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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
JANUARY 15, 2006
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: How many of you have been to the
2 Common Ground?

3 Even if you have not joined up there, they have
4 about six to eight flat screen TVs right across the front.

5 I remember when I first walked in there and saw
6 that.

7 I was just amazed by the number of TVs and they all
8 have something different coming at you. Every channel is
9 different.

10 I was on the treadmill this past week for about
11 forty minutes and in the forty minutes I counted eight
12 credit card commercials.

13 And one in particular stuck out in my mind. There
14 was a picture of a woman in suburbia and she had her hands
15 full of groceries and she was putting her groceries away in
16 the refrigerator.

17 And then there was a flash on the screen of a
18 tropical island and she sort of checked out a little bit
19 there.

20 And then the words came across the screen, "You can
21 chase after it with Chase," the credit card.

22 The world claims to know what the secret to real
23 life is, doesn't it?

24 The world out there and all those messages that
25 bombard us on a daily basis through television, billboards,

1 radio, shopping malls, all those messages bombard us and
2 they try to get us to focus on what we want and what we need
3 and it's distracting, and it can very easily, very quickly,
4 lead to a bad case of me and my-osis, can't it?

5 Pastor Mark alluded to that last week, the whole
6 disease of me and my-osis.

7 What is in it for me? Thinking of number one,
8 taking care of my own needs and my own wants.

9 And that's what the world claims to know. They
10 claim to know what the secret is to real living.

11 But deep down inside, even when we are sitting in
12 that lounge chair on that tropical island, or sitting back,
13 I'm saying into the third or fourth day now, the first day
14 you do think that's real living.

15 But when you sit back a little bit and you've got
16 about three or four days in, there still is that feeling, is
17 this really all there is to life?

18 Is this really what it's about? Sitting on a
19 tropical island, drinking in the sun or an adult beverage.

20 There is that restlessness in each and every one of
21 us, isn't there, that longing that there is something else
22 to life.

23 That there has to be something much more satisfying
24 and fulfilling than sitting on a tropical island.

25 We really come across that question when we plop

1 down in our easy chair, or lay down in our bed at night
2 after a long day of parenting, or a tough day at the office
3 and we say, is that really all there is?

4 I'm wondering, is it possible for people like you
5 and like me, is it possible for us to lead a fulfilling and
6 satisfying life?

7 What if there was a possibility? What if there was
8 a way that we could lead a fulfilling and satisfying life?
9 Would you be willing to try it?

10 In John 10 Jesus said, "I came that you might have
11 life and have it abundantly."

12 As you begin to think about that purposeful life
13 and the way God wants us to live, and I invite you to put
14 your name in there.

15 In fact, would you read this and put your name in
16 there?

17 I came that _____ may have life and have it
18 abundantly.

19 Let's say it again.

20 I came that _____ may have life and have it
21 abundantly.

22 That's what Jesus wants for each and every one of
23 us. He wants abundant life, and that phrase there, abundant
24 life, means something beyond measure.

25 That's what it means in the original language,

1 something that is superior.

2 In other words, something that is not like this
3 life, something beyond this life.

4 That's what Jesus says. I came that you might have
5 life and have it abundantly.

6 But what does that look like? What does that look
7 like for you? What does that look like for me?

8 That's a question that a lot of people have asked
9 over time.

10 And one of the persons that asked that question is
11 a king in the Old Testament and he wrote some words in the
12 Book of Ecclesiastes. I'm going to read it to you from the
13 Message Bible.

14 "Call me the quester. I've been king over Israel
15 and Jerusalem. I looked most carefully at everything, and
16 let me tell you, life is a cork screw that can't be
17 straightened; a minus that won't add up."

18 Do you know who is writing this? King Solomon.
19 He's the one who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes.

20 "Life is a cork screw that can't be straightened; a
21 minus that won't add up. I said to myself, I know more and
22 I'm wiser than anyone before me in Jerusalem, but much
23 learning earns you much trouble, and the more you know the
24 more you hurt.

25 "So I said to myself, let's go for it. Experiment

1 with pleasure, have a good time.

2 "With the help of a bottle of wine and all the
3 wisdom I could muster, I tried my level best to penetrate
4 the absurdity of life.

5 "I wanted to get a handle on everything useful we
6 mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth."

7 This section in the Message is entitled "I Never
8 Said No To Myself."

9 "Oh, I did great things. I built houses. I
10 planted vineyards. I designed gardens and parks and planted
11 a variety of fruit trees in them."

12 Now, when King Solomon says that, he's not just
13 talking about that he designed them and they are on paper.

14 He had a botanical garden in the yard, okay?
15 That's what he means there.

16 And he didn't just have one house. He had one in
17 Los Angeles and also one in New York and also one in the
18 South of France. We know people like that today.

19 "And I made pools of water to irrigate the groves
20 of trees and I bought slaves, male and female, who had
21 children, giving me even more slaves, and I acquired large
22 herds and flocks, larger than any before me in Jerusalem.

23 "I piled up silver and gold and loot from kings and
24 kingdoms and I gathered a chorus of singers to entertain me
25 with songs."

1 Not just a few singers and a couple of musicians,
2 but a chorus.

3 Maybe in our world today a couple of bands, and
4 choirs, and they just all waited upon King Solomon, sang to
5 him.

6 "Most exquisite of all pleasure, voluptuous maidens
7 for my bed. Oh, how I prospered.

8 "I left all my predecessors in Jerusalem far
9 behind, left them in the dust. Everything I wanted I took.
10 I never said no to myself.

11 "I gave in to every impulse. I held nothing back.
12 I sucked the marrow of pleasure out of every cask, my reward
13 to myself for a hard day's work."

14 That's an amazing description, isn't it, of
15 everything that he did and everything that he had.

16 So he started by accumulating property, it seems to
17 me, and then he started by adding to that property people
18 that would serve him, and then money.

19 And then at the end of all that, it's quite a
20 fascinating book, Ecclesiastes, at the end of that he said:

21 "I considered all that my hands had done and the
22 toil that I had spent in doing it, it was just a chasing
23 after the wind."

24 Even after all of those days he spent on that
25 tropical island in the lawn chair, he said it's still not

1 enough.

2 I still have that empty feeling in my heart. I
3 still have that longing.

4 I still have that longing, that restlessness to
5 have purpose, to do something that is fulfilling.

6 And he said it was just a chasing after the wind.
7 We were not created to chase after the wind.

8 That's a great picture of what it looks like in our
9 lives when we chase after the wind, as though that was what
10 we were created to do.

11 But we weren't created to chase after the wind; we
12 were created to be change agents.

13 We were created to hook up with God in this world,
14 in this broken planet.

15 One of the books that is inspiring me for this
16 series is called "The Volunteer Revolution" by Bill Hybels
17 and in it he says:

18 "We were created to join God on a mission. Some
19 people think of God as hanging around beyond the edges of
20 the universe somewhere listening to really good worship
21 music."

22 Isn't that a great picture?

23 "But the Bible sees it much differently. It
24 teaches that God is at work 24-7 all over our world, filling
25 his followers with grace, mercy, and power to reclaim and

1 redeem and fix this broken planet. It's as if God has work
2 gloves on and he calls us to roll up our sleeves and join
3 him with our talents, our money, our time, and our passion.
4 He wants his mission to become ours.

5 "If you are chasing into the wind," he tells us,
6 "you can keep right on doing that, or you can hook up with
7 me and together we will transform this hurting planet.

8 "What would it feel like to lay your head on your
9 pillow at night and say, "You know what I did today? I
10 teamed up with God to change the world."

11 That would be something, wouldn't it?

12 Remember, we asked the question, what if there was
13 a way for us to live fulfilling and purposeful lives?

14 What if there was a way to lay our heads down at
15 night on the pillow and say, "You know what I did today? I
16 teamed up with God and I changed the world today, just a
17 little bit."

18 That would be awesome, wouldn't it?

19 Jesus wants us to be in partnership with him, and
20 when he was on this earth he said quite a few things that
21 gave us a good description of what it's like. What it's
22 supposed to be like anyway.

23 I thought it might be fun if we looked at a few of
24 those verses today.

25 Let's look at Matthew, Chapter 28. This is a good

1 time to take your pens and mark things, because then when
2 you are flipping through your Bible, or your Bible falls on
3 the floor and it opens up, you have a verse and a thought
4 that God has spoken to you about before.

5 Matthew 28, the very end of the book of Matthew,
6 Jesus is teaching his disciples. It's such a great verse,
7 Verse 16.

8 "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the
9 mountains and when they saw Jesus they worshipped him, but
10 some doubted and Jesus came and said, "All authority in
11 heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore,
12 and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the
13 name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach
14 them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
15 Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

16 That's just one. We could pick out several, but I
17 thought I would pick this out today because there are action
18 verbs in here.

19 Go; make; baptize, teach; obey; and remember.

20 We were not created to chase the wind; we were
21 created to be world-changers.

22 We were created to hook up with God and help redeem
23 and fix this broken planet.

24 And here's just some ideas Jesus gives his
25 followers right before he was going to ascend into heaven.

1 Let's look at a couple more.

2 John 13, Verses 34 and 35. Jesus says to his
3 followers, "Where I am going you cannot come."

4 He said so many things. Can't you imagine that
5 just would have set the disciples scratching their heads?
6 What did he mean by that?

7 I'll bet every day when they were with him, I bet
8 there wasn't a day that didn't go by where they would not
9 look at each and say what was that? What was he talking
10 about?

11 Right before he gives them something maybe they can
12 understand.

13 He said, "Where I am going you cannot come. I give
14 you a new commandment," Verse 34, Chapter 13, "Just as I
15 have loved you, you also should love one another. By this
16 everyone will know that you are my disciples."

17 Maybe he had hopes that they would understand that.
18 Maybe by this time, this is three years in, maybe by this
19 time they had felt that love.

20 And so he thought maybe if I say love others like
21 we've loved each other, maybe he thought they could
22 understand that.

23 And that's how people are going to know you are my
24 disciples, if you love each other, if you don't go away from
25 the table angry or upset, but stay at the table until there

1 is some plan forward, some relief, some hope, some new
2 understanding. That's what we are called to do as God's
3 disciples.

4 And finally let's look at the Gospel of Mark.
5 Mark, Chapter 9:33 and following.

6 They are walking along the road and Jesus says what
7 were you guys arguing about?

8 He always wants to know that. He always wants to
9 know what is keeping us from loving each other. He want us
10 to talk together.

11 "What were you arguing about on the way? But they
12 were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another
13 who was the greatest. And he sat down, called the twelve,"
14 he's a patient teacher, and he said, "Whoever wants to be
15 first must be last and servant of all."

16 Then he takes a little child, like Lexington, and
17 he says, "Whoever welcomes a child like this welcomes me."

18 And our hearts melt, don't they, when we see babies
19 like Lexington?

20 He's saying to us that this is how it's supposed to
21 be.

22 This is the kind of love we are supposed to have
23 for one another.

24 But, as I said, I think there were so many times
25 when the disciples turned to each other, kind of like we do,

1 what did he say? What was that? What do they mean? What
2 does he mean?

3 So, we have to keep talking with one another, and
4 in John 13 Jesus gives us an incredible example.

5 And I think while the disciples must have been
6 frustrated at times, I also think that Jesus, our teacher,
7 Jesus, the leader of his disciples, I also think that he was
8 at times frustrated.

9 And John 13 is a perfect example of that. So I
10 invite you to turn to that, to the Gospel of John,
11 Chapter 13.

12 We are going to look at this story just a little
13 bit more in depth.

14 This is a picture of everything that he had been
15 talking about. Verse 3 we start at.

16 "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all
17 things into his hands," do you understand where they are at?

18 They are at the table. It's the Passover meal.
19 It's a very special dinner that Jesus is going to have for
20 the disciples.

21 This is right before he is betrayed. So he has
22 been there three years with them.

23 They have been walking, talking, and discussing
24 things, and he has been saying those curious things to them,
25 and I'm thinking because of what he did at the table, I'm

1 thinking that maybe he was frustrated. They are just not
2 getting this.

3 "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all
4 things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was
5 going to God," that verse is vital.

6 Jesus couldn't have done what he was about ready to
7 do, and we can't do what we are called to do, unless we know
8 who we are; that is, who we belong to.

9 In this verse we really get that Jesus knew he
10 belonged to God. He belonged to the Father.

11 So Verse 4, "He got up from the table, took off his
12 outer robe, and he tied a towel around himself and then he
13 poured water into a vase and began to wash the disciples'
14 feet and to wipe them with a towel that was tied around
15 him."

16 Now, here's the thing that is amazing about this
17 story, one of the things, is that they were already eating.

18 They were in the middle of the meal when Jesus got
19 up, because, you see, what happened is that the volunteer
20 coordinator didn't show up, or they forgot to schedule the
21 foot washer.

22 So there are two possibilities here. Either the
23 volunteer coordinator of the upper room failed at his or her
24 job, or the foot washer that was scheduled, because the
25 schedule was sent out months ago, the one that was scheduled

1 to do the foot washing that night in the upper room didn't
2 show up.

3 So picture it with me. The disciples, they were
4 coming in, they are so excited to eat with Jesus.

5 And they get there, and this was huge in those
6 times, what you did first is have your feet washed by a
7 slave, because they were dirty, because they walked around
8 on the dirty, dusty roads.

9 So the disciples come into the room and they go
10 where is the foot washer?

11 I hope that volunteer coordinator didn't mess up
12 again. I don't see anybody around. Do you guys? No.

13 Well, I'm not doing that. I'm not washing your
14 feet, Peter.

15 Look at them. They have callouses all over them.
16 Those are gross. What about that fungus toe? I'm not
17 touching that.

18 So they look around and all twelve of them decide
19 that there must have been a mix up at the volunteer
20 coordinator's office. Either that or it was just never
21 scheduled.

22 So they sit down and they start eating. That's
23 gross.

24 Because, remember, they reclined, so they had their
25 dirty feet in each other's face.

1 They didn't sit down at a regular table like you
2 and I do. That's gross.

3 So they had their dirty feet in the face of one
4 another and Jesus is watching that whole thing, comes in and
5 sees their feet, maybe they were hoping he wouldn't notice,
6 I don't know.

7 But it seems to me that about the time that they
8 had all forgotten about this, this is what I mean about what
9 an awesome teacher Jesus is, and patient, he gets up from
10 the table and he goes over and starts to wash their feet.

11 Peter starts to see what is happening, Verse 6, no,
12 Lord, no, you're not. I'm pretty sure it was the volunteer
13 coordinator's fault, let's just forget it, the washer didn't
14 show up today, you're not going to wash my feet.

15 Yes, I am, Peter, he says, Verse 7, and I will
16 explain later. I can only imagine it was just absolutely
17 still.

18 Verse 12, "After he had washed their feet and put
19 his robe back on and returned to the table he said, "Do you
20 understand what I have done?"

21 Jesus is standing there with a muddy bowl of water
22 and the dirty towel and he asks the disciples, do you
23 understand?

24 You call me teacher and Lord, and I am that. In
25 other words, yes, I am your Savior, but I've washed your

1 feet, and so I want you to wash one another's feet.

2 In other words, I want you to do what normal
3 pride-filled people refuse to do.

4 I want you to be my followers. I want you to live
5 beyond yourself.

6 I want you to roll up your sleeves and get dirty,
7 because I want you to look different.

8 I want your lifestyle to look different than the
9 world, and normal pride-filled people don't get down and get
10 dirty, do they?

11 I want you to pick up the towel, and I want you to
12 live beyond yourself. That's what he says.

13 I'm asking my followers to live beyond themselves.
14 That's why our new vision statement says to reach beyond
15 ourselves, and it needs to be a way of life, because it's
16 Jesus's idea.

17 On Christmas Eve I naturally forgot something in my
18 office and I went across, sometimes I wish there was a
19 skywalk from my office to here because it looks like I can't
20 talk to you and I never want to give that impression.

21 Mark and I, when we preach, we'll be down here
22 after services and you can talk to us.

23 That's what we are here for, and the prayer
24 ministers will pray for you.

25 And if we need to reschedule an appointment and

1 talk again, we can. That's what we are supposed to do as
2 God's people.

3 But at that time I was racing across the lobby out
4 here and Bob Worley, some of you know Bob, he's one of our
5 great ushers, he's standing there in his Christmas suit, he
6 looked awesome, real handsome.

7 And there was a bit of a clearing in the lobby,
8 because the animals that were here that night apparently had
9 too much to drink on Christmas Eve and they had too much to
10 eat.

11 (Laughter)

12 And so there was a bit of a clearing there and I
13 saw Bob and I said, "Bob," and he goes, "I know," and he had
14 a little bit of sweat on his brow to go with his Christmas
15 suit.

16 And those of you who don't know Bob, he works for
17 an insurance company that specializes in liability.

18 So he was sweating when he saw that shiny pool of
19 water.

20 And the next thing I know he was down on his knees
21 in his Christmas suit cleaning that up.

22 That's what Jesus is asking us to do. What a great
23 picture. Thank you, Bob. Thank you for doing that.

24 That's it. He wants us to roll up our sleeves and
25 to get in there, and he showed us how to do it.

1 Because we have to pick up the towel. We have to
2 get busy and we have to get to work.

3 All of you have expertise, a lot of things, I don't
4 even know what you do, and as much as I can I ask you, what
5 do you do?

6 What are you good at? What are your passions?
7 What are your talents? What are your financial resources?

8 What do you have that can contribute to this local
9 church, this Bethany that you have been called to be a part
10 of?

11 A young man walked into my office last week. Terri
12 said, "There's a young man out here to see you. He appears
13 a little nervous."

14 He comes in and sits down. I could tell he was
15 nearly shaking.

16 He said, "I want to be baptized."

17 I said, "That's a good idea. Where did you get
18 that idea? What are you thinking about?"

19 I said, "Just relax. Could I get you a cup of
20 coffee?"

21 He seemed so nervous about it. He said, "Well, I
22 am nervous, but I'm working on my spiritual life and I would
23 like to be baptized."

24 I said, "That's great."

25 So we started talking a little bit about baptism

1 and what it means and then I said normally people stand up
2 with friends or family.

3 And he goes, "I have issues with my family, so I
4 don't have anybody."

5 I said, "We have a big family here at Bethany. I
6 could probably talk to a few people and they would probably
7 stand up with you."

8 He liked that idea. I couldn't believe he accepted
9 it.

10 So then he says, "Let's just talk logistics. When
11 do I come up out of the bleachers?"

12 I laughed, and then he laughed, and we laughed
13 again a little stronger, and I thought to myself, how
14 prophetic.

15 Apparently to that world out there we look like we
16 are sitting in bleachers in here and spectating isn't where
17 the action is, as you all know.

18 Now, as a Bethany church goer you could come in
19 here every week and park in your regular spot and sit in
20 your regular place in the pew and chat with some friends,
21 have a cup of coffee, and then go home.

22 You could, but I think God is calling us to pick up
23 the towel, each and every one of us.

24 I think God wants to get a volunteer revolution in
25 this place, where we have armies of people doing things.

1 I know what it looks like, and it looks like we
2 hired out professional staff and every single job was taken
3 care of, but that's not true.

4 And now God has given us this opportunity, a bit of
5 a financial squeeze, where we had to reduce staff.

6 I just am wondering if God is saying I don't want
7 them to have the impression that there is not a towel out
8 there for them to pick up.

9 There are jobs in this church that need to be done,
10 and I know a little bit like those disciples when they came
11 into that upper room that night and said where's the
12 volunteer coordinator, because I've said that.

13 Where is that person who was scheduled to be here?
14 You've seen us. Remember when we have done this in the
15 past?

16 We will come around here and we'll try not to look
17 stupid, you know what I'm talking about, we're standing here
18 because like three of the communion assistants didn't show
19 up and we are just trying to look lovingly at you.

20 High accountability on the part of the disciples,
21 low control here at church. That's where we're headed.

22 This church needs you, and it's time for us to
23 start a volunteer revolution in this place.

24 So I want to challenge you, as your leader and one
25 of your teachers and pastors here, I can only challenge you

1 with God's word.

2 He says pick up the towel and then the rest of it
3 is between you and the Lord.

4 So I'm asking you to seek God on this. I'm asking
5 you to pray about being here all four Sundays of this
6 volunteer revolution series.

7 Because on the fifth we need to launch a volunteer
8 revolution.

9 And if you are here every week you'll hear all of
10 the teaching from God's word and then I think you'll be
11 ready to go. I'm going to challenge you there first of all.

12 Secondly, I challenge you to talk to God about what
13 jobs he would like you to be doing in the church.

14 Maybe you can help Bob with clean up. There's
15 plenty of jobs like that to be done.

16 I want to say this, too. I know that sometimes we
17 have not been ready for you, and the staff is working on
18 that. Be patient with us.

19 Sometimes you have felt like you're going to sign
20 your life away, I know, or sometimes you felt when you got
21 here the expectations weren't clear and you didn't know what
22 you were going to do.

23 I know, I'm sorry about that, but we all need to
24 work on this together.

25 So that is my second challenge. Talk to God about

1 that.

2 Thirdly, as you are leaving today, do some menial
3 task in the church, or do some act of kindness that you
4 wouldn't normally do.

5 That's just a challenge for you today. Let's pray
6 about picking up the towel.

7 Thank you, God, for your word. It's so challenging
8 because each and every one of us have thought about things
9 that are just beneath us, we don't want to do.

10 You're incredible, that you would wait and then
11 wash, to teach us how to love each other in a different way.

12 Thank you so much for washing the disciples' feet
13 and for washing our feet today.

14 We praise you and ask you to be with us this week
15 as we seek you and we seek our part in this place that we
16 know and love called Bethany. In Jesus's name. Amen.

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