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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

APRIL 24, 2005

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: I don't know if you are joining
2 in on the journey in a formal way or not, but we're sure
3 glad you're here today.

4 This has been fun. It's an eye-opener, literally,
5 the theme being seeing the unseen Christ.

6 We have been in this for a couple weeks and just a
7 quick review.

8 The first week we talked about worshipping with
9 genuine enthusiasm.

10 I want to tell you I've noticed a difference in
11 that and I want to encourage you, because you've been
12 encouraging me.

13 Wenda preached that week and it's really kind of
14 about singing a little louder.

15 And people have really responded to that
16 invitation, and it's not a pep rally, but we need to get
17 that stuff out so that we can be filled back up.

18 You would be amazed if you only knew how your
19 singing lifts the spirit of others.

20 And we've noticed a marked difference in our 5:30
21 and 7:45 services, it's unbelievable, just that challenge,
22 that those folks have responded, and that gives me chills as
23 I speak about it.

24 But it's worshipping with genuine enthusiasm, and
25 it's not just once a week, once an hour a week; it's on a

1 daily relationship basis.

2 We need to get that stuff out and then receive the
3 good stuff that God has for us.

4 The second week I got to preach on lavishing God's
5 love on other people, hopefully in unsuspecting ways that
6 you might do some random acts of kindness, not expecting a
7 thank you, but just to surprise somebody so that they don't
8 know who to thank so they might thank God. That was the
9 second week.

10 Last week Pastor Wenda again talked about embracing
11 righteousness and renouncing evil.

12 And I'm here to tell you that evil is real. The
13 darkness is very hungry, and it's omniscient, it's
14 omnipresent in some ways.

15 It's out there, so we need to do what we can to
16 embrace righteousness and renounce the evil tendency in us
17 and in the rest of the world.

18 So that is where we have been.

19 This week I get to talk about serving with
20 gratitude and eagerness.

21 Grab your Bibles, if you are comfortable doing
22 that, I would love to bring you up to speed a little bit
23 with Paul.

24 The Book of Romans is just a great place. I would
25 say Romans is the Mt. Everest of the Bible.

1 It's kind of the beginning and ending place for a
2 really awesome theological discussion.

3 There is kind of an old joke, if you were stranded
4 on a deserted island what book would you bring?

5 And the author C.K. Chesterson said, "Well, of
6 course I would bring the "Practical Guide to Shipbuilding"
7 so I could get off the island."

8 But I believe you could do a whole lot worse than
9 bring along the book of Romans. It is the Mt. Everest of
10 scripture.

11 In a nutshell, in some fifteen or so chapters, it
12 captures the essence of the whole Christian message and the
13 way we co-exist with other religions, the way we co-exist
14 with our forebears in the Jewish faith and with the whole
15 universe, really.

16 Paul is able to kind of put it all out there.
17 Romans has it all. It's like the Mt. Everest of the Bible.

18 So if you are just a beginning Bible student, it's
19 deep, but it's practical.

20 So I want to roam through Romans a little bit with
21 you today and just show you a little bit of what is
22 happening.

23 And I think the best place to start that is in the
24 Book of Acts, strangely enough.

25 So if you have your Bible, the Book of Acts, the

1 9th Chapter, I've got it on page 120. It goes Matthew,
2 Mark, Luke, John, and Acts.

3 One of the things we are blessed with here at
4 Bethany is we have a lot of people who are coming as either
5 pre-Christian people, or kind of recovering Christian people
6 in some ways, and they have not had a whole lot of Bible
7 interaction, and this is an opportunity for us to get up and
8 not assume a whole lot of prior knowledge.

9 So I don't want to throw junk out there that maybe
10 you're like where did he come up with that? Or I didn't
11 know that.

12 So I want to basically move us forward together,
13 because that's one of the things, we need to not think too
14 highly of ourselves, is one of the things we are going to
15 learn from Romans 12.

16 And if anybody thinks they have all this figured
17 out, I would like to meet you.

18 But Acts 9, who we are going to meet in this is the
19 author of the Book of Romans.

20 You need to know that Rome was the center of the
21 universe in a lot of different ways.

22 Rome was the center of power; it was the center of
23 culture; it was the center of art; it was the center of
24 intelligence.

25 Rome was all of that in a bag of chips. It was the

1 cultural and power center of the universe when this Bible
2 was written.

3 So we need to figure out who is it that is writing
4 to the Romans?

5 And we meet him in Acts 9. He's this guy, his name
6 was Saul, but his name is going to be changed to Paul, okay?

7 So we learn about it in Acts 9:1 and following.

8 "Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against
9 the disciples of the Lord," you see Saul, he's a Jewish
10 religious leader and he has an axe to grind and he loves to
11 grind it against Christians because they are doing what they
12 are not supposed to be doing; that is thinking Jesus is the
13 Messiah.

14 And so Paul (Saul) is very proud of the fact that
15 he personally had condemned and convicted and had murdered
16 hundreds of Christians because of their religious beliefs.
17 That's who Saul is.

18 He's still breathing threats and murder against the
19 disciples of the Lord.

20 "Saul went to the high priest and asked him for
21 letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found
22 any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring
23 them bound to Jerusalem."

24 People that were part of the Way, that was what the
25 early church was called, when Jesus said, "I am the way, the

1 truth and the life," some people thought that's a cool name
2 for a group, we are going to be called people of the Way.

3 So Saul is on the lookout to find out if some of
4 these people are inhabiting the synagogues around Damascus.

5 He wants to get them and he wants to bring them to
6 justice, which most often meant death. That's what he's
7 doing.

8 "Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus
9 suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to
10 the ground and he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul,
11 why do you persecute me?"

12 "He asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

13 The reply came, "I'm Jesus, whom you are
14 persecuting. But get up and enter the city. You will be
15 told what you are to do."

16 Notice closely in that verse there, Verse 4, "Saul,
17 Saul, why do you persecute me?"

18 When people are going the wrong way Jesus takes it
19 personally.

20 He doesn't say why are you persecuting Christians?

21 He doesn't say why are you persecuting the church?

22 He doesn't say why are you persecuting my church?

23 He says, "Why are you persecuting me?"

24 He takes it personally.

25 Saul is like, well, who are you?

1 He says I'm Jesus. I'm the one you are coming
2 after. When you go after anybody that is a member of my
3 body, you're going after me, and he takes it personally.

4 Saul is stricken blind. He has that great
5 encounter.

6 Ananias comes and gives him his sight back and he
7 gets his name changed.

8 He's no longer Saul, that was going the other way,
9 now he's becoming Paul. He's a Christian. He has met
10 Jesus.

11 That's the background of who is writing the letter
12 to Rome, and he writes letters to Corinth, he writes them to
13 Ephesus, to Philippi, to Thessalonica, all the different
14 letters Paul writes he's writing to Christians because he
15 used to be going the wrong way, now he's going the right way
16 and he wants them to know what the way is like. That's what
17 is happening.

18 In short, before meeting Jesus Paul was a fighter
19 and not a lover.

20 What he then finds himself doing is he's an
21 apostle, he's called, he's sent, he's blessed to go out and
22 encourage and love people, instead of have them put to
23 death.

24 He used to be really religious and now he's really
25 righteous, because in a relationship with God through Christ

1 he has had a heart transplant.

2 Before meeting Jesus he was a fighter, not a lover;
3 now, you see, he's a lover and not a fighter.

4 And so he writes a lot of his letters from jail.
5 He writes because there are other people that are out there,
6 they are trying to the rid of these people that are on the
7 way and he's on the way.

8 That's why we sing that song, "I'm On My Way To
9 You."

10 I'm on my way. We are in the way. That's what is
11 going on.

12 Then we turn to the book of Romans. That's who is
13 writing the letter, the guy who used to be a fighter, now
14 he's a lover.

15 So now he's sharing and he's very brilliant,
16 because he's a former Jewish leader of the synagogue.

17 He had it all down pat, so what he's going to do is
18 he's going to say, you guys, that stuff is not invalid, but
19 here is how we interpret it now.

20 It's about love; it's not about law.

21 It's about Jesus; it's not just about some God that
22 is unknown, a God that is distant.

23 It's about a God who is right here right now and
24 that's what he talks about.

25 Romans 1, he then starts it out, he starts his

1 letter, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an
2 apostle, set apart for the gospel of God."

3 This is Romans 1, page 144. He starts throwing out
4 these beautiful new words, gospel, God has good news; not
5 bad news.

6 It's not about killing people; it's about giving
7 people life.

8 He's called. He's changed. He's different.

9 So he talks about gospel. He talks about grace.
10 He talks about love. He talks about faith.

11 And says some of it is almost foolish, Verse 22,
12 "Claiming to be wise they became fools."

13 It doesn't make sense, but it makes all the sense
14 in the world. It's Jesus. He's it.

15 Across the page, Chapter 2, he's talking again as a
16 Jewish person writing to some Jewish people, some Gentile
17 people, Chapter 2:29:

18 "Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly," he
19 says.

20 You guys think it's all just about getting
21 circumcised.

22 There is more to it than that, he's saying to his
23 Jewish audience. Real circumcision is a matter of the
24 heart.

25 He's speaking as one who has had a heart

1 transplant. It's spiritual and not literal.

2 "Such a person receives praise not from others but
3 from God."

4 It's not about just seeing somebody in the gym and
5 going, hey, that person is Jewish; it's seeing what is in
6 their heart.

7 Then Chapter 3, arguably the most influential
8 chapter of the Bible.

9 This is the chapter that when Martin Luther was
10 sitting in the castle reading, all of a sudden the lights
11 came on when he was a frustrated monk wanting to please God.

12 He's reading along and he comes to Chapter 3 of
13 Romans, the 23rd Verse.

14 "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory
15 of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift,
16 through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

17 It hit him like a lightning bolt and it changed
18 history.

19 Luther understood for the first time it's not about
20 me; it's about God. It's grace. It's a gift. I don't have
21 to earn it.

22 Calvin, same experience, his heart was warmed, and
23 Wesley, both, when reading the letter of the Romans at a
24 frustrated time in their lives their heart was strangely
25 warmed.

1 The spirit came into them and it changed these
2 people.

3 So Romans is big stuff, and we are just roaming
4 through it quickly, you go through the third chapter, fourth
5 chapter, fifth chapter, this is all great stuff, it's the
6 Mt. Everest of scripture.

7 He's talking about grace, he's throwing in stuff
8 because, remember, he's a very learned man, he's writing to
9 very smart people in Rome.

10 And I venture to say there are a lot of people
11 around our empire, and I say that in a sarcastic way, the
12 American empire, that really need to kind of hear Romans.

13 Because what he's saying to these really bright and
14 articulate people it's that it's not all that it seems, and
15 yet it is, maybe more so what it looks like than what you
16 think it is.

17 He goes on and on throughout the letter. That's
18 what gets us up to Chapter 12.

19 That's a long sprint, really, and I hope I didn't
20 exhaust you with that.

21 When we come to Chapter 12 we see that Paul is
22 saying faith is an inward reality, but it's expressed by
23 outward behaviors.

24 That's a big theological statement. It's an inward
25 reality. It's in my heart, but how is somebody going to

1 know?

2 Because, you see, Paul knew that there were some
3 people who were accused of being Christians, and the old
4 standard joke for today, if you were accused of being a
5 Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?

6 He's going to say, well, there ought to be, and
7 here is how.

8 12th Chapter, Verse 1, "I appeal to you,
9 therefore," in other words, I've given you all my
10 theological credentials, I've spun you through the Old
11 Testament, the thing about Abraham and all that kind of
12 stuff, and just so you know, I do have my degrees, I'm
13 pretty sharp myself, I'm not all that stupid he's saying to
14 the audience in Rome.

15 "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren," in other
16 words, we've got that out of way, now let's get practical,
17 "Brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God," here is
18 probably the most important verse in this chapter, "to
19 present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and
20 acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

21 Look closely at that verse. "Present your bodies,"
22 that's physical, as your spiritual worship.

23 In other words, it's not just what you do in church
24 for an hour a week.

25 "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice."

1 He will go on later in the book to Corinth and say
2 your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

3 So, in other words, be careful about what you put
4 into it.

5 You might think twice about alcohol, drugs, and
6 caffeine, and nicotine and all that stuff.

7 Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so what
8 goes in is important.

9 But he's also saying present your body as a living
10 sacrifice. That's your spiritual worship.

11 It's not just singing on Sunday morning. Your body
12 and the way you do stuff physically matters spiritually, is
13 what he's teaching them and us.

14 How you live physically is actually spiritual.
15 That's compounding.

16 Then he goes on, Verse 2, "Do not be conformed to
17 this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your
18 minds."

19 In other words, think differently about what it
20 means to be physical.

21 Well, some people say, well, this is a spiritual
22 journey.

23 Paul says, no, it isn't. It's a physical journey
24 with spiritual ramifications. So think differently about
25 that.

1 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be
2 transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may
3 discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable
4 and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone
5 among you," in other words, I've given my qualifications and
6 I want you to know, I might not be the sharpest knife in the
7 drawer, but I have been there, done that.

8 He says, I therefore appeal to you, he says, "By
9 the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to
10 think of yourself more highly than you ought to think."

11 In other words, you in the Roman empire, check
12 yourselves.

13 In other words, you in the United States of
14 America, check yourselves.

15 You better not think more highly of yourself than
16 you ought to think, because you're not better than anybody
17 else, Christians, individual members of the body of Christ,
18 check yourself.

19 Look in the mirror, he's saying, and then after you
20 look in the mirror, and you realize you know I do have a few
21 warts, look to Jesus, because he's the one who makes sense
22 of the whole deal.

23 And so Verse 3, "With sober judgment, each
24 according to the measure of faith that God has assigned,"
25 we've all got faith, please don't tell me you don't have

1 faith.

2 You've got it. You just might have it in something
3 else. He's saying faith in Jesus is really it.

4 "For as in one body we have many members, and not
5 all the members have the same function," again, remember, we
6 are looking in the mirror, that's Verse 4, and 5, "So we,
7 who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we
8 are members one of another."

9 Remember, physical is very important, so he's going
10 to get physical with his audience.

11 I invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians 12, he goes
12 into a little more detail on this whole body image thing.

13 This is found on page 166, 1 Corinthians 12:12 and
14 following.

15 "Just as the body is one and has many members, and
16 all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so
17 it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all
18 baptized into one body, Jews and Greeks."

19 This is revolutionary thinking, that the Jews are
20 also part of this deal? Yes.

21 So are the Greeks? Yes.

22 So are the Corinthians? You bet.

23 They are all in it, one baptism, we are all in this
24 thing together and it's physical.

25 "We were all baptized. We were all made to drink

1 of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one
2 member, but of many. If the foot would say because I'm not
3 a hand I don't belong to the body, that would not make it
4 any less a part of the body. If the ear would say because
5 I'm not an eye I don't belong to the body."

6 In other words, when you look into the mirror and
7 you see your different body parts, that's exactly what you
8 see when you look at the church.

9 It's a body. It's has fingers and ears and elbows
10 and eyebrows and ankles, and it has other parts of the body
11 that are unmentionable.

12 We have different body parts, but we are all
13 knitted together in this incredible thing. The church is a
14 body.

15 Notice, we go back to Romans 12, it's a living
16 sacrifice; it's not a dead body.

17 Present your bodies, your living bodies, as a
18 living sacrifice.

19 It suggests movement. It suggests being
20 transformed and not conformed to this world.

21 So he's being not allegorical, but really physical.
22 You see your body, it's spiritual worship, so is the body of
23 Christ.

24 What you do physically is spiritual. Isn't that
25 exciting? It's great stuff. It's very basic.

1 Verses 6 through 9, "We have gifts that differ,
2 according to the grace given to us."

3 We've all got grace, but we do have different
4 gifts.

5 The new members that are joining our congregation,
6 our church here at 10:30, are in the other room right now
7 unwrapping their gifts.

8 If you look at the screen I've put on our web site,
9 Bethany-Lutheran.com, if you want to fill out a spiritual
10 gifts inventory you can click onto that and it has spiritual
11 gifts.

12 You can find out what your dominant spiritual gifts
13 are by filling out a little forty minute survey.

14 I invite you to pray before you do that, click on
15 that and you're going to be amazed at the way your gifts
16 differ from everybody else's.

17 We're not the same. That's what Paul is telling
18 us.

19 We all have grace, but we have different gifts,
20 prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving,
21 leadership, compassion, all of those are spiritual gifts,
22 and we have them to different degrees, but some people, that
23 is their dominant spiritual gift.

24 He's got another more exhaustive list back in
25 1 Corinthians 12, but what he's saying is, you guys are all

1 different, and yet you are all part of the same thing.

2 And if the body is functioning properly, all of
3 those gifts are going to be operative.

4 And so hence spiritual gifts give you an indication
5 of what God wants you to be doing with your life, and in
6 your church, and other places.

7 Those are the strengths that we should play to.
8 It's like in sports, well, he's got good speed. Well, then
9 don't swing for the fence; bunt once in a while. That's a
10 gift, speed. Play to your strengths.

11 The same is true of the church. You want to get
12 people in positions so that they can succeed, because the
13 body then is achieving more. That's what we try to do with
14 spiritual gifts.

15 I want to read to you Verses 9 through 13. Keep
16 your Bible open to those, but I want to read it from this
17 little Bible I haul around in my car.

18 I take this into hospital rooms and also read it
19 when I go on vacation, because it's a little smaller.

20 This translation is really kind of revealing to me.
21 This is Verses 9 through 13.

22 He says, "Don't just pretend that you love others;
23 really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of
24 the good. Love each other with genuine affection and take
25 delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy in your work,

1 but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is
2 planning for you. Be patient in trouble and always be
3 prayerful. When God's children are in need, be the one to
4 help them out, and get into the habit of inviting guests to
5 your home for dinner, or if they have need of lodging, for
6 the night."

7 That's practical, and it's actual, it's physical,
8 it's just little things.

9 And when that says in there about honoring each
10 other, honoring each other, I don't know what that looks
11 like in your life all the time, but I'm here to
12 prophetically tell you what it doesn't look like in the
13 church, and I'm going to use the metaphor of coffee.

14 We have a crisis in our church, because what coffee
15 has become for some people is an avenue for complaint, and I
16 don't get that.

17 We pride ourselves on serving a decent cup of
18 coffee, but what we've found is that the people who have
19 been around here for a while like to complain and criticize
20 and make a big deal about the coffee ministry.

21 And somebody told me that at a staff meeting. I
22 said, "You have to be joking."

23 "No. If you want an experience, go out there some
24 Sunday morning and serve coffee."

25 Because a lot of the people that get the coffee,

1 it's either too weak, it's too strong, why can't I just have
2 a regular cup of coffee, you have to have all these flavors?
3 Where's the creamer? I can't believe you losers have empty
4 air pots.

5 I just went out there two minutes before the
6 service to get myself a cup of coffee and it was empty.

7 But did I go and criticize and complain and raise
8 holy heck about it?

9 No. Why didn't I? I'll tell you why. It's not
10 about me; it's about Jesus.

11 That's what Romans 12 says. Honor each other, and
12 you don't pull that crap at Starbucks, so why do you pull it
13 at the church? It's free.

14 (Laughter)

15 I'm using that only as a metaphor, and I apologize
16 for saying the word crap, but it is, it stinks.

17 A couple of our people on staff they said, "No, we
18 are not joking."

19 So a couple other staff people said, "I'm going to
20 try it on a Sunday morning."

21 They came back the next Tuesday morning at staff
22 and they said, "It's unbelievable. I don't know why these
23 people even do what they do."

24 That's wrong, guys. The next time somebody gives
25 you a cup of coffee, if it's weak, if it's strong, if it's

1 Kona Blend, if it's Hazelnut Decaf, if there is no creamer,
2 honor that person.

3 They are serving you, and you are serving them.
4 That's not them; that's Jesus.

5 In Matthew, this is what the Bible says about
6 serving each other.

7 Jesus says, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water
8 to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, truly
9 I tell you these will not lose their reward."

10 Cold cup of water, warm, hot, lukewarm cup of
11 coffee, same paradigm, church, they are giving you a gift,
12 and you are to receive that with gladness and eagerness.

13 And, therefore, you are supposed to serve with
14 eagerness and gladness, realizing it's not somebody else
15 you're serving, but you are serving Jesus.

16 You wouldn't talk to Jesus that way, so don't talk
17 to people that are in the body of Christ that way.

18 It's that simple. That is stinking thinking and
19 the aroma does not like that.

20 It is not conducive to growing. It's a little
21 reality check for all us.

22 I'm just using coffee as an example. Somebody else
23 hit me the other day with the fact that those little things
24 are being tracked into the church off of those gorgeous
25 trees.

1 I want to pull my receding hairline out. That's
2 not negative; that's beautiful.

3 Go out and smell the coffee. Go out and smell
4 those trees and their blessings.

5 We have to get beyond this, and that's why I love
6 that translation, when you love somebody, don't just pretend
7 that you love others; really love them.

8 Jessica, can I shake your hand? This is how you
9 love somebody.

10 Good morning? Can we hug? Would that be okay?
11 I'm not going to turn my head away, I'm going to actually
12 thank Jessica for helping me today. This is not pretend.

13 And Jessica and Brittany are helping today. They
14 are serving.

15 But if I'm going to do, "Jessica, how it's going,
16 good to see you," that's not honoring her, and it's not
17 honoring the one who created her, most importantly.

18 And if I do that and I call myself a caring person,
19 that's pretending, and that's unbiblical, it's wrong.

20 And so please look at that in your own life of
21 being there with people, make their day, have fun, be there.

22 When somebody calls out to you, be there. Like JFK
23 said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what
24 you can do for your country."

25 Do the same thing with your Savior. It's not about

1 what can my church do for me. Can you give me a decent cup
2 of coffee? It's what can I do for my Savior?

3 That's what Paul learned. That was part of the
4 change, from being Saul to Paul.

5 That's what it is supposed to be part for being
6 marked, being a child of God, child of the light, not the
7 darkness, because most of the people who come to visit
8 churches are people who are coming and they have hurts.

9 And here is the news flash. We are all in sales;
10 not in management.

11 What is wrong with this coffee? It's not strong
12 enough. It's not weak enough. We think we are in
13 management. We are all in sales.

14 What is God doing in your life? Let me get you a
15 cup of coffee. I don't need mine. Let's think about that.

16 I close with two quotes. One is from Henri
17 Nouwen. He was a Christian theologian, Roman Catholic
18 background, arguably one of the finest authors of the 20th
19 Century.

20 He probably wrote thirty to thirty-five books. One
21 of his most famous was called "The Wounded Healer" and he
22 quit the ministry and he quit publishing for a time as he
23 went to give care to dying people in his own family.

24 So I say that because he wrote about it, he sang
25 about it, and he also did it, and here is the quote.

1 "Seeing how a person slowly becomes aware of his or
2 her own capacities might make us happy for a little while,
3 but that's not enough for a grateful life. A grateful life
4 is a life in which we come to see that the Lord himself is
5 the gift."

6 That's what I am trying to get at with the coffee.
7 It's not a cup of coffee; it's Jesus.

8 And I'm not trying to be heretical about that.
9 This is Jesus here, too, the bread and the wine, but he's
10 born, he's incarnate, he's also coffee and water, and fire,
11 and mustard seeds, and all of those symbols, you see.

12 "The mystery of ministry is that the Lord is found
13 when we minister, not when we are ministered to."

14 Do you catch that?

15 "This is what Jesus tells us when he says, "Insofar
16 as you did it to one of these the least of these my
17 brothers, you did it to me." Our care for people thus
18 becomes the way we meet the Lord. The more we give, the
19 more we help, the more we support, the more we guide,
20 counsel, and visit, the more we receive. That's why it's
21 more blessed to give than to receive, because when you give
22 you receive so much more. When you serve, you are served."

23 It isn't brain surgery, but it's a heart
24 transplant, and it's amazing stuff.

25 "We receive not just the gift, but we receive the

1 Lord himself."

2 Finally, Gene asked me the reason why I have a
3 flashlight on the altar today. I have it on because of my
4 last quote here.

5 "I was cleaning out a desk drawer and I found a
6 flashlight I hadn't used in over a year."

7 This is by Ted Engstrom, "The Pursuit of
8 Excellence" is the name of the book.

9 "I flipped the switch on and I wasn't particularly
10 surprised when it gave out no light. So I unscrewed it and
11 I shook it to get the batteries to come out, but they
12 wouldn't budge.

13 "Finally after some considerable effort they had
14 come loose.

15 "What a mess I discovered. Battery acid had
16 corroded the entire inside of my flashlight.

17 "The batteries were new when I put them in and I
18 stored it in a safe and warm place, but there was one
19 problem.

20 "Those batteries weren't made to be warm, safe, and
21 comfortable. They were designed to be turned on, to be
22 used.

23 "It's the same with us," he writes. "We weren't
24 created to be safe and warm and comfortable. You and I were
25 created to be turned on, to put our love to work, to apply

1 our patience in difficult times and situations and to let
2 our light shine."

3 Steve, can you cut the lights? What I want to do
4 is shine this thing around while I pray, because this I
5 think is even a more powerful metaphor than the coffee.

6 And I would pray for you, not while I'm walking
7 around here, but in your life you would have a little more
8 gratitude and a little more eagerness, that you might
9 discover the gifts, because the gifts, you see, are going to
10 shine the light in somebody else's life.

11 And then when I'm done praying we'll hit the
12 lights, because that's the way it is when the light gets
13 turned on, and then we make a difference in this darkening
14 world.

15 So would you join me as we pray? I'll wander
16 around with my flashlight.

17 Living Jesus, you are not dead. I ask you to take
18 away some of that corrosion, some of that darkness, some of
19 that battery acid that has developed because of lack of use
20 and not being turned on, we confess it, we name it, we claim
21 it.

22 We also, Lord, realize that your blood washes it
23 away. It's more powerful than acid and it brings grace and
24 goodness into our lives anew.

25 Thank you, Lord, for these friends, the body of

1 Christ. It's alive, Lord, and not dead.

2 May we measure our complaints and our criticisms
3 against the standard of your life.

4 For you came not to be served, but to serve, and
5 so, Lord, we receive your light, we engage it today, and we
6 shine in your blessed name forever. Amen.

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