Christ is risen! This morning we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the foundational hope of all of Christendom. As believers, our faith, our identity, and our eternity hinge on the historical veracity of the empty tomb. The world’s brightest minds have considered the evidence surrounding the empty tomb for nearly 2000 years, and to date, this proclamation has never been disproven or even threatened in its veracity: Take heart Church--the tomb is empty, Christ has risen indeed!

I want to welcome all those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, many who call Colonial their church home, but many who are also visiting with us today. May your souls be encouraged as we gather to celebrate the resurrection of our King and the salvation He has brought to us through His grace. Wherever the redeemed gather in His Name is home…so welcome home my brothers and sisters! It is good to be in the house of our Lord, amen?

I also want to welcome those who are here today…or those who might be listening online…who are not yet convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. I consider your willingness to gather with us this morning a particular honor worthy of acknowledgment. It takes more than a little patience to knowingly attend a party in honor of One you think unworthy of celebration. That being said, perhaps our time together this morning might inspire you to think deeply about your own beliefs and even encourage you with the conviction that there is yet hope in this dark hour of history.

Now, for those who are visiting, please know that I have a challenging task before me this morning. As a church, we are working our way through a series called Believe where we are examining the ten core beliefs, ten core practices, and ten core virtues of the Christian life. This series includes weekly readings and small group gatherings, so I am compelled by our agreed upon schedule to teach on the topic of the week: the Christian virtue of Patience. At the same time, we are on the highest and holiest day of the Christian calendar…Resurrection Sunday…so I am even more compelled to contemplate with you the mystery and hope of an empty tomb. I shall happily attempt both, and likely accomplish neither to your satisfaction or my own! That said, I actually find these two notions…patience and an empty tomb…to be a fine match for our consideration this morning.

My message will fall under three main subheadings this morning: 1) Friday; 2) Saturday; and 3) Sunday! First, let us consider Friday.
I. Friday

Please allow me to set the stage for a minute. Whenever we speak of the virtues of Christianity, we naturally look to the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus of Nazareth. After all, the goal of the Christian life is to eventually become like Jesus in every way possible through the transforming work of His Holy Spirit changing us from the inside out. This process of transformation begins first by agreeing with God about our sinful condition and placing our confidence in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. That agreement must then move even deeper in terms of the way we think. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we must, over time, learn to think and believe the way that Jesus thought and believed. What we believe in our minds makes its way into our hearts by what we practice; thus, with God’s help we must learn to practice living the way that Jesus practiced living…we call these practices the spiritual disciplines. Finally, over time, our transformation into little Christs will be revealed in our character. In other words, over time, by the power of the Holy Spirit residing within us, the virtues of Jesus will be the fruit that we produce with our words, our attitudes, and our actions. So, what are the virtues of Jesus? Thus far we have observed the virtues of unconditional love, joy, peace, self-control and hope. Let us now consider the virtue of patience.

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When we read the Bible, there are two different words regularly used to articulate this virtue of patience. The first is the word makrothymia. Makrothymia comes from two Greek words put together: makro which means “long,” and thumos which means “anger, passion, or indignation.” Some English interpretations will refer to this term as “long-suffering,” but it would be better to understand makrothymia as “it takes a really long time to tick you off!” In other words, if you have the Christian virtue of patience, people think your emotional thermometer is broken because even when somebody cuts you off in traffic, or some kid screws up your order at the drive-through, your temperature doesn’t seem to rise at all! When someone falsely accuses you, when someone judges you, when someone disrespects you, everyone wonders how it is that you are not angry and indignant! If you have the Christian virtue of makrothymia, you are very slow to get ticked off.

Let me just stop here for a minute and do a quick survey? How many of you KNOW that you lack the virtue of makrothymia, let’s just see a show of hands? OK, next question: how many of you KNOW that the person sitting next to you lacks the virtue of makrothymia?!!! Right…we all think we’re more patient than we are, so if you really want to know how you’re doing in this category…ask the people who have to tolerate your driving! Ask the people who regularly see how you interact with the waitress or the cable guy. Ask the people who have to deal with your outbursts anytime some poor soul lingers at a green light for more than 1.5 seconds, or whenever the referee makes a bad call against your team, or whenever a certain female member of your marriage makes you 15 minutes late…again!!! Did I just say that out loud?

Listen: our culture does not in anyway celebrate or encourage this virtue of “slow to get ticked off,” right? In fact, with every new advancement in technology, our impatience is rewarded and encouraged. We couldn’t wait for a fire, so we made a stove. We couldn’t wait for the stove, so we made a microwave. We can’t wait for the microwave, so we yank the door open when there...
are only 3 seconds left on the timer! We can’t stand to wait in line at the check out counter, so we now get our groceries (and everything else) delivered to our home. We can’t stand to wait for commercials, so we got a DVR. We can’t stand to wait for our wives to get ready…but there’s not one thing we can do about that. I’m thinking there is a real entrepreneurial opportunity there.

SLIDE 8, SLIDE 9 - Blank

You get my point: we live in a culture that is chronically impatient. We are slow to listen and quick to be ticked off…but what does the Bible teach us? James (1:19) writes, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger…” Why? Because this was the example of our Lord and King, Jesus of Nazareth.

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Let us now turn our attention to Friday. In the Jewish world, a day began at sunset and lasted 24 hours until sunset the next day. So Friday, for Jesus, likely began at dinner on Thursday evening according to our Western way of thinking. (I know…I just blew your mind…hang with me). So, Friday’s dinner was the Last Supper of Christ. You might recall that on this night, Jesus gathered His best friends, the 12 men he had poured Himself into for three years, and He shared his heart with them. In Luke 22:15 Jesus says, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you that I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” He goes on to distribute the bread and the cup, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you….this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood…remember me!”

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But do you know what happened a few minutes later? Literally minutes after Jesus makes himself so vulnerable, expressing his love and predicting his coming sacrifice on a cross, here is what Luke reports in Luke 22:24, “A dispute also arose among [the disciples] as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”

The crème de la crème…the Twelve…and they totally don’t get it. Three years of teaching, modeling, and demonstrating humility…and these knuckleheads are duking it out over who is the greatest! Can you imagine how most of us would have handled that situation? “You idiots! How can you be so dense? What have I been doing for the past three years? What was God thinking when He gave me this pathetic band of misfits? The world is surely doomed if it depends on these morons to tell the world about the hope of salvation!”

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Ahh…but Jesus was not like us. Jesus had the virtue of macrothymia. So, do you know what he did? He patiently taught his apprentices a last minute little lesson on how the greatest among them should be as servants, and then He got down on his knees and he washed the morons’ feet…and then they got it. Jesus was patient…and as we see Jesus on the floor, washing the disciples’ feet, we get a picture of God’s patience with us all. Psalm 145:8 states, “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” How do we know that is true? Look at Jesus. See Jesus washing the feet of bumbling fools like all of us. See Jesus on a cross, asking God to forgive us, because we do not know what we are doing.

Now, how will people know that Jesus was slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love? The world will discover the virtues of Jesus in His disciples. Such is why it is imperative that, over time, our nature becomes like that of Jesus…our character is to resemble His character, which means we shall exhibit the virtue of macrothymia…even on a Friday. Even when the people we count on the most let us down. Even when people plot against us. Even when we are falsely spoken of. Even when the people we love the most wish we were dead. Even when a certain someone causes us to running late again! Jesus was patient; and by his grace, we are to be patient.

Now, the second word for patience commonly used in the NT is hupomone. Once again, this term is two Greek words combined: hupo which means “under” and mone which means “remain.” This concept of patience means that one is willing to “remain under” whatever the situation at hand requires. Paul writes in Romans 12:12, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

To demonstrate the virtue of hupomone is to willingly endure hardship when you could easily choose not to because it is the right thing to do. How many of you know that marriage requires a lot of hupomone? Any loving relationship that lasts will require hupomone…it will require hanging in there…enduring trials…choosing to remain in the relationship even in those times that we are not getting our needs met. One of the great privileges of being a pastor is walking with individuals and families throughout the entire span of their existence, from the cradle, to the altar, and finally to the grave. One of the most inspiring examples of hupomone that I witness on a regular basis is that time when a spouse is faced with the arduous task of becoming a care giver to their mate who is no longer able to care for themselves. This happens all the time in our church. A husband has a stroke and now his wife must feed him, bathe him, and put him to bed. A wife has dementia, so the husband must be by her side at all times, repeating himself constantly due to her lack of a short-term memory.

Or what about raising a newborn? Mega hupomone required, right? No sleep, lots of poop…not even a thank you! Should that child have complications or health issues, parents move into the NIC unit for months at a time. They could choose not to…but their love for the child leads to the virtue of hupomone…they choose to endure hardship for the sake of the one they love.
Jesus taught His disciples to exercise this virtue of *hupomone* at all times, particularly when dealing with those perceived to be enemies. His teachings are so counterintuitive in this regard that they are famous throughout the world. In Matthew 5 Jesus states, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” Do you hear the call to practice *hupomone*? The Christian is to be patient when facing all kinds of trials and times of suffering for the sake of those whom God loves…for the sake of those who Jesus died to save. Why?

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Paul sums it up in Romans 5, “God demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were yet sinners…while we were yet enemies of God…Christ died for us.” Then Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” That’s why the Christian is called to practice the virtue of *hupomone*…we love others as Jesus loved us by choosing to remain in the relationship…choosing to endure and “stay under” the difficult situation because it’s the right thing to do.

More than any human being in human history, Jesus modeled this virtue of *hupomone* on a Friday. He who was without sin was arrested, falsely accused, and sentenced to die. He was beaten, spat upon, stripped, and mocked. He was flogged…meaning his flesh was ripped from his back and legs with leather whips laced with glass and bone. He was then nailed to a criminal’s cross…spikes driven into his hands and feet, taunted and mocked by those He came to save…and there he died a few hours later. Some might call what happened to Jesus an unfortunate act of injustice upon an innocent man…but it was more than that. You see, Jesus had options. Jesus was not forced to undergo this horrible suffering. Jesus had the option to bail…he had the option to say, “It’s my life, and I’m entitled to be happy. I can’t be expected to give up so much for people who do not appreciate my efforts. Souls going to hell is not my problem…I’m not the one who sinned here.”

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Jesus also had the option of calling down 12 legions of angels and wiping out those who opposed Him. But Jesus chose to lay down his life…He chose *hupomone*. In John 10:18 Jesus says, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

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Jesus laid down his authority, he laid down his power, he laid down his privilege…with great patience he endured the scorn and the shame of a criminal’s cross. And why? Because He loved us that much. Jesus exchanged His perfect record for our criminal record so that we might inherit his verdict of not-guilty…but that cost Him more than we can possibly imagine. On the cross, the Father turned His face from Jesus so that He would never have to turn His face from us. We have been saved by His grace…This is the hope of the Gospel…and our salvation was accomplished on a Friday when Jesus, with great patience, plead for our forgiveness and then uttered with His last breath, “It is FINISHED!”

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The patience of Jesus purchased our souls, so that no matter how bad things might get, we would never, ever have to face a Friday like that Friday…our salvation has been accomplished, it is finished, thanks be to God! Church, as our Savior demonstrated hypomone for those who despised Him, so too are we to bear patiently with those who persecute us, even those who cause us to suffer for a season. Our faith means that we choose to endure hardships, so that, like Jesus, we might love wayward people back to the Father.

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Make no mistake, this is exactly what Jesus meant when He said in Luke 9, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” This kind of self-denying patience is a supernatural ability given to us through the power of the Holy Spirit as we conform our minds to Christ and discipline ourselves to live as Jesus lived. But it is this very virtue that causes even the most hostile enemy of the faith to pause and wonder…much like the centurion marveled at the foot of the cross, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” There are millions of stories of Christians who have illustrated this point…we will hear one such story on Sept. 1 when Tass Saada comes to share his journey from serving as a sniper under Arafat to becoming a Christian who has endured tremendous suffering. Mark your calendars for Sept. 1…you will not want to miss his story.

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II. Saturday

Let us now briefly move on to Saturday, because for many of us, Saturday is where we live. Don’t get me wrong…Fridays still come and go. Fridays are dramatic and important and horrendous and precarious, but Fridays are rare. For most of us, on most days, we are living in the Saturday.

You see, the most notable characteristic of Saturday within the passion narrative is this: it’s just a normal day. Normal in that, by all appearances, nothing has changed. The bad guys won, again. People in power ruthlessly slaughtered the innocent…again. Men claiming to be religious and virtuous committed the most horrendous crime and apparently got away with it…again. The One
who gave us hope was snuffed out, and now life goes on as it always has...nothing has changed. People are cooking meals, friends are laughing in the street, babies are crying, someone is commenting on the weather...all we see is normalcy...as if nothing even happened on Friday. Meanwhile, there is an undeniable darkness that is growing...it is a darkness “out there”, but it is also a darkness that we recognize in ourselves. The world out there is not as it ought to be, and we are not as we ought to be. But what can really be done about that? After all...this is normal.

For many of us, this is how life feels on an average day. Our lives may be full of painful, complicated realities...or perhaps our lives are horrendously predictable and mundane. Whatever the case, we all resign ourselves to some form of “normal,” and although we’ve heard that there was a man named Jesus who took our place on a Roman cross one Friday to demonstrate God’s unfailing love for us, given the way our lives look on this Saturday...given the way the world is going on this Saturday...it’s hard to understand how that makes all that much of a difference. Life still hurts. My marriage is still broken. My job is still unfulfilling. My financial situation is still tenuous. My hopes and dreams are still as unrealistic as ever. My addiction seems impossible to master, and I’m not sure that I really care anymore. And this is normal...this is Saturday.

One of the hardest times to practice the virtue of Christian patience is on a Saturday...when sleeping on the couch for one night somehow turned into sleeping in separate rooms for six months. When living off the severance turned into living off what little savings we had stashed away with no job in sight. When the brief time of remission ended and we’re back into another round of chemo.

Whenever pain, uncertainty and complexity become normal...and there is no end in sight...we are living in the Saturday.

Jesus understands our Saturday. As horrible as Friday was, Jesus endured an unthinkable Saturday that theologians can only hazard to guess about. The early church fathers summed up Jesus’ Saturday with these words in the Apostle’s Creed: “He descended into hell.” Like heaven, hell exists outside of time, so what Jesus experienced on our behalf...the torment and hopelessness...the silence of the Father...the anguish of God’s wrath...is something we can only speculate about...but rest assured it was an unthinkable horror that, for him, likely lasted a lifetime. Jesus understands the Saturday...and He chose to endure that Saturday for us. He waited so that we could wait. He endured so that we can endure. He suffered patiently so that we would know that whenever we suffer, we are not alone. Church...do not despair on this long and difficult Saturday. Do not succumb to the lie that nothing has changed. Let your patience find its source in the hope that is the anchor for our soul: Sunday’s coming!

III. Sunday!
Early in the morning on the first day of the week…Sunday…some very sad women stepped out thinking that they were still in the nightmare of their normal “Saturday.” They had no hope…their hope had been killed…and yet they could not NOT go to where he lay, if for no other reason than to honor the one who had once given them hope. But these dear women could have never anticipated what Sunday would bring…for behold…the tomb was empty!

Messengers from heaven…representatives from the unseen realm of God’s Kingdom…entered into space and time to announce (Matt. 28:6), “He is not here, He has risen!” Jesus is not dead…the King has defeated death…there is hope yet! Over the course of the next 40 days hundreds would encounter the Risen Christ, not just in the spirit, but in the flesh.

Just over 20 years later…well within the lifetime of the witnesses, Paul writes these words to the church in Corinth: For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

On a Sunday we learned that EVERYTHING has changed! God is there, and God loves us more than we could possibly imagine. Death does not win…the bad guys do not win…Justice is coming for them…even as Justice is coming for us all. Because the tomb is empty, forgiveness of sins and the life eternal is available for all who will repent and yield to King Jesus. Church, your King is alive, and He is coming back to set things right. This is the hope of Sunday, and that hope of Sunday gives us reason to be patient: patient with people, patient with ourselves, and patient with our Lord’s timing.

Now…some of us are skeptical. We look around and it seems that we are stuck on a Saturday. There is still so much evil in the world and in us; in fact, it would seem there is more evil in both than ever before. This call to bear patiently with hardship, to suffer the narrow road that leads to life, seems like an empty promise when Saturday is all we can see. But friends, remember what Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but He is patient toward you, not wishing that that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Why does the Lord delay His return? Why does He allow suffering to linger and for evil to continue for a time? Because He longs for all of us…all human beings…to repent and be spared...
the most horrible FRIDAY that we all deserve. He longs for all of us to turn back to our Father, to be reconciled, that we might spend eternity in the joy of His perfect presence. He is patient with us…but let us not forget that history had a beginning…and it will one day come to an end.

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Peter goes on to write in vs. 10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed.” Friends, it is by the patience of our Lord that any of us have hope for this life and the life to come. He has given us His Son, and He has given us this time to repent, to be reconciled, and to be transformed into His likeness. It is for this very reason that Jesus commands His church to be patient with a hurting and broken world. We must lovingly, patiently bear witness in a world of Saturdays that Sunday’s coming! Aslan is on the move! As C. S. Lewis once wrote, heaven is already reversing the agony of sin and turning it into glory for those who are redeemed. Raise your heads church! The tomb is empty! There is yet hope…and our HOPE has a name. His name is Jesus! Let us give thanks in prayer.