

# SIGNAL RESTORED

*Sixth Sunday of Easter | Mothers Day*

John 14:15–21

With Acts 17:16–31 and 1 Peter 3:13–22

On September 5, 1977, NASA launched a spacecraft called Voyager 1 from Cape Canaveral, Florida. It carried a golden record etched with greetings in 55 languages, music from Bach and Chuck Berry, and the sounds of wind, rain, and a mother's first words to her newborn child. Engineers chose that last sound deliberately. They believed that if any civilization in the universe could understand love, they would understand that. On this Mothers Day, we honor every woman who has spoken that kind of love into a life, and we remember that God himself has been speaking that love into us since before we drew our first breath.

Voyager's mission was simple and glorious: go as far as you can, send back what you find, and do not stop. It did not stop. It passed beyond our solar system entirely and today floats in interstellar space, more than fifteen billion miles from Earth. For over forty years it faithfully beamed its data home, a faint whisper across the darkness.

Then, in November of 2023, Voyager 1 went silent. Not dead, but garbled. Its transmissions came back scrambled and incoherent, like a voice crying across a phone with no signal. Engineers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory spent five months diagnosing a problem fifteen billion miles away. They found it in April of 2024: a single corrupted memory chip, one fragment of code that had poisoned the entire communication system. They wrote a tiny patch, transmitted it at the speed of light, and waited forty five hours for the answer to return.

It worked. Voyager spoke again. Signal restored. Mission resumed.

## **PART ONE: THE MISSION**

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In John 14, Jesus tells his disciples something so simple it almost stings: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* He is not threatening. He is describing reality. Love is never a feeling that floats free of action. A good mother does not merely feel warmly toward her child and call it enough. She rises at three in the morning. She sacrifices sleep, ambition, and comfort. She pours herself out. Love without obedience is not love at all. It is only a feeling that has lost its signal.

Christ gives us a mission. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Be ready always, as Peter writes, to give a defense to anyone who asks for the reason for the hope that is in you. Paul, standing at the Areopagus in Athens, surrounded by temples to gods made of marble and money and human ambition, does not flinch. He declares: there is one God, he made everything, and he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

This is your mission. This is the golden record you carry. This is the transmission you were created to send.

## **PART TWO: THE GARBLED SIGNAL**

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Let's take a look at what's happening with the Apostle Paul in Athens.

Paul walked into that city and found it drowning in religion and empty of God. The Athenians had temples on every corner and one altar inscribed "To an Unknown God," because they wanted to cover their bases. They were not atheists. They were devoted, stone carving, incense burning worshippers. They had simply fashioned gods in their own image, gods who made no demands and issued no judgments, and called it faith.

Look in the mirror. Acts 17 says God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything. He is not a project we maintain. He is not a tradition we preserve for sentimental reasons. He is the Lord who gives all people life and breath and every good gift. He commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will

judge the world. That is not a suggestion for the spiritually inclined. That is a declaration aimed at everyone in this room. And when the Athenians heard about the resurrection and the coming judgment, some of them mocked. The rest politely changed the subject. If we are honest, we have done the same. We have treated the resurrection as a pleasant Easter tradition and the judgment of God as something that applies to people worse than us. We have lived not as people accountable to the God who made us and will judge us, but as people who have quietly decided to manage the distance between ourselves and him on our own terms.

Now hear Peter's plain words. He says always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks for the reason for the hope that is in you. So here is the question with its teeth showing. If your neighbor, your coworker, your own adult child sat across from you today in genuine grief or confusion or searching, could you open your mouth and speak the living hope of the risen Christ with clarity and courage? Or would you go quiet, deflect, and tell yourself later that it was not the right moment? It is never the right moment for a person who has not prepared, and most of us have not prepared.

Peter goes further. He says keep a clear conscience so that those who slander your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. But our conduct has been giving the slanderers their evidence. Peter says it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Yet we have not suffered much for doing good, because we have not done the good that costs anything. We have been afraid, exactly what Peter tells us not to be, afraid of the awkward conversation, afraid of the social cost, afraid of being thought narrow or strange, and so we have kept quiet and kept our heads down and called it humility when it was only fear.

The chip is corrupted. The signal is garbled. We cannot fix this ourselves, and we know it.

### **PART THREE: THE PATCH THAT CROSSED THE VOID**

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Here is the Gospel.

God did not abandon his mission. He did not write off the corrupted system or leave the old one tumbling in the dark. He sent a transmission across an infinite void. He sent his Son.

Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, descended into this broken world, lived the perfectly obedient life none of us has managed for a single day, and carried every corrupted line of code, every broken command, every garbled and idolatrous and cowardly transmission of every human life ever lived, to a cross outside Jerusalem. He died under the full weight of it. Jesus transmitted his last message from the cross, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" On the third day God sent the answer back in the resurrection. The patch worked. Death is undone. The signal is restored. This is not metaphor, myth, or spiritual reinterpretation of a mere human event. This is the fulcrum upon which all history teeters.

What is more, Christ does not communicate that redemption from a comfortable chair at mission control. He gives us the healing words of absolution right here in church. The voice of God reaching across the void into your specific, named, and known life. At this altar, in bread and wine, Christ serves you his very body and blood. He patches the connection not from fifteen billion miles away. He comes in. He enters. He restores. Baptism, absolution, the Lord's Supper - these are not just important Christian rituals. They are God's signal, reaching you.

#### **PART FOUR: SIGNAL RESTORED, MISSION RESUMED**

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Now you are Voyager after April 2024. The signal is back. The mission is not over.

Jesus says, "*Because I live, you also will live.*" The Spirit of truth abides in you. You are not alone in the dark. You are not still running on a corrupted chip. The Helper is leading you back into obedience, not as a condition of your salvation, but as its fruit, evidence, and joy. You keep the commandments not to earn God's love but because you already have it, and love, as we established, always moves toward action.

When you walk out of here forgiven, the world will see something it desperately needs. Not religious performance or cultural warfare. A people who love their neighbors with actual time and actual money. Who speak their hope with gentleness and respect. Who do good and do not fear what is frightening.

That witness confirms who you are. You are a son or daughter of the living God, claimed in baptism, sealed by the Spirit, forgiven at this rail, and sent. You are an ambassador of the Kingdom that will outlast every government, every empire, and every cultural trend demanding your loyalty. And the One who sends you has promised that your labor in him is never in vain. There is a day coming when every faithful transmission, every act of love rendered in his name, every moment you chose holiness over comfort, will be honored by the Father who sees in secret.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not let the signal go dark again.

On that golden record hurtling through interstellar space, there is a mother's voice speaking to her child, chosen because love crosses every boundary. God has spoken your name. In baptism he claimed you. In absolution he restores you. At this table he strengthens you.

Go. Send the signal. The mission is not complete. Amen.

Pastor Ron Breight

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