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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
MARCH 16, 2008
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: We've been looking at major
2 biblical mountains and today we are at the Mount of Olives.

3 So let's open our Bibles at the start, we'll come
4 back to it, but I want to read the story as we begin our time
5 together. Matthew 21, Versus through 11.

6 We are following our Lord to Mr. Calvary. We are
7 not quite there yet.

8 We are stopped with the disciples and our Lord just
9 outside of Bethpage, which is on the east side of Jerusalem
10 near the Mount of Olives.

11 Matthew 21, Versus 1 through 11. I invite you to
12 follow along.

13 "When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached
14 Bethpage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,
15 saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and
16 immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her.
17 Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to
18 you, just say this, "The Lord needs them," and he will send
19 them immediately.'

20 "This took place to fulfill what had been spoken
21 through the Prophet Zachariah saying, 'Tell the daughter of
22 Zion, look the king is coming to you humble and mounted on a
23 donkey and the colt, the foal of a donkey.'

24 "The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed
25 them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put their

1 cloaks on them and he sat on them.

2 "A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road
3 and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the
4 road.

5 "The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed
6 were shouting, 'Hosannah to the son of David, blessed is the
7 one who comes in the name of Lord. Hosannah in the highest
8 heaven.

9 "When he entered Jerusalem the whole city was in
10 turmoil asking, 'Who is this?'

11 "The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus
12 from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

13 Let's pause there and hold your hand over your Bible
14 as we pray.

15 Lord God, these are your holy words. We hold in our
16 hands your holy scriptures, the Holy Bible.

17 And we thank you so much for the great reformers,
18 including Martin Luther, who helped to put the Bible into the
19 hands of the people so that they could turn their own pages
20 and read for themselves your word, your promise, and your
21 truth.

22 Thank you for these words, Lord. You are our
23 teacher.

24 In your last week on earth you did a lot of
25 teaching, so we ask that you would teach us now as we walk

1 with you the rest of the way to Mt. Calvary.

2 Bless us this day as we sit on the Mount of Olives
3 and listen to your teaching. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

4 Before we look at that text a little more carefully,
5 I don't know about you, but when I go on a trip one of my
6 favorite things to do is to look at my pictures when I come
7 back, I just love that, remember where I been and what I've
8 doing.

9 So let's just look at the pictures of the trip we
10 have been taking.

11 A few weeks ago we went to Mt. Mariah, remember
12 that, five weeks ago we climbed Mt. Mariah with Abraham and
13 Isaac, remember?

14 And on that mountain God asked Abraham to bring
15 Isaac and to sacrifice his son and Abraham obediently went
16 and just as the knife was coming down, remember, he saw a ram
17 caught in a thicket.

18 And Abraham was so relieved that he called that
19 place Jehovah Jira, which means God will provide.

20 And then that day we asked God to help us as we went
21 into our week.

22 We asked God to help us in times of testing and
23 trial, to help us be trusting that he would provide us a way
24 through.

25 And then the next week we didn't actually climb Mt.

1 Sinai, we sat at the base of that one as well, just like we
2 are today at the base of the Mount of Olives.

3 But we sat at that because we kind of took a picture
4 of the wilderness there, remember?

5 We were with Moses and the people who God had
6 delivered through the Red Sea.

7 And we sat at the base of that and we listened to
8 God tell Moses I want you to tell the people that I've chosen
9 them. They're to be my treasured possession.

10 And so we didn't actually climb up, but God was
11 beginning a covenant.

12 He was beginning a covenant of reconciliation there
13 at the base of Mt. Sinai that was fulfilled later in the
14 blood of Jesus Christ on Mt. Calvary.

15 But we waited with the people there and we listened
16 to that, we listened to that title, I could choose anybody,
17 but I choose you, you are my treasured possession.

18 And we remembered that God wants us to be a
19 treasured possession and that we, too, are chosen, and that
20 we shouldn't forget it.

21 Then Mt. Carmel, we went up with that crazy prophet
22 Elijah.

23 The stories of Elijah are better than any movie you
24 might check out. They are just so full of drama and
25 brilliance and story and miracles, just better than any

1 movie, just read the stories of the prophet Elijah and the
2 prophet Elisha.

3 But we went up on Mt. Carmel, remember, and we were
4 with Elijah the prophet and the Israelites.

5 And, remember, Elijah was kind of taunting the gods
6 of the Baals, come on, I thought you had a god of weather,
7 why don't you call on him and rain down fire from heaven,
8 sort of taunting him, but nothing happened.

9 And then Elijah called on the God of Abraham, Isaac,
10 and Jacob, which means, whenever we read that in the Bible,
11 we are reminded of the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

12 That's the covenant that Jesus made good with us
13 upon Mt. Calvary.

14 And what Elijah was wanting to do, what God was
15 doing through the prophet Elijah, was reminding the people
16 they are in a covenant with God, but they had forgotten, they
17 were going after gods, the gods of the Baals, and they were
18 worshipping other things, things of the world.

19 But he called on that God and God came down and with
20 fire from heaven licked up even all the water that had been
21 put down on the altar there of twelve stones.

22 And Elijah said don't forget, and that day we asked
23 God to help us not forget that we, too, are in that covenant,
24 we are just as little Brady, sealed with the Holy Spirit and
25 marked with the cross of Christ, and there is nothing that

1 can rub that cross, the seal of that covenant, there is
2 nothing and no one in this world that can take that away from
3 us, and that's what Elijah was reminding the Israelites that
4 day.

5 Then we went to Mt. Zion, the same as Jerusalem.
6 Remember, you read that in the Bible, Mt. Zion is Jerusalem,
7 and we watched King David worship with great abandon.

8 Remember, he danced before the Lord with nothing on
9 but a linen cloth, and then we did a little jamming ourselves
10 because Pastor Mark played a reggae song which kind of
11 loosened things up and allowed us at the end of worship to
12 worship with great abandon.

13 Last week we went to the Mount of Transfiguration.
14 We were reminded it's sometimes good just to be here and not
15 think about what we are going to do next, to be just right
16 here, instead of winding our watches, thinking about lunch,
17 just be.

18 Then we turned toward the world that God sent us
19 into and asked him to go with us, like he promised Peter,
20 James and John.

21 It has been quite a trip, hasn't it? That's what
22 happens when we take out our pictures of trips we have gone
23 on and remember all that we have been through, all the things
24 that we've seen and done and heard. It has been amazing.

25 We did a little singing, remember we did that on

1 Wednesdays.

2 We used the Psalms of ascent, Psalms means songs,
3 and we used those Psalms, only six of them, we just chose a
4 few, six, 120 through 134, and we used those, did a little
5 bit of singing.

6 Because our ancestors, the Hebrew pilgrims, when
7 they would make their ascent up to Jerusalem to worship, kind
8 of like what we did today on high holy days, Palm Sunday is a
9 high holy day, we made our way to worship.

10 On their way they would sing and last Wednesday
11 Lowell spoke on Psalm 134, the very last Psalm, and I wrote
12 in my Bible, I never thought of it before, but I wrote next
13 to Psalm 134, this is the good-bye Psalm.

14 Lowell talked to us a little bit about how hard
15 good-byes are.

16 And I love this quote from Eugene Peterson about
17 Psalm 134, the very last song of ascent.

18 "The persons who first sang this song had been
19 traveling literally the roads that led to Jerusalem.

20 "Now they had arrived and were at the temple to
21 worship God in festival celebrations.

22 "Some would have been on the road for days, some for
23 weeks, and in some instances perhaps for months.

24 "Now they were at the end of the road. What would
25 happen? What would they feel? What would they do? Would

1 there be the deadness inside?"

2 I was just kind of caught at those four questions.
3 What would happen? What would they feel? What would they
4 do? Would there be the deadness inside?

5 Maybe you've experienced a good-bye in your life
6 that brought up some of these questions.

7 And I couldn't help but think toward the disciples
8 that Jesus had at the Mount of Olives with him.

9 And I want you to have you look with me at Matthew
10 20, this is just before Matthew 21 where we read.

11 I just can't help but think that maybe some of the
12 disciples were thinking these same questions, although unlike
13 the Hebrew pilgrims they didn't know they were at the end of
14 the road with Jesus, although he had warned them.

15 Let's look at that warning, Chapter 20, Verses 17
16 through 19.

17 "While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem he took the
18 twelve disciples aside by themselves and said to them on the
19 way, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man
20 will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and they
21 will condemn him to death and then they will hand him over to
22 the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and on
23 the third day he will be raised."

24 Now, right after that, the mother of the sons of
25 Zebedee, Verse 20, kind of comes up to Jesus and says do you

1 think that my sons could sit really close to you in the
2 kingdom of heaven in the end?

3 And then he has a conversation with them, it's just
4 right after that prediction of his sacrifice and his dying
5 and his betrayal, she asks him that.

6 And then right after that a blind man calls out to
7 him and he heals the blind man and then they are at the Mount
8 of Olives by the time that happens.

9 I'm just wondering about that conversation with the
10 wife of Zebedee and the healing of the blind man.

11 I'm wondering, between those things, the prediction,
12 the question, the healing, and now the entry, I'm wondering
13 if maybe some of those disciples weren't asking these
14 questions?

15 It doesn't say that in the scripture, but of course
16 the Book of John says that not everything is written down,
17 and of course it couldn't have been.

18 It says that if it had been written down there
19 wouldn't be enough pages. There wouldn't be enough pages to
20 fill all the things that Jesus did while he was on this
21 earth.

22 But I'm just wondering about those questions. I'm
23 wondering, we don't know, maybe Bartholomew, maybe some of
24 the lesser known disciples, the ones we didn't talk about
25 that often, Thaddeus, Nathaniel, could it be that maybe one

1 of them took Jesus' words of we're going up to Jerusalem, the
2 Son of Man, maybe took them to heart, thought to themselves,
3 wow, if that's true, how will I feel?

4 If that's true, what is going to happen? If that is
5 true, and maybe some of them by the time they got to the
6 Mount of Olives, maybe they started to feel dead inside.

7 Maybe the beloved disciple John, who loved Jesus so
8 much, it doesn't say it, I know, but maybe he started to feel
9 sick inside, like I do today, I feel a little queazy today,
10 maybe by the time they got to the Mount of Olives they were
11 feeling like that.

12 Not all of them, but wouldn't some of them? We
13 don't know, but we do know how we feel when we're suddenly
14 struck with a tragedy.

15 We do know how we feel when our loved one dies. We
16 do know how we feel, we know we feel dead inside when our
17 actions don't match our words.

18 We know how we feel, so it's possible that they
19 started to wonder these questions, I think, maybe one or two
20 of them.

21 This past Thursday at Bethany we were blessed with a
22 holy happening. How many of you were at the Andrew Peterson
23 concert?

24 It was one of the finest moments of my discipleship
25 journey, I believe.

1 How about that guy? How about Andrew Peterson?

2 He's so humble, and his friends are so humble.

3 The thing that struck me was that he -- I can't
4 remember, I think he said it at the first half, but he said
5 that a few years ago he felt a nudging to do something about
6 Easter, and something about the Lord's sacrifice, and how he
7 prepared for that was this.

8 He called it a discipline. He disciplined himself
9 to read the gospels every day.

10 And, remember, he said I didn't feel like it doing
11 it all the time, but I did it anyway.

12 And I thought that was really amazing, because out
13 of that disciplined time, up time spent with Jesus, intimacy
14 spent with Jesus in the scriptures, we benefited.

15 We got to hear his devotional musings that night and
16 they were beautiful. This is the one that stirred my heart.

17 "The sun shines hot on the city gate and the palm
18 branches stir the air. You can feel the air move.

19 "You can hear the hearts pumping in their chests,
20 their mouths cry save us, while their hearts cry, give us
21 what we want.

22 "But because you are God, you hear even deeper in
23 the spirits of men and women and even children the silence of
24 our profound loneliness.

25 "You hear the trickle of need that we scarcely know

1 ourselves.

2 "You come to us, though you know we are praying to
3 you for the wrong reasons, singing to you without the
4 faintest notion of how powerful and just and holy you really
5 are.

6 "We don't even realize the danger we're in, crying
7 for salvation from Cesar when the devil himself is battering
8 the door, crying like a baby for its bottle when a wolf is
9 loose in the nursery.

10 "And yet you come. You set your iron gaze on
11 Jerusalem, and because the Father wants you to, you come.
12 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

13 That just made me stop dead in my tracks. Oh, I've
14 done that. I've prayed, save me, God, from that, when what
15 I've really meant is give me what I want, Jesus.

16 I have sat in this place, and in that chapel, and
17 sang songs that are beautiful in words, and I haven't had the
18 faintest notion, I don't even think about what I sang.

19 I forget how holy he is and how powerful he is and
20 how just he is. I do that very same thing. I was convicted
21 by that. My heart was stirred.

22 We wear crosses around our necks, we might hang them
23 from a rearview mirror of our car, we call ourselves by the
24 name Christian, but we really don't want things the way he
25 wants them.

1 We really don't. We are like Peter. No, Lord, no.
2 Not that way. I don't want you to do that. Don't do that.

3 You're not going to suffer and die like that. No,
4 Lord, don't wash my feet. I'm embarrassed by that. Please
5 don't.

6 We're like Zebedee's wife, hey, can the boys have
7 the good seats? Can I?

8 We forsake him and we run just like all of the
9 disciples that week.

10 We do that by the way we live our lives. We still
11 do that, because we really don't want it the way God wants
12 it.

13 We run from him and we forsake him when we refuse to
14 do the good we know we're supposed to do.

15 We run, we flee, when we hold the love back that we
16 know we are supposed to give.

17 It's just as if we would mock and slap his face and
18 spit on the path when we live our lives holding grudges,
19 little hates, jealousies, envies, refusals to forgive. We do
20 it all over again.

21 One of the privileges I have these days is mentoring
22 Lowell. It's a great privilege. It's an honor.

23 Lowell Nelson is our newest member of the pastoral
24 team. He's a pastor in training.

25 He often refers to himself as a pastor in training.

1 I kind of smile at that.

2 He's humble about it, but one of the things when he
3 got back from Berkeley this last time, he took the New
4 Testament, and the first time we met we were talking about
5 the papers he was going to be submitting.

6 And he said to me, "Wenda, I've always known that
7 Jesus is with me, and I'm with Jesus, but I also realize now
8 that I'm also one of those silly, stupid disciples. I'm also
9 there. I know Jesus is with me, but I'm one of them."

10 And I was grateful. Thank you, Lowell, for your
11 honesty.

12 I mean, let's be all be honest. Let's all be
13 honest. Think about it.

14 We're often stiff-necked or hard-hearted in our own
15 kitchens.

16 We often don't forgive the person who sleeps next to
17 us. We know how Jesus wants us to live.

18 That's what struck me about this text today.
19 There's only three things that stood out. I've never seen
20 them before. Verse 1, Verse 3, and Verse 6.

21 Verse 1, "When they come near Jerusalem and had
22 reached Bethpage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two
23 disciples."

24 Jesus sent.

25 Verse 6, "The disciples went."

1 It's simple. Jesus sent; the disciples went. He
2 gave them a little bit of help, Verse 3.

3 "If anyone asks you what you're doing, just say 'The
4 Lord needs them.'"

5 We know what the Lord wants us to do. He wants us
6 to love each other.

7 He wants us to help people who need help. He wants
8 us to forgive 70 times 7.

9 We know what he demands of us. He doesn't want us
10 looking at our neighbor's spouse that way at a party.

11 He doesn't want us to look at pornography on the
12 computer.

13 He doesn't want us to talk like that. We know what
14 he demands of us.

15 Jesus sent, his disciples went, and if anybody
16 presses you on it, just say the Lord needs it.

17 The Lord needs us, disciples. The Lord needs us to
18 do the things that he asks of us.

19 The scripture is really clear. You're either a
20 disciple or you are not.

21 You either worship God or you turn away. You either
22 commit to following him or you turn away in contempt, because
23 the Book of Revelation says I'm not really interested in
24 lukewarm hearts.

25 Jesus tells the disciples to go get two donkeys, the

1 colt and the donkey, and they go.

2 It just really struck me like, yes, we could do
3 that, Jesus sends us, let us go, because we know what he
4 wants of us.

5 He knows that we're fickle, he knows that, and
6 that's what I love so much about him, is he looks past that.

7 He knows that I say save me, but can you give me
8 what I want?

9 He knows I sing without great abandon sometimes,
10 that I'm just half-hearted in what I do and what I say and
11 what I worship.

12 There are times when my actions don't match my
13 words, and yet he loves me.

14 He looks past that, disciples, to the cross, and
15 looks down on us in love.

16 Will we ever get our arms around that? We know what
17 he wants of us, and we're either a disciple or we're not.

18 This is not the only week out of the year that he
19 wants our full devotion and our full attention.

20 He wants it every day of the year, because Christian
21 discipleship is about passion and love and devotion 52 weeks
22 out of the year, not just during Holy Week.

23 And I pray that we might be found faithful and not
24 run and flee with our lives. Mark, would you lead us in our
25 response?

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: Thank you. That expression from
2 the Thursday concert, we cry like a baby wanting its bottle
3 and there is a wolf loose in the nursery, that just kind of
4 convicted me the other day.

5 Some of you've may know this. We are in the process
6 of trying to sell our house, and if we let it, that becomes
7 the biggest thing in the universe.

8 It's interesting, as Wenda was setting us up for the
9 context of where the story comes, I was seeing where it goes
10 next, and the next thing that Jesus does is he does some
11 decluttering.

12 He goes into the temple and he cleans house, and
13 then he sees a fig tree that is not being productive and he
14 curses it.

15 And it's interesting, because as you pointed out,
16 Wenda, if I'm real honest with myself, my house becomes the
17 biggest deal in the universe.

18 I become like a guy crying for his bottle while
19 there's a wolf loose in the nursery.

20 It's interesting. I think that's the way God breaks
21 us, because Jesus sent, and they went, and it's a choice.

22 We can still make everything cluttered, but if we
23 choose to declutter, and some of us do spring cleaning
24 because it's mandated by the calendar, but it's still a
25 choice to get off the couch and get the vacuum cleaner out.

1 And I think it's also a choice for us to get off the
2 pew and just merely stand up and maybe admit, God, we know
3 you have been reading our mail, you've been checking my
4 computer, you've been looking at my checkbook, you've been
5 monitoring my conversations, and I need a little decluttering
6 here this week before Easter.

7 So if that speaks to you, I would just invite you,
8 again it's a choice, you don't have to do it, but my choice
9 is I guess to be accountable and to just stand up and say
10 there were some things that Pastor Wenda was preaching about
11 today that spoke to me.

12 There are those times when I'm like a baby crying
13 for its bottle and there's a wolf loose in the nursery, but
14 my needs are more important than world hunger, and more
15 important than the economy, and all these other things.

16 So if you're in that boat I would like to bless you
17 for being accountable to that being your reality.

18 If you would join me, I'm just going to close my
19 eyes, I don't care who you are, I'm just going to face the
20 cross, because I know that's where we are going in the
21 journey this week.

22 And if you've maybe sensed that once in a while
23 you've been like a baby crying for its bottle when there's a
24 wolf loose in the nursery, and if you want to declutter, it's
25 a choice.

1 So my choice is to stand today and admit that. If
2 you want to join me I just invite you to.

3 Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Lord, when we
4 face your wondrous cross, it's like a mirror that reflects
5 back to us our inadequacy.

6 And, Lord, we know that's where you're going and you
7 have some cleaning to do yet this week.

8 First you'll clean the temple, and then you'll curse
9 the tree that bore no fruit.

10 And, Lord, we are so thankful that you don't curse
11 us when we don't bear fruit.

12 It just says that you're hungry and that you want
13 our lives to bear fruit, fruit which lasts.

14 So, Lord, as we stand facing your cross, we thank
15 you for going there for us, Lord.

16 And we thank you now in advance, Lord, that you will
17 go with us into this week which will bring joy, and children
18 singing, and also disciples sleeping, and your own tears, and
19 also your blood.

20 So thank you, Lord, for where we are. It is good,
21 Lord, to be here at the base of this mountain.

22 May we hear your word of encouragement, and your
23 word of forgiveness, that you know how hard it is to climb
24 and you go with us.

25 So, Lord, may we leave some things here. May we

1 declutter and leave them here at the base of the cross so
2 that we can climb faithfully.

3 We ask all of this in the strong name of you, Lord,
4 Jesus the Christ, and people together said amen.

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