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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA  
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PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: Today what I am going to talk  
2 about is exactly what God says to the people on Mt. Carmel.  
3 That's the mountain we are going to climb today.

4 I like that contemporary way of saying, be on this  
5 side, the side of Jesus, or the side of the world.

6 That's exactly what Elijah says to the people of  
7 Israel, only he says it this way.

8 Are you going to go limping around? Make up your  
9 mind. You're either on the side of God or on the other side.  
10 That's pretty much what he said.

11 So we are going to look at that today and it's quite  
12 a story actually, and it's quite a decision to make.

13 It's quite a thing to think about, and I love the  
14 authenticity of our young people saying that, yes, I want to  
15 be a Christian.

16 I want to be on the side of God. It's just not that  
17 easy, and there are no pat answers, and I love that, I love  
18 that that is what is happening in our Disciple making  
19 Disciple group, is that our young people, instead of sitting  
20 in a classroom and receiving cognitive knowledge only, their  
21 hearts are being engaged to speak from their heart and about  
22 their heart.

23 And that's part of the journey, is to be honest with  
24 what we believe about God and what we think about him.

25 We praise God for that testimony today. Thank you

1 so much, Tyler, Megan, Matt and Danny. Thank you so much.

2 What happens, as we have been talking about, what  
3 happens on the mountains in the Bible is that God reveals  
4 himself to God's people and often helps them to know how they  
5 can have a fuller life, not only on this side, but in heaven  
6 forever.

7 So on Mt. Mariah, for example, a couple of weeks ago  
8 Pastor Mark taught us the story of Abraham and Isaac.

9 And on Mt. Mariah Abraham took his son Isaac up on  
10 the mountain and he was going to sacrifice him.

11 And just as the knife was coming down, God spoke  
12 through an angel and yelled at him, "Abraham, don't do that.  
13 Now I know. Now I know, Abraham, now I know that you love me  
14 and fear me and want to follow me."

15 And that is when God made a covenant with Abraham on  
16 that mountain.

17 Then last week we looked at Mt. Sinai. We didn't  
18 actually go up on Mt. Sinai, we stood at the base with our  
19 ancestors, the Hebrew pilgrims, who had been wandering in the  
20 wilderness for three months.

21 We stood at the base of the mountain and heard God  
22 say through Moses, not through an angel this time, but  
23 through Moses, tell the people that the whole world is mine,  
24 and I can choose anybody I want, and tell them I choose them.

25 And they would will be a treasured possession, and

1 what does he say?

2           They would be for him a priestly kingdom and a holy  
3 nation.

4           In other words, God was setting them apart. They  
5 really didn't deserve to be chosen.

6           Remember, we talked about the fact pretty much all  
7 they did was pretty much complain for three months in the  
8 wilderness.

9           Three preferred, the leeks and the onions and  
10 pomegranates, even though they were enslaved in Egypt, they  
11 were saying we would rather be sitting back there with the  
12 leeks and all the delicious delicacies and the things we  
13 could get, rather than having you provide for us, God.

14           They complain after all that time and God still  
15 chooses them and says you are my treasured possession.

16           We talked about that on the cross of Calvary God  
17 says the same thing.

18           So what was begun at Sinai, the reconciliation and  
19 the choosing, was fulfilled on Mt. Calvary.

20           And on the mountains God reveals himself and speaks  
21 through people.

22           And on Mt. Carmel he speaks through the prophet  
23 Isaiah, not an angel, not Moses, but the prophet Isaiah.

24           Before we look at the text I want to set up a little  
25 bit of background with regard to the people of Israel and

1 where we are going to come across this text, because a lot  
2 has happened since Mt. Mariah and Mt. Sinai when they finally  
3 get to Mt. Carmel.

4 Five hundred years have passed and God's people have  
5 really struggled with choosing to worship the true God.

6 They just have a struggle with it, and they had a  
7 struggle because everybody else around them had a king and  
8 they wanted a king.

9 God said I'll be your king, Mt. Mariah, Mt. Sinai,  
10 the covenant was, let me be your king.

11 Obey my voice, I'll give you these commands, I will  
12 rule over you, you'll always be provided for, you'll always  
13 be cared for.

14 But they looked around at the other nations and they  
15 got jealous and thought they have an earthly king, why can't  
16 we have one?

17 So things start turning for the people of Israel in  
18 First Samuel, Chapter 8.

19 I'm going to have you go to that right now before we  
20 go to the other text, because this is key, Disciples.

21 First Samuel, Chapter 8, in the pew Bibles it's 254,  
22 but of course we want you to bring your Bibles.

23 Raise your hands if you do have your Bibles today.  
24 Fantastic. Excellent.

25 Bring your Bibles, especially when we look at these

1 Old Testament texts, there are so many pages to turn, and so  
2 many things to look at.

3 First Samuel Chapter 8, Verse 4, here is where  
4 things start to turn. I want you to see it for yourself.

5 Remember, Samuel was chosen by the Lord to lead the  
6 people and he was doing a good job, but how he's old.

7 "Then all of the elders of Israel gathered together  
8 and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, 'You are old and  
9 your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us then a  
10 king to govern us, like other nations.'

11 "But the thing displeased Samuel when they said,  
12 'Give us a king to govern us.'

13 "Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to  
14 Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people and all that they  
15 say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have  
16 rejected me from being a king over them.'"

17 This is key, Disciples, this is where things start  
18 to go south for the people of Israel.

19 So God says to Samuel, no, don't worry about it,  
20 they are not rejecting you; they are rejecting me.

21 And the thing that Samuel and the Lord didn't like  
22 about this is they are called a treasured possession.

23 They are supposed to look different than the world.  
24 They are not supposed to be like other nations.

25 But, see, that's where they started to turn. We

1 want a king so we can be like other nations.

2 And that's the beginning of a lot of heartache, a  
3 lot of strife, a lot of bloodshed for the people of Israel,  
4 because God grants them their request.

5 That's kind of how God is. He'll work out his plan  
6 anyway, but he grants them a king.

7 And so the history of the kings is told in First and  
8 Second Samuel and First and Second Kings.

9 And if you read those books, you'll see that upon  
10 each succession of king after king after king, it says in  
11 God's word, and this king did evil in the sight of the Lord,  
12 more than the king before him. It just gets worse.

13 And so in the end, where we find ourselves is, this  
14 is a picture of the northern and southern kingdom.

15 So there is a map of Israel, or all of Palestine  
16 actually.

17 And Israel was the northern kingdom, I think that's  
18 the pink, and its capital was in Samaria, which was Jericho,  
19 they built Samaria right on Jericho. Its kings were all  
20 unfaithful to God.

21 Judah is in the green. Judah was the southern  
22 kingdom, with its capital in Jerusalem, it was never to be  
23 divided, but with the onset of the succession of kings this  
24 got to be a mess.

25 I'm giving you like five hundred years of history in

1 just a short time here.

2 But I want you to understand this idea that first  
3 they wanted a king so they could be like other nations and it  
4 didn't really work out that well.

5 So the southern kingdom, with its capital in  
6 Jerusalem, almost half of its rulers remained somewhat  
7 faithful to God and the others grew disobedient.

8 So it wasn't a good idea in the first place. God  
9 didn't want to do it, Samuel didn't want to do it, but they  
10 did it.

11 God said all right, I'll give them a king, started  
12 with Saul and then Solomon and the stories are amazing.

13 Each one does worse than the last. They don't  
14 follow after God's love, not like what God intended at  
15 Mt. Sinai.

16 You are my treasured people. If you obey my voice  
17 and follow after me, I will bear you on eagles' wings, just  
18 like I did when I brought you out of Egypt, and I'll provide  
19 for everything that you need.

20 But there is something about that that just doesn't  
21 work out very well for us.

22 It's hard for us to surrender to God, it just is,  
23 and that's what Megan is talking about, it's hard.

24 Last week I was in Phoenix with the maestro and a  
25 couple of our life group leaders and on Wednesday night I saw

1 the eclipse from the desert.

2 Do you have a picture of that, Julie? Isn't that  
3 gorgeous?

4 I think that was the day that you guys called school  
5 off here.

6 It was about 70, it was kind of chilly in Phoenix, t  
7 wasn't as warm as it normally is.

8 And it was cloudy in the morning, that's what I mean  
9 by chilly, and the maestro and I thought we are not going to  
10 see the eclipse.

11 We knew we were going out away from Phoenix, it was  
12 going to be dark, we were spending some fellowship time with  
13 Mike Breen and Steve Cochran at Steve's house.

14 And we got out there about 8:00 o'clock and about  
15 fifteen minutes later I went out on the patio and the clouds  
16 were clearing and we saw the eclipse.

17 I just loved it, because it reminds me that God is  
18 the creator of the universe.

19 I have no problem when I see something like this,  
20 how many of you saw it, by the way? Could you see it here in  
21 Omaha? Fantastic, isn't it?

22 I have no problem, when I see things like this, I  
23 have no problem believing that God is the king of the  
24 universe.

25 And then after we traveled back to the hotel a huge

1 thunderstorm rolled in.

2           And I just sat with my window open, and I have been  
3 in Phoenix many times over the years and I have never seen it  
4 rain like that, the thunder and lightning, it was just loud.

5           And I think to myself, God, you are the king of the  
6 universe.

7           And I don't think it takes much for any one of us to  
8 proclaim in moments like that when we see a lunar eclipse, or  
9 we see a thunderstorm like that, that God is sovereign,  
10 right? That he clearly rules the cosmos.

11           That we don't have a problem with, but that he would  
12 want to rule in our personal life, that he would want to rule  
13 in our workplace, that he would rule in our universities and  
14 Lutheran colleges, that he would even rule in this church,  
15 our churches, is something that we struggle with.

16           We're cool with him being the king of the universe,  
17 but him taking every part of our life, that's a different  
18 thing.

19           And that is the struggle that God's people have  
20 always had, our ancestors included.

21           So now let's move to First Kings, because that's  
22 what it's about.

23           It's about that struggle between worshipping God and  
24 following him and his laws and obeying them and choosing a  
25 different god.

1           This is actually a picture of Mt. Carmel in  
2 Palestine and in First Kings 18, where I want to look at  
3 today, Elijah has predicted a drought.

4           Three years earlier he came on the scene and  
5 predicted a drought.

6           Here is the thing. Elijah comes on the scene when  
7 King Ahab is the king of Israel.

8           And he is just like all the other kings. He did  
9 evil in the sight of the Lord, the scripture says.

10           Here is how bad it was for him. He married Jezebel,  
11 and Jezebel, she was just pretty much not a very nice person,  
12 like she was pretty bad, actually, because she didn't want to  
13 worship.

14           Ahab was in the covenant, but she didn't want to  
15 worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

16           She wanted to worship Baal, a B-A-A-L god, and we  
17 can see that.

18           Look with me at First Kings 16, Verse 31, we can see  
19 that.

20           "And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk  
21 in the sins of Jeroboam," in other words Jeroboam was the  
22 king before and he was really bad news, so as if it had been  
23 a light thing to follow in his footsteps, in other words, not  
24 only that but then, "He took as his wife Jezebel, daughter of  
25 King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and

1 worshipped him.

2 "He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal,  
3 which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made a sacred pole,"  
4 known as Asherah.

5 My footnote takes me down to the word Asherah. That  
6 was erecting a pole near places where God's people worshipped  
7 the one true God, and then we will worship that instead, they  
8 choose right in that moment.

9 And Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord,  
10 the God of Israel, than all the kings who were before him,  
11 and it says that about every single king.

12 So he's the king in Israel, and the capital is  
13 Samaria, and Elijah is the prophet that was appointed three  
14 years earlier, and that's in 17, Verse 1.

15 "Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said  
16 to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I  
17 stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years,  
18 except by my word.'"

19 Well, that's not what King Ahab wanted to hear, and  
20 neither did Jezebel.

21 So they tossed him out and they said you better get  
22 out of the palace, and you better go a long ways from here  
23 because we are going to kill you.

24 And then Jezebel set out to kill all the prophets of  
25 the Lord so that she could hopefully kill Elijah, because she

1 didn't like the things he said.

2 She needed water, of course, to bathe in. She  
3 didn't want to hear there was going to be a drought because  
4 she had a lifestyle she had to keep up, right?

5 So these are the kinds of things that enter in. So  
6 she's angry and Elijah has a bounty on his head and that's  
7 where we'll pick up the story.

8 Chapter 18, Verses 1 to 6. This is three years  
9 after that word.

10 "After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah  
11 in the third year of the drought saying, 'Go, present  
12 yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.'

13 "So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. The  
14 famine was severe in Samaria.

15 "Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the  
16 palace. Now, Obadiah revered the Lord greatly.

17 "When Jezebel was killing off the prophets of the  
18 Lord, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a  
19 cave and provided them with bread and water.

20 "Then Ahab said to Obadiah, 'Go through the land to  
21 all the springs of water and to all the wadis; perhaps we may  
22 find grass to keep the horses and mules alive and not lose  
23 some of the animals.'

24 "So they divided the land between them to pass  
25 through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself and

1 Obadiah went in another direction by himself."

2 Obadiah is not the Prophet Obadiah, just so you  
3 know.

4 Obadiah is the manager of the palace, and so King  
5 Ahab says we have to find water for these animals, we better  
6 go.

7 So Ahab goes in one direction and Obadiah goes the  
8 other direction and Obadiah runs into Elijah.

9 Running into Elijah is similar to running into the  
10 living God. It's an experience.

11 Elijah looks like a vagabond. He has hair that is  
12 white and it's thin and it kind of stands out.

13 And then he's got this mantle, a camel's mantle,  
14 looks a lot like how we might picture John the Baptist as  
15 well.

16 He just doesn't look like everybody else. He looks  
17 like a nut, okay?

18 And Obadiah runs into him and he goes, if anyone  
19 hears that I've run into you, I'm dead.

20 Because, see, there is a bounty on his head.  
21 Jezebel wants him killed, because he brings truth.

22 So this is what is happening next, Verses 7 to 16,  
23 Obadiah and Elijah have this long conversation about the fact  
24 that, well, I tell you what, I want you to go get King Ahab,  
25 and I don't care if you are killed or if I'm killed, but I

1 have a word from the Lord I need to say.

2 So Obadiah summons Ahab, and we pick it up at 17.

3 "When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Oh, it's you, you  
4 troubler of Israel.'

5 "He answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you  
6 have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the  
7 commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. Now  
8 therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mt. Carmel with  
9 the 450 prophets of Baal and the four hundred profess of  
10 Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.'

11 "So Ahab sent to all the Israelites and assembled  
12 the prophets at Mt. Carmel.

13 "Elijah then came near to all the people and said,  
14 'How long will you go limping with two different opinions?  
15 If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow  
16 him.'

17 "The people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah  
18 said to the people, 'I, even I only, am left a prophet of the  
19 Lord, but Baal's profits number 450. Let two bulls be given  
20 to us. Let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in  
21 pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. I  
22 will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood but put no  
23 fire to it. Then you call on the name of your God and I will  
24 call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire  
25 is indeed God,' and all the people answered, 'Well spoken.'"

1           Now, I don't really know why they said well spoken,  
2 other than that they perhaps liked a good show, like we  
3 sometimes do.

4           Yes, good idea, yes, let's see. Let's see what  
5 happens.

6           So they do it, and the prophets of Baal, they put  
7 their bull on the fire and they call down their god, the god  
8 of weather who was supposed to have by now brought some rain.

9           They call on him and their prayer is in Verse 26,  
10 "'O Baal, answer us,' but there was no voice and no answer.  
11 They limped about the altar that they had made."

12           Maybe this is why they didn't like Elijah. Check  
13 out Verse 27.

14           "At noon Elijah mocked them saying, 'Cry aloud.  
15 Surely he is a god, either he's meditating, or he has  
16 wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he's asleep  
17 and must be awakened.'"

18           In other words, is Baal on vacation? I thought you  
19 said you had a god worth worshipping. Where is he? Maybe  
20 that's why they didn't like him.

21           But, see, Elijah was also angry that the people had  
22 followed after other gods, he's really angry about it.

23           Sometimes when we are angry we get sarcastic, don't  
24 we, and we taunt others, we don't want to, but he really,  
25 really had a word from the Lord that it was time for them to

1 worship the one true God.

2 So nothing happens and as ritualistic they start  
3 cutting themselves and blood is everywhere, Verse 29.

4 "As midday passed, they raved on until the time of  
5 the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no  
6 answer, no response."

7 So after several hours Elijah says, all right,  
8 everyone gather around.

9 He takes twelve stones from around the place there,  
10 builds an altar.

11 The twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of  
12 Israel, that's who the covenant was made with.

13 And he asks for some water and he uses twelve jars  
14 of water in a drought, it's amazing, twelve jars of water,  
15 pours it all over the thing, and then says to the Lord at  
16 Verse 36.

17 "At the time of the offering of the oblation, the  
18 Prophet Elijah came near and said, 'O Lord, God of Abraham  
19 Isaac and Israel,' the God of the covenant, 'let it be known  
20 this day that you are God in Israel, that I'm your servant,  
21 and that I have done all these things at you bidding. Answer  
22 me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you,  
23 O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.'

24 "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the  
25 burned offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even

1       licked up the water that was in the trench.

2                 "When all the people saw it they fell on their faces  
3 and said, 'The Lord indeed is God. The Lord indeed is God.'

4                 "Elijah said, 'Seize the prophets of Baal, do not  
5 let one of them escape.

6                 "Then they seized them and Elijah brought them down  
7 to the Wadi Kishon and killed them there."

8                 Quite the story. See, what was happening at this  
9 time in Israel was pagan worship was everywhere.

10                On hills like this there would be little shrines set  
11 up with people kind of asking you to come in and you could  
12 buy a little magic potion if you were going to stub your toe  
13 while you were a pilgrim or traveler.

14                Or there would be other people who would say come  
15 and pay homage to these fertility gods and they would lay  
16 with a prostitute so that the land would be fertile.

17                There were things like that on the hillsides luring  
18 people in, trying to tell them you're going to need this for  
19 protection, or you're going to need that, which reminds me of  
20 any mall in our culture, or any downtown area of some of our  
21 cities or streets in our American culture.

22                New York City, just off Broadway, you can see it, or  
23 in the red light district in Amsterdam, they are just luring  
24 you in.

25                It's not a new thing. It was happening on the

1 hillsides in Palestine.

2           And so that is why the Psalmist says in Psalm 121,  
3 turn to that with me, Psalm 121, Pastor Mark and you looked  
4 at this on Wednesday when I was gone.

5           Psalm 121 says, "I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
6 From where will my help come?"

7           Does my help come from those things, those shrines?  
8 That's what that is referring to.

9           And the psalmist says no, my help doesn't come from  
10 the mall, it doesn't come from the television advertisements  
11 that say you need this in order to have a better life.

12           It doesn't come from drugs, or food, just eat this  
13 and you won't feel a thing, or just have this.

14           Do you see? It's the same sort of thing that our  
15 ancestors struggled with.

16           God's people have always been tempted by this world  
17 to go off the path, and if you would just get this, or have  
18 this, or do this, or come in here, back in this dark place,  
19 you will be better off, or you'll be protected.

20           That was what was happening on Mt. Carmel. God was  
21 saying through Elijah, you are part of the covenant, you  
22 belong to God.

23           Because you are a treasured possession, and you  
24 belong to God, make up your mind.

25           Live in that. Live under that knowledge, under that

1 umbrella of love, protection, and providence.

2 Live in that. Do not go limping. You are going to  
3 follow the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and  
4 Jacob, the God of the covenant, and Christ's blood who made  
5 that covenant for you and for me, live in that as though you  
6 belong to him and nothing else matters.

7 Or are you going to go to the mall again? I know I  
8 say that a lot, but I've read the statistics.

9 Sometimes I just go to the mall and watch, sit there  
10 and watch.

11 People really do believe in this culture that's the  
12 way to happiness, that if you could just get one more thing.

13 Sometimes we don't see that, but the psalmist says I  
14 look to the hills, I look to the malls, I look to the  
15 streets, does my help come from there?

16 No. It comes from the one who made heaven and  
17 earth, and though I will stumble and fall, and the Israelites  
18 could get a potion to put on their toes so they wouldn't trip  
19 on the path, though I might stumble and fall, he will not let  
20 your foot be moved.

21 He will not fall asleep. He's not a god like Baal,  
22 who was maybe sleeping.

23 That's why they bloodied themselves. They thought  
24 maybe they could draw attention to themselves.

25 He didn't pay attention to them and come and save

1 them.

2 But he doesn't sleep. The one who keeps Israel  
3 doesn't sleep.

4 He's our keeper, and he's our shade, and the sun  
5 shall not strike us by day, nor the moon by night, and we  
6 don't need to moon worship either, because he made the moon.

7 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming  
8 in.

9 This is the promise for those who live in the  
10 knowledge that you belong to Christ.

11 If you live this, if you pray this way, if we live  
12 as though we believe, this is why I loved so much what Megan  
13 said, we want to believe that, and we struggle with it, we  
14 all do, we all do.

15 And we need to live as though we believe it, because  
16 it's true.

17 It's true that you are loved. It's true that you  
18 will be provided for.

19 It's true that nothing in this life, not one thing  
20 in this life, not death, not drugs, not a slip here or a  
21 failure there, none of that stuff will be able to separate  
22 you from Christ's love.

23 You belong to Christ. None of that makes a  
24 difference.

25 You're going to heaven. You do not have to worry

1 about it.

2           You're in the covenant because of that and the blood  
3 that was shed, once for all, Hebrews says, once for all.

4           You don't need to worry about that. In the meantime  
5 you need to live as though you believe it, and claim his  
6 providence, claim his protection, call him your keeper, tell  
7 him how much you love him daily, because that really jazzes  
8 our maker.

9           He wants nothing more than to be in relationship  
10 with you and for you to live it and for you to believe it.  
11 Praise God.

12           Pastor Mark is with Adrian, our son, in Portland, he  
13 had a couple performances, I'm so thankful he could go,  
14 normally he would lead us in a response.

15           The maestro is going to play "You Are Our King".  
16 I'm thinking that three weeks ago I could barely get you guys  
17 to leave the cross of Calvary.

18           You just didn't want to go away from it. It's so  
19 beautiful. It's such a great place to be drawn to.

20           So during this song, if you want to come up and  
21 claim that the Lord is your king and your keeper during the  
22 song, just come and then I will just ask a blessing for all  
23 of us as we leave.

24           During the song if you want to come closer to the  
25 cross of Calvary, you are invited to do that and sing to the

1 Lord, your keeper and your king, there.

2 Lord in all we do we want to honor you. We love  
3 your cross.

4 We love the blood that was shed for us, because in  
5 that sacrifice we became part of the covenant, a beautiful  
6 covenant given to Abraham, Moses, Noah, the covenant that  
7 Elijah wanted the people to remember through God, not the  
8 world.

9 So, Lord, we ask now under the shadow of your cross  
10 that we might have the strength, that you give us the  
11 strength this week, increase our faith to believe that we are  
12 your kid, and that nothing in this life will be able to  
13 separate us from your love.

14 We love you. Bless us now as we depart, through  
15 Christ, Amen.

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