us of. In your son's name we pray, amen.