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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

MARCH 4, 2007

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: I have the wonderful task today of  
2 tying in the metaphor of the robe.

3 As we said earlier, we are having this tell the  
4 story theme.

5 Inanimate objects on Wednesday nights are speaking  
6 to us.

7 We had the crown of thorns interviewed a couple  
8 weeks ago and then the robe was interviewed on Wednesday.

9 And then what we are doing then the following Sunday  
10 is we are trying to go a little deeper with that metaphor.

11 And so today I'm going to be looking with you at the  
12 robe, and there are several scriptures that talk about robes.

13 One of the foremost is this verse from Matthew 27.  
14 We provide Bibles for you if you don't bring your own, so I  
15 would invite you to open those Bibles up to the Gospel of  
16 Matthew.

17 There are four gospels, that means good news books,  
18 Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

19 They were the people that were around at the time of  
20 Jesus and so they are testifying about the wonderful things  
21 they saw through our Lord

22 And we are jumping into this to set the context.  
23 This is right before the crucifixion, and in our calendar  
24 year we are in the forty day period that leads us to Easter.

25 And so we are in Lent, we are slowing down the pace

1 a bit, and learning a little bit more and taking on an extra  
2 spiritual discipline of a Wednesday night worship service.

3 But we jump in here at Matthew 27, beginning at  
4 Verse 27.

5 "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into  
6 the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole  
7 cohort around him.

8 "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,  
9 and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on  
10 his head.

11 "They put a reed in his right hand and they knelt  
12 down before him mocking him and said, "Hail, king of the  
13 Jews."

14 "They spat on him and they took the reed and struck  
15 him on the head.

16 "After mocking him they stripped him of the robe and  
17 put his own clothes on him and then they led him away to  
18 crucify him."

19 And so the robe, notice in that little four or five  
20 verse passage there, that Jesus is wearing clothes, they  
21 strip him, and they put a scarlet robe on him, and they mock  
22 him, they beat him, they spat upon him, and then they take  
23 that robe back off and they put his clothes back on him.

24 So there is a disrobing and a robing going on.  
25 There is some movement in that story.

1           There is another powerful story from the Gospel of  
2 John about some disrobing that I want to set as a bookmark  
3 for that same story.

4           This is from John 13, because what we learned in  
5 Matthew 27 that we just looked at is it's not Jesus who is  
6 taking off the robe.

7           Others are doing it to him and for him. These  
8 soldiers are making him disrobe, and they are putting his  
9 clothes back onto him.

10          Jesus seems to be kind of a helpless person in that  
11 story.

12          They are stripping him, beating him, clothing him  
13 with other clothing.

14          And then in John 13, this was roughly twenty-four  
15 hours earlier than Matthew 27, Jesus has just had the  
16 Passover meal with the disciples.

17          They had eaten the lamb, they had had a glass of  
18 wine and some bread and he had just taught them about the  
19 need for fellowship at the table

20          And then he gets up from the table in Verse 3,  
21 "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his  
22 hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got  
23 up from the table. He took off his outer robe and tied a  
24 towel around himself. He poured water into a basin and began  
25 to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel

1 that was around him.

2 "He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are  
3 you going to wash my feet?"

4 "Jesus answered, "You don't know what I'm doing now,  
5 but later you'll understand."

6 Peter said, "You'll never wash my feet."

7 Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no share  
8 with me."

9 So notice those two stories. The one time Jesus has  
10 this done to him.

11 This time he's taking off his robe to be vulnerable,  
12 and he's teaching the disciples and he's teaching us about  
13 accountability in that story, for Peter is saying you're not  
14 washing my feet.

15 Scholars say that when it said Jesus took off his  
16 outer robe, that was probably the only robe he was wearing.

17 And so he's stark naked in front of his dear friends  
18 with a towel and he says I have to wash your feet. That's a  
19 little intimate. But, you see, that's how close Jesus wants  
20 to be.

21 So, again, Matthew 27, they are doing it to him;  
22 John 13, he's choosing vulnerability. He's choosing to take  
23 off his robe.

24 So those two bookmarks speak of chosen or forced  
25 vulnerability.

1           Jesus chooses it for himself in John 13, and others  
2 are thrusting it upon him in Matthew 27, the soldiers, they  
3 are mocking him and so they stripped him.

4           So the question could be asked, who is in charge?  
5 Through the eyes of history we know that God was in charge,  
6 that this is the way God wanted this to come down.

7           But it is an interesting paradox, isn't it, of  
8 putting on clothes and taking them off.

9           Accountability and intimacy really are the issue  
10 here, aren't they?

11           So those two texts are kind of percolating in my  
12 mind, and there are several stories in the Bible about robes.

13           There is a wonderful story in the Book of Psalms  
14 that talks about when we are anointed it's like precious oil  
15 coming down over our heads into our beards and onto the  
16 collar of our robe.

17           It's a sign of royalty to be anointed, to put on  
18 this wonderful robe and to have the oil of anointing that is  
19 warm and a beautiful feeling of God's grace surrounding us.

20           There is another story that just seems to beg us to  
21 read it.

22           It's from Luke 15, and sometimes we might have read  
23 this story in the past and we didn't necessarily notice the  
24 robe, but the robe is a key characteristic in this story from  
25 Luke 15.

1           This is the story of the prodigal son, or the  
2 prodigal sons, some might say.

3           But in the story there is a father who has two sons.  
4 The younger son wants his inheritance early and so the father  
5 says okay, gives him his money.

6           He goes off and he squanders it in dissolute living.  
7 He makes a bunch of bad investments.

8           And a famine comes along and he has hit rock bottom  
9 and all of a sudden he comes to himself, he's in such a bad  
10 state that he's willing to eat the food that the pigs were  
11 eating.

12           And he finally realizes, he has kind of a V-8  
13 moment, my father loves me. I don't have to live this way  
14 anymore.

15           So he gets up and he starts to go home and he's got  
16 his speech all rehearsed and everything else, he's going to  
17 go back home.

18           So we have Luke 15, Verse 20, "So he set off and he  
19 went to his father.

20           "While he was still far off his father saw him and  
21 was filled with compassion.

22           "He ran and put his arms around him and kissed him  
23 and the son said to him, "Father, I've sinned against heaven  
24 and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."

25           "But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring

1 out the robe, the best one, put it on him. Put a ring on his  
2 finger, sandals on his feet, get the fatted calf and kill it  
3 and let us celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and he's  
4 alive again. He was lost and is found, and they began to  
5 celebrate."

6 So the robe again is a metaphor, isn't it, of coming  
7 home.

8 The father embraces the son. He doesn't even make  
9 him take a bath first.

10 He just says get the robe, the best one, put it on  
11 him, put a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet, go get  
12 the fatted calf, we are going to have pot luck, and we are  
13 going to have a huge party.

14 But the robe is this metaphor of anointing, and it's  
15 also this metaphor of being vulnerable, taking it off.

16 So that is where I zero in, those three bookends  
17 from Matthew, John, and Luke, the robe.

18 There is a wonderful book, I would recommend you to  
19 buy it.

20 This is a picture on the cover of the book. It's  
21 called "The Return of the Prodigal Son."

22 It's by Henry Nowan. Pastor Nowan died a few years  
23 ago. He was a French Canadian, a clergy person, and he  
24 writes this book and this is the picture that he had seen in  
25 Europe in an art museum of "The Return of the Prodigal Son."

1           So this whole book is about that painting, and he  
2 has three chapters to it. He has the father, and one son,  
3 and the other son.

4           But it's a fascinating picture. You can see the  
5 idea being that's the father embracing the one son and you  
6 have some other people that are watching.

7           Now, it has some interesting insights in this,  
8 because he also says it's important to not be too anal when  
9 we look at things like this and when God is speaking to us.

10           And what he says is it's kind of also a very  
11 powerful way to look at that like this is God the father  
12 welcoming his son Jesus back from the cross, and this is what  
13 he says.

14           "To see in this tired broken young man the person of  
15 Jesus himself brings much comfort and consolation. The young  
16 man being embraced by the father is no longer just one  
17 repentant sinner, but the whole of humanity returning to God.  
18 Thus Rembrandt's painting becomes more than the mere  
19 portrayal of a loving parable; it becomes the summary of the  
20 history of our salvation.

21           "But neither Rembrandt's painting, nor the parable  
22 it depicts, leaves us in a state of ecstasy.

23           "I see in the faces of the bystanders an enigma,  
24 especially the tall man standing at the right side of the  
25 painting.

1           "Yes, there is beauty, there is glory, there's  
2 salvation, but there's also the critical eyes of uncommitted  
3 onlookers."

4           The critical eyes of uncommitted onlookers.

5           "Our eyes are drawn to that man on the right side of  
6 the painting. That could either be the elder brother, or it  
7 could be the world looking on."

8           You guys are Christians? What's up with that? And  
9 so now it has an insight there, that maybe that is the story  
10 of humanity.

11           This is Jesus being embraced by the Father, and the  
12 rest of the world in their beautiful robes, Jesus has his  
13 shirt off, he has this dirty robe on now, but isn't it  
14 interesting?

15           There is kind of an interesting paradox in that,  
16 isn't there? Critical and uncommitted.

17           Henry Nowan again continues. He said, "The painting  
18 might well be called the parable of the lost sons, not just  
19 the lost son.

20           "Not only did the younger son who left home to look  
21 for freedom and happiness in a distant country get lost, but  
22 the one who stayed home also became a lost man.

23           "He did his duty. He worked hard every day. He  
24 fulfilled all of his obligations, but he became increasingly  
25 unhappy and unfree."

1           Let's look at him again. The guy at the right is  
2 the elder brother, but it's interesting as we gaze into him,  
3 he refuses to get washed.

4           And if you have really good eyesight you can notice  
5 that even when Rembrandt painted this, he put the elder  
6 brother up on another level.

7           It's kind of like me up here on this other level,  
8 and this wonderful story of reconciliation is happening, but  
9 it's happening down there, and he has positioned himself in  
10 self-righteousness with his fancy robe, you see.

11           And if we were to read the story, there is this  
12 fascinating picture of the elder brother, because when the  
13 party is thrown, he's critical, he's stern, he's angry.

14           He says this son of yours, he goes off and blows all  
15 the money. Where is my party?

16           He doesn't even cop to the fact that he's his  
17 brother. He just says this son of yours.

18           And the father is like he's your brother. He was  
19 dead, he's alive again, check yourself.

20           Are you going to party with me or not? Are you  
21 going to celebrate or not?

22           In other words, your robe is awfully nice. Do you  
23 realize that you're also invited.

24           A lot of us do very religious self-righteous things  
25 during the season of Lent.

1           Some of those things are wonderful, but it's  
2 interesting to me as I listen to some people share what they  
3 are giving up for Lent.

4           They are giving up maybe red meat. My son is  
5 fasting from My Space, which I thought was really a cool  
6 idea.

7           People might fast from alcohol or from chocolate.  
8 It's interesting, isn't it, because probably we should be  
9 doing that anyway.

10           Probably a lot of those things might be what God  
11 wants us to do anyway.

12           But we kind of get a little bit self-centered. We  
13 contend to do that, and we go I'm going to do this, I'm going  
14 to deprive myself of this for forty days to make myself a  
15 better Christian.

16           Isn't that interesting? We have done that, I think,  
17 in different ways.

18           I've done the same thing. Jesus was in the  
19 wilderness for forty days without alcohol, so I can do that.

20           But the question becomes, does that become a  
21 self-righteousness, or does that become taking off some  
22 layers, give up something, fast, but then fill that time with  
23 prayer, with accountability, with vulnerability.

24           Instead of watching those shows on television, what  
25 are we going to do with that time, because God probably

1 doesn't want me to watch them anyway.

2           So we have to be aware of that elder brother  
3 syndrome.

4           And it's interesting, because he's so clean on the  
5 outside, and he kind of represents the church a little bit,  
6 doesn't he?

7           We don't want these other people in, they are kind  
8 of dirty. Where have you been, is almost the posture he has  
9 in this picture.

10           And it's interesting, too, if we think of that as  
11 Jesus.

12           That's kind of the way people look at Christianity.  
13 Where have you been? You're no king. You're all dirty. He  
14 eats with tax collectors and sinners.

15           But the elder brother tends to assume a higher level  
16 and sometimes we do that subconsciously.

17           And I'm not telling you to break your fast. If you  
18 are giving up chocolate, God bless you.

19           But I need to look at that when I choose to do that,  
20 and I need to take that to Jesus at a lot of different times.

21           We were in Phoenix this week, and I know you feel  
22 sorry for me because we were in 80 degree weather and all  
23 that.

24           We left Sunday right after church and it was kind of  
25 a blizzard last Sunday morning, and five wonderful Bethany

1 people went with me, Wenda and I and four other wonderful  
2 people, and we flew out on Sunday and most of us came back on  
3 Thursday night in the midst of a blizzard.

4 We were all on our cell phones in Phoenix at 2:00  
5 o'clock, 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, "What's it like in  
6 Omaha?"

7 "Oh, it's horrible. We didn't have school today and  
8 school is already called off tomorrow and the airport is  
9 closed."

10 So we thought we better check with the airlines,  
11 check in with U.S. Air and America West.

12 They say no, you're still going, in fact on time as  
13 scheduled. Really?

14 We take the rental car back, go to the airport, and  
15 sure enough right up on the schedule, on time, flights to  
16 Omaha.

17 We are still on our cell phones. Everybody is like  
18 you'll get to Omaha, but you won't get home. The roads are  
19 horrible and the earlier flights into Omaha that day were all  
20 canceled.

21 One of the things that Pastor Wenda and I love to do  
22 is to go up and we try to get either bulkhead seating or exit  
23 row seating, because my legs are a little longer than the  
24 average person, and we were blessed, we got to do that.

25 We go in and they let us go in early, get situated,

1 she sits by the window and I'm sitting in the next seat, just  
2 really grateful, I've got an extra little bit of room there.

3 The plane starts filling up and this young guy comes  
4 in and sits right beside me and he goes, "How are you doing,  
5 mate?"

6 "Good. Where are you from?"

7 "I'm from Australia, mate. Brisbane."

8 I said, "Really? We used to live in Australia."

9 We had this fabulous two and a half, three hour  
10 conversation about Australia.

11 He's an apprentice electrician, and he's 24 years  
12 old.

13 "Why are you going to Omaha?"

14 He said, "I landed in LA," he told me these great  
15 stories about LA.

16 "I went to Las Vegas, had to check out Las Vegas,  
17 and then they sent me to Phoenix."

18 He had been up for forty-eight hours without  
19 sleeping, because his first plane was canceled, and when he  
20 was in Las Vegas he was up and he didn't trust his alarm  
21 clock, so he stayed up until his flight left.

22 He's a young kid, a 24-year-old kid. He's sitting  
23 there and I'm thinking to myself this is fantastic, he's an  
24 Australian kid, Wenda and I got to touch base, do some  
25 Australian stuff, and he had this great accent.

1           He's from back in the bush, back four hours west of  
2 Brisbane.

3           And I said, "Where are you staying in Omaha?"

4           He said, "I'm not really sure. I got on the  
5 internet and got a hotel close to the airport."

6           I said, "How long are you going to be there?"

7           "Well, a couple of days. I've got some friends from  
8 Sutton that are going to come and pick me up."

9           Sutton, Nebraska, is about two hours from here.

10          I said, "What is the name of the hotel?"

11          He checked and he said, "It's called the Econo-Lodge  
12 at 22nd and Douglas."

13          You know the place. It's a dump. God bless them  
14 down there. I don't say anything disparagingly about that,  
15 but we have put homeless people up in that hotel.

16          I've done that several times in my ministry, and  
17 there are prostitutes that are in the lobby there, there are  
18 drug deals right in the parking lot, and I just sensed God  
19 saying don't let that happen.

20          I conferred with Wenda and said, "Steve, we really  
21 don't want you to have that as your impression of Omaha, the  
22 Econo-Lodge. Would you come and stay with us?"

23          "No, I couldn't do that, mate."

24          I said, "No, we really want to insist on that. That  
25 place is a dump. We don't want you to think of that as

1 Omaha. It's not a safe place."

2 He said, "I have been to Las Vegas. I have been to  
3 Los Angeles."

4 He told us about this ride he had in a Hummer  
5 stretch limo with these rappers and stuff.

6 The guy's name was Pale Ghost Face Killer, or  
7 something.

8 And he said, "Imagine, they let me in there, sitting  
9 in there drinking their beers, riding around in the back of  
10 the Hummer."

11 I really insisted. We got back to the airport and I  
12 get on the phone, tried to cancel his room. They would  
13 cancel one night, but not the other.

14 So we had a fabulous forty-eight hours with Steve.  
15 He had never seen snow before until he came to Omaha.

16 But we were riding around all day Friday and we went  
17 over behind that Taco Bell by Home Depot and somebody was  
18 stuck.

19 And he goes, "What do you say, mate? Shall we be a  
20 Good Samaritan?"

21 I said, "Yes. Good idea."

22 We put the Blazer in park, we go and push this gal  
23 out of the snow bank and stuff and get back in.

24 He finally asked me, he said, "What do you do?"

25 I said, "I'm a pastor of a church."

1 "What about Wenda?"

2 "She is a pastor in the same church."

3 "Oh."

4 That's about the end of it, and Friday night comes  
5 along. Wenda and I talked to him about 5:00 o'clock.

6 "Steve, we have a bunch of people coming over to our  
7 house tonight, and these are friends from our church. We  
8 just kind of do life together and we eat together and pray  
9 together and maybe have a little bit of learning and some  
10 prayer time. I don't want to pry or anything, but you would  
11 sure be welcome to part of that."

12 "That sounds good."

13 He was right there in the midst of it with us,  
14 eating, carrying on, having fun, and we had some prayer time  
15 at the end.

16 The next morning Wenda and I got up and had coffee  
17 with him.

18 And Wenda is a little more forward than I am, I'm  
19 pretty quiet, in case you didn't know that about her, yes,  
20 that's the way she rolls.

21 But she said, "Steve, is Jesus any part of your  
22 life? Because you are just the nicest guy."

23 He's this person of peace that we really sensed God  
24 wanted us to have him over to our house.

25 He goes, "No. I've been to church twice in my

1 life."

2 And we said, "Three times now, because you were at  
3 church last night in our house."

4 He goes, "Yeah. Right. Right."

5 I said, "How did you get to be the way you are? You  
6 are the Good Samaritan. You wanted to push this lady out of  
7 the snow bank."

8 He's a nice guy. He's polite. He's kind. He's  
9 generous. Help us with that.

10 "Well, I guess my parents did a pretty good job. I  
11 got good mates."

12 He told a horrible story of one of his mates  
13 stealing his girlfriend by having an affair with her, and was  
14 Jesus part of that? No.

15 And I know that kind of shocked us, but here is what  
16 I think God was teaching me.

17 At least he was honest about it; that Jesus isn't  
18 part of my life.

19 I know a lot of people who say Jesus is part of  
20 their life, and they kind of have a self-righteous robe on of  
21 lack of generosity, compassion, Good Samaritan kind of stuff.  
22 So I thought that was fascinating learning.

23 We said good-bye to him yesterday. His friends from  
24 Sutton came and picked him up and I just can't wait until he  
25 comes back.



1 is a quiet person, and we just ask that you might anoint her,  
2 that we might hear some of your words through the words she  
3 chooses. So calm her fears and allow her to speak. Thank  
4 you, Lord.

5 BRENDA: Thank you. The robe. I have a robe that  
6 I've worn pretty much all my life, and up until a few years  
7 ago it was very comfortable for me.

8 It was warm, it was inviting, and it's called the  
9 robe of selfishness and self-seeking, and I wore it  
10 regularly, and I did things for me and only me.

11 And that robe today doesn't comfort me like it used  
12 to. I can't stay in it for very long.

13 It's not warm anymore and it's not very comfortable  
14 anymore.

15 And the reason being, when Mark and Wenda talk about  
16 their friends who are in recovery, I'm one of those people.

17 I belong to Alcoholics Anonymous, and through the  
18 twelve steps of AA and my Bible study here at church, and  
19 with friends here at Bethany, I have been taught a new way to  
20 live that is less selfish and less self-seeking.

21 I have been given plenty of opportunities to take  
22 that robe off on a regular basis and just realize how  
23 uncomfortable it really is to be wrapped up in me, myself,  
24 and I all the time.

25 Part of the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous is

1 that we are given opportunities to make a list of all the  
2 people we have harmed and then go out there and make amends  
3 to them and make it right.

4 When you are wrapped up in selfishness and  
5 self-seeking you hurt a lot of people.

6 You don't live the way Jesus intends us to live. I  
7 didn't. I really didn't.

8 And it was the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday and I  
9 was preparing to make a financial amends to an institution  
10 that I had stolen some money from many years ago

11 And to me it was a large amount of money. I don't  
12 know to them that it was, but to me it was a huge amount of  
13 money.

14 And I have been sober for about ten years and this  
15 was the longest lasting putoff I had done.

16 I had put this off and put this off, but that  
17 Tuesday before Ash Wednesday I had an appointment to meet  
18 with the CEO of this organization. She really didn't know  
19 what I was coming to do.

20 On my way to work that morning I stopped at the ATM  
21 and withdrew all the cash I needed to pay the money back.

22 I got to work, and I'm the first one in the office,  
23 so I'm opening things up and making coffee.

24 And all of a sudden I hear this voice, and I believe  
25 it was the evil one talking to me, telling me, "Who do you

1 think you are? This is not going to make it right by that  
2 organization. Do you even know how many people you have hurt  
3 when you took that money? You're nothing but a piece of  
4 crap. Come on, give it up. You don't need to do this. This  
5 is not going to make things any better. You are still a  
6 liar, a cheat, and a thief."

7           And one of the cool things about AA is that we have  
8 what we call sponsors, and our sponsors know us better than  
9 probably we know ourselves.

10           They hold us accountable to the truth and my sponsor  
11 keeps my feet to the fire so that I don't stay where I'm at,  
12 so that I keep progressing forward, so that I'm always making  
13 progress in my program.

14           So I called my sponsor, because I knew my thoughts  
15 were going whacko, and that pretty soon I might talk myself  
16 out of doing this.

17           So I called her and she was in a position where she  
18 could only spare a few minutes for me.

19           And I hung up and I thought, okay, that's cool, I  
20 can wait. I'll be all right. I can wait.

21           And here it came again. "You're nothing but a  
22 loser. You're a piece of crap. What makes you think this is  
23 going to make it any better? It's not. It's not. Just  
24 don't do it. Forget it. You can't face that woman."

25           So I knew then I couldn't wait for my sponsor to

1 call back.

2 I dialed the church, and not really thinking, it was  
3 9:15, I dialed Wenda's extension and got her voice mail. She  
4 wasn't there.

5 So I hung up, and then I called right back to Pastor  
6 Mark's extension and thank God he answered the phone right  
7 away.

8 And he knows that I'm in AA, and he knows what kind  
9 of program I'm in, he knows the steps, we've done a series  
10 here at Bethany on the twelve steps of AA.

11 So, short version, I gave him the short version and  
12 said I need you to pray, because I can't stop this talk in my  
13 head.

14 And so he lovingly and graciously started praying  
15 for me and he led me right back to the foot of the cross and  
16 into the arms of Jesus and helped me understand that I was  
17 covered, and that no matter what the evil one was trying to  
18 convince me of, I had the armor, I had the armor of God's  
19 word and the righteousness of Jesus's sacrifice, so I could  
20 go in there and make those amends, and I did.

21 I walked in at 10:00 o'clock and I sat down in the  
22 chair.

23 She was a wonderful woman, and very kind and  
24 gracious, and I told her what I was there to do, and asked  
25 her in addition to paying the money back, is there anything

1 else I can do to make the situation right by the people  
2 there?

3 And she started to cry, she started to bawl, and she  
4 had anticipated that I was going to come in and complain  
5 about the organization and that I was going to be a thorn in  
6 her side that day.

7 And she said, "Maybe I shouldn't be so cynical about  
8 people, because what you're doing is amazing."

9 And she thanked me. She jumped up and ran out and  
10 brought me back a gift.

11 And it was a tin filled with wonderful chocolate  
12 mints, and I shared those mints with the girls at work and  
13 I'm going to use that as my God box.

14 Anytime I have something I can't handle, I'm going  
15 to stick my trouble in that box right there.

16 It's a reminder that if I'm willing to take off the  
17 robe of selfishness and self-seeking and live the way Jesus  
18 intends us to live --

19 PASTOR MARK: You get chocolate.

20 BRENDA: That's true, I get chocolate, but I get a  
21 new life.

22 PASTOR MARK: Brenda had no idea I was using the  
23 prodigal son story of that robe thing and the gift that comes  
24 from celebration. So would you thank God for Brenda?

25 (Applause)

1           It's interesting, isn't it, as Brenda was telling  
2 that story, and she sent me a copy of that story, so I used  
3 it at 7:45 with the people in the chapel, without putting her  
4 name on it.

5           It's interesting, isn't it, there was a celebration  
6 when she came clean.

7           And it's interesting also that we were surprised in  
8 that. I mean, it's not easy, but it's so simple.

9           And again I go back to those stories of the robe and  
10 here is where I'm at.

11           The covenant is that God welcomes us. He embraces  
12 us. He anoints us.

13           It's like the precious anointing oil that flows down  
14 over the collar of my robe, anointing, grace, love,  
15 acceptance.

16           Thank you, Brenda. Come on home to the foot of the  
17 cross. That's the covenant.

18           The kingdom then is -- there is kind of an  
19 interesting twist on that -- it's more like maybe you need to  
20 take off some of your robes.

21           Take off a layer or two here or there and open your  
22 heart and maybe your home to someone to come in, because God  
23 has great things around the table, chocolate, food,  
24 conversation, prayer, blessing.

25           Pastor Wenda is going to help us with our ministry

1 time, but for me there's a double there, isn't there?

2 Grace releases us and grace also invites us, and if  
3 you are a person who maybe just needs to be reminded of that  
4 anointing that is yours, you may have had a tough week, or  
5 maybe you've been in a tough season of life, I invite you to  
6 come up and let us pray for you.

7 It was stormy the other night and I was just  
8 thinking of all the people that are out in the howling  
9 wilderness of life, and I have a friend who has about three  
10 different surgeries, but if you are somebody, I know I'm that  
11 way, I always need to be reminded of the anointing that is  
12 mine.

13 But we would like to pray for you, and maybe you  
14 heard something that Brenda said, or that God said through  
15 Brenda or I, about that self-righteousness that creeps in.

16 That you don't need to put a robe on; you may need  
17 to just take a layer off.

18 To be accountable, to confess that I've become that  
19 elder brother a little bit, and I've begrudged my fellow  
20 brothers and sisters in the family, and I've forgotten that  
21 they are my brother.

22 PASTOR WENDA FRY: You are invited to come up if you  
23 were stirred in your heart by anything Brenda said today.

24 Thanks, Brenda, so much for being translucent and  
25 letting us in, opening that a little bit more for us to see

1 where we might need to come clean with someone. Maybe we  
2 need to go make amends.

3 The twelve step program is basically I can't, God  
4 can, and I'm going to let him.

5 And today, if something happened, we really believe  
6 that God is calling us at Bethany to move from the pews and  
7 to move out in response to God's love and mercy.

8 So that's why we are calling people forth at the end  
9 of the services during the ministry time so you can be prayed  
10 for, or take a step in your walk.

11 Because as Lutheran Christians we have done a lot of  
12 gathering and receiving and sitting in the pews, and we have  
13 done some watching from afar uncommitted, critical onlooking.

14 We are really sensing God wants us to be with Jesus  
15 and to do the things he did.

16 If something has stirred in you, come on up, we'll  
17 pray for you.

18 I know there are those of you that have maybe even  
19 thought of someone that you might owe some money to.

20 We want to anoint you with that power that God  
21 promises in his Holy Scripture.

22 He says in John 14:12, you are to do even greater  
23 things than I did.

24 That same power is yours. You can take that next  
25 step in your walk with your Lord and Savior.

1           I ask you to come forward. It is kind of a twelve  
2 step process.

3           Lord, I praise you and thank you for your Holy  
4 Spirit, your holy fire, for the scarlet color of your robe  
5 that was taken off of you and then put back on and then taken  
6 off again, Lord, so that we would know the risk of your love  
7 for us.

8           We praise you for the cross. We praise you for the  
9 season of Lent.

10          We praise you for an opportunity to do the things  
11 that you've asked us to do, to scatter the demons, whether  
12 they might be food, or shopping, or alcohol, or cheating.

13          You teach us in your word that you want us to raise  
14 the dead; that is give life to others.

15          We thank you for the new life that our new friend  
16 Steve gave us through his kind heart that blessed us.

17          It's as you said, we will entertain angels unaware  
18 if we open our hearts and our homes.

19          Lord, I praise you for these disciples and I ask a  
20 special anointing upon them as they are thinking about doing  
21 something beyond what they have done in the past, wanting to  
22 grow and stretch forward, and they are willing to help  
23 others. We praise you for them and ask your spirit now for  
24 power in their heart as they go forth. In your holy name.  
25 Amen.