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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
MAY 7, 2006
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: We are beginning a new worship
2 series today through the month of May called "May Day-May
3 Day" and May is fraught with activity for families.

4 I've got a basket on my counter next to my microwave
5 that is almost full of wedding invitations and graduation
6 announcements and invitations.

7 So I know that many of you have a similar basket and
8 it's just that time of year.

9 It's that time to celebrate, and it's fraught with a
10 lot of activity and sometimes it gets a little stressful

11 So our thought was instead of sending out a distress
12 signal that we could talk about living with love and talk
13 about the peace that Jesus gives that the world cannot give.

14 The text that I read today is Jesus is sitting at
15 the table in the upper room with his disciples.

16 That farewell discourse, as I mentioned when I was
17 reading it, is not found in any other part of the Bible, not
18 in any of the other gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.

19 So it's unique to John, and it's a beautiful body of
20 material, because Jesus is taking care.

21 He's taking care with his disciples, and he is
22 telling them that he is going to give them a signal, a sign,
23 if you will.

24 When he leaves he will send the "S" Factor, is what
25 I would like to call it today, the Holy Spirit, because he

1 was telling them as they sat at the table together that he
2 was about ready to walk through a door that was going to be
3 closing and they couldn't follow him, at least not yet.

4 And so in the midst of telling them those
5 frightening things, and we'll look at that in a few moments,
6 and we know they are frightening because they asked all kinds
7 of questions, and he spends time with them, loving them, and
8 answering their questions, as any good rabbi, any good
9 teacher, would do.

10 And he says to them I'm going to go through this
11 door and it's going to close behind me and you can't go
12 there, at least not now.

13 But I'm going to ask the Father to send a signal,
14 the "S" Factor, an advocate, a helper.

15 I like to think of it as a screen door. You have a
16 nice screen door and you open up the metal door, or wood
17 door, whatever kind of door you have, in blows that beautiful
18 spring air

19 And today when you leave the campus, breathe it in.
20 It's such a great air.

21 We have such great sweet air here in Nebraska. I
22 notice that every time I travel.

23 It's just a little bit sweeter. It really is. I
24 don't know if it's the corn or what, but it's sweet air, so
25 breathe that in.

1 What Jesus is promising his disciples is, yes, there
2 is going to be a closed door, but I'm promising you a screen
3 door, where my breath, my life, can come in and give you help
4 and strength and comfort.

5 So in the midst of things that are frightening, he
6 is telling them, promising them some help.

7 Last Tuesday evening I had the privilege, I was
8 invited to be a guest at a concert in Wahoo, Nebraska.

9 Now, I thought this was a fictitious place until I
10 moved to Nebraska, and it's actually just down the road for
11 those of you who aren't from Nebraska and don't know about
12 it.

13 Pam Nygren has lived in Wahoo, Nebraska, for fifty
14 years.

15 She doesn't live there now. She lived fifty years
16 of her life in Wahoo.

17 I have driven through Wahoo, but I have not ever had
18 this experience.

19 So we are driving, it's a beautiful spring evening,
20 last Tuesday evening, we are driving over there and she's
21 saying, "Right down there is the house that I grew up in.
22 Just down that road is where the farm was."

23 We get into Wahoo and she said, "That's where my
24 sister lives and my mom lives down the street. That's where
25 Brad and I lived when we were first married, and I went to

1 7th grade in that old building. Did you know, Wenda, that
2 used to be Luther College in Wahoo?"

3 I said, "No. That old building used to be Luther?"

4 She is giving me a history lesson.

5 The concert was at the elementary school, and she
6 knew I would enjoy it, it's the Dallas Brass.

7 They are famous, they're a quintet and they're just
8 excellent and I thought how in heck did they get to Wahoo?

9 It turns out the guy who founded the group, his
10 mother is from Omaha, so they had a Nebraska connection.

11 Anyway, we get to the street right outside the
12 elementary school and there are cars everywhere.

13 I'm thinking wow, the whole town is turning out for
14 this event.

15 And Pam rolled down her window, because there is a
16 parking attendant, and the parking attendant calls her by
17 name.

18 "Hi, Pam, how are you doing?"

19 And I'm going wow.

20 And we get out of the car and we're walking across
21 the parking lot, people are going, "Pam," and she's calling
22 out, "Hi," I can't remember the names now, but she's calling
23 out their names, "How are you?"

24 And we get into the elementary school and it was
25 like I was with a celebrity.

1 Everybody knew Pam and Pam knew everybody. She
2 would look across and she would say there is so and so. It
3 was unbelievable.

4 And I kind of came to, I thought this is small town
5 America, this is what it's like, where people know your name,
6 and you know where everybody lives, and you know more than
7 that even, right?

8 But that sense of belonging, that sense of identity,
9 that small town feeling of someone knows my name, they're
10 calling out my name, I belong here, this is home to me,
11 intimacy, identity, belonging, love, that's what so many
12 people get from living in a small town.

13 And those are the things that the human spirit
14 craves, aren't they?

15 We want someone to know our name. We want someone
16 to call out.

17 It feels good when someone says, "Hey, Wenda," that
18 sense of belonging, that sense of someone else loving us,
19 that sense of intimacy and identity, those are things our
20 human spirit craves.

21 But do you know that not even a small town, not even
22 the feel of a small town or that experience can deliver the
23 kind of closeness that Jesus, our Lord, can deliver.

24 And that is what he's telling his disciples in the
25 text for today.

1 I invite you to take out your Bibles and let's have
2 a look at that.

3 There are some things I noticed this time as I was
4 preparing the message that I had not seen before, and maybe
5 you'll pick up something as well.

6 Jesus is at the table with his disciples. It's his
7 farewell discourse and he is telling his disciples that he
8 knows that their spirits crave intimacy.

9 And he knows that they have enjoyed being with him
10 for the last three years

11 And he can tell that they're getting upset because
12 he's telling them that he's going away.

13 It begins at Verse 31 in Chapter 13. "So when he
14 had gone out," meaning Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus, then
15 Jesus starts discourse and that's where it begins, in 13:31
16 and it goes through 17:26, a beautiful body of text. It's
17 just beautiful.

18 But you can tell that the disciples are frightened,
19 because, look at Verse 36.

20 "Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you
21 going?"

22 "Jesus answered, "Where I am going to go, you cannot
23 follow me now."

24 But where, Lord, where are you going? What are you
25 talking about?

1 I mean, they have been through this before. This is
2 what is always amazing to me.

3 But this really shows to me how our human spirit
4 longs to have closeness, longs to have intimacy, longs to
5 have identity, to be known by someone, because they are
6 worried.

7 Chapter 14, Verse 2, Jesus answers back with a
8 question.

9 "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go
10 to prepare a place for you?"

11 He's being a loving parent here, or a loving older
12 brother, actually.

13 Remember what I told you? So he's answering back
14 with questions, but they are not consoled.

15 In Verse 5 Thomas says, "Lord, we don't know where
16 you are you going. How can we know the way?"

17 In Verse 8 Phillip says, "Lord, show us."

18 They are concerned, and Jesus is answering their
19 questions, and that's where we come in.

20 Today's text is Verse 22, Judas Thaddeus is asking
21 him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and
22 not to the world?"

23 And Jesus answers him, "Those who love me will keep
24 my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to
25 them and make our home with them."

1 So after these questions that clearly reveal that
2 the disciples are frightened, he pauses and he loves them and
3 he comforts them and gives them these words.

4 And so I want to look at these words that he gives
5 just a little bit.

6 When he says, "Those who love me will keep my word,"
7 that word right there, "word", that's not like a commandment;
8 it's not like a specific teaching.

9 It's a fat word. The word is logia and it means a
10 lot of things.

11 It means, what he's really saying, is it's not about
12 like just keeping the commandments, it's not about like
13 obeying certain things that Jesus says to do; it's a way of
14 life, is what he's saying, because love, this love, this word
15 logia, keep my word, keep my logia, means live with love,
16 really.

17 In all of your actions, in all of your attitudes,
18 live with love. In everything you do and say, do it with
19 love.

20 I like how The Message Bible in Colossians 3, it
21 talks about love being an all purpose garment.

22 Put on love and never be without this all purpose
23 garment.

24 I love that image, go ahead and put on other things,
25 but dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you, number one,

1 that you wear love as an all purpose garment.

2 I love the way that is said, but that's what Jesus
3 is saying here.

4 It's not about just keeping the commandments and
5 being focused; it's fluid.

6 This mandate is fluid. It applies to all
7 situations, all nations, all hearts, all families, all
8 relationships. Live with love is what he's saying in that

9 And this is the part that I wanted to point out to
10 you.

11 In Verse 24, first of all Jesus says if you love me,
12 and you live with love, and you love one another, my Father
13 and I will come to you, and we'll make our home with you.

14 That's what we want. That's what every human spirit
15 desires, is to be at home somewhere, where someone knows our
16 name and calls it out and loves us even though we've done
17 something or not done something.

18 That's what every human spirit craves and Jesus
19 knows that, so these are words of comfort for the disciples.

20 He says I'll make my home with you, and not only me,
21 but the Father will make his home with you.

22 But then look at Verse 24. "Whoever does not love
23 me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not
24 mine, but is from the Father who sent me."

25 What Jesus is saying, he's clear here, those who do

1 not live with love, those who do not love others, as I love
2 them, I won't make a home with them.

3 That's what it says. That was something I had
4 missed before and I wanted to point that out.

5 Now, it's hard to love sometimes, and Jesus says
6 what good is it if you love those who love you?

7 Anybody can do that, but I want you to love those
8 who don't love you.

9 So this is for everyone in every situation, every
10 time and place, and every heart.

11 It's a fluid word. It's a fluid mandate.

12 So we have help, we know it's hard, and that's what
13 I love about 25.

14 He promises it twice. Jump back up to Verse 16.
15 "And I will ask the Father and he will give you another
16 advocate to be with you forever. This is the spirit of
17 truth."

18 Verse 25 and 26, "I have said these things to you
19 while I am still here, but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
20 whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you
21 everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."

22 In other words, we have help, and I like the words
23 that he gives us: Advocate, helper, counselor. Comforter is
24 another one.

25 From the Amplified Bible, which I sometimes like to

1 read, there are these two, which are awesome, strengthener
2 and stand-by.

3 He will stand right alongside of us. He will
4 strengthen us and he will strengthen what we have known, what
5 we have heard, he'll strengthen that in us so that we can do
6 what he asks us to do.

7 It's kind of cool, because he asks us to do
8 something and then he gives us the means to do it.

9 Because he says I don't want to leave you alone, I
10 don't want to leave you orphaned, and he's trying to help
11 them understand that, yes, this has been great and
12 everything, and I've enjoyed it, too, being with you for the
13 last three years, but I'm only one person.

14 So if the Father sends the Spirit, then my spirit
15 can be in everyone and it can be in all the world.

16 It can be in you. That's the promise. The Holy
17 Spirit is for all of us, so that we can know the love of
18 Jesus Christ right inside of us and right beside us as the
19 stand-by, and as the strengthener.

20 I don't know if you have seen the spring issue of
21 "The Jar", the article on the front page of "The Jar", it
22 comes through email and it's on the web site.

23 "The Jar" is an outreach tool at Bethany. It's not
24 necessarily about inside communication, and we are working on
25 that, by the way, we are working on that one.

1 The council leaders just met yesterday. We know
2 that it's important that you know what is going on inside
3 this church.

4 We want to be in balance with our worship, with
5 people inside the church, but also people outside.

6 Jill was hired to do outreach, and she puts out a
7 Bethany publication called "The Jar".

8 And she interviewed Teri Osbon-Kitzelman, our
9 current director of administration, and her title is "God Is
10 At Work On Us, Time To Be Nice".

11 Teri writes, "My mom grew up on a farm near Howells,
12 Nebraska, with nine brothers and sisters and many cousins.

13 "Grandma Sophie always told the kids, be nice to
14 each other. That was how they were raised."

15 She writes, "What a pearl of wisdom."

16 And then something that kind of surprised me as I
17 was reading down the article, she actually speculates on what
18 it's going to be like when we get to the pearly gates,
19 whether or not we have been nice.

20 She kind of puts a few questions in there.

21 Interesting.

22 She says, "I can almost hear God saying, you forgot
23 your family; you forgot your neighbor. What did you give
24 back? Did you make someone's day? Did you give the hug that
25 was needed? Did you slow down and listen to the response

1 when someone said how are you? Did you make a difference?
2 Were you nice?"

3 She has some pearls of wisdom there, doesn't she?
4 Very simple, but it's not easy.

5 Our life in Christ is simple, really, but it's not
6 easy.

7 I thought it was neat that she said that God is at
8 work on us; she didn't say in us.

9 Her title doesn't say in us; it says work on us, and
10 indeed he is.

11 He wants to work on us so that we can live with love
12 and know that he is within us, as well as helping us as a
13 strengthener, a stand-by, comforter and counselor, because he
14 knows we can't do it on our own.

15 I'm grateful that Teri reminded us of Grandma
16 Sophie's wisdom.

17 It's the same kind of wisdom that Jesus was teaching
18 in his farewell discourse.

19 Live with love, live with love, live with love, and
20 it begs the question, and this is what I said earlier, will
21 the church welcome its role as a living, breathing, healing,
22 helping organism?

23 Organism; not organization. It is an organism.
24 It's fluid. It moves. It's alive. It's not an
25 organization. It's a body of people.

1 I like to come into this church, this worship
2 center, when it's empty.

3 But it is so different without you. I am always
4 struck by the emptiness of this shell when you aren't here,
5 because you are the body of Christ.

6 And together we are called to live with love, and to
7 love on one another, and to love the world that Jesus came to
8 save.

9 So that is the question. So many churches are known
10 for their judgment, and not their love, not their acts of
11 love, and we want to be known as a people who live with love,
12 who are known for our acts of love in this place.

13 I want to introduce you to Karen Kloster, and there
14 are other people that have been down to Bolivia before.

15 Would you come up and stand by Karen? She's going
16 to talk to us about the work of the Holy Spirit in her life.

17 I asked Karen to speak to the work of the Holy
18 Spirit in her life.

19 These folks either have been or they are going down
20 to make a difference in the world, because, see, the "S"
21 Factor, the Holy Spirit, is what makes all of the difference
22 in the world

23 And those of us who have been down before,
24 Christina, Jen and I, Barb and John, we can tell you straight
25 out that the only way we could do that is in the power of the

1 Spirit, because it's just not like where we live.

2 You saw it in the pictures. It's not at all like
3 where we live.

4 Those kids don't live at all like we live, and it's
5 just amazing, and yet they showed us love, and that's why
6 it's awesome to make that exchange.

7 I've asked Karen to talk about the work of the Holy
8 Spirit in her life, and actually I kind of interviewed her
9 for it.

10 She told me that the Holy Spirit will come to any
11 one of us when we ask him, and that the Holy Spirit will
12 change our hearts and our minds and our actions.

13 And she said that when you allow the Holy Spirit to
14 live in you, you're going to live a very exciting and
15 rewarding life. I know you believe that.

16 MS. KLOSTER: Yes, I do. The Holy Spirit opens my
17 eyes to see things that I have never seen before.

18 He takes and allows me to take ordinary things in
19 life and he makes them extraordinary, and he opens doors that
20 wouldn't be possible without him.

21 PASTOR FRY: When I asked her about that, I said,
22 "Did you know we kept the doors up from Easter?"

23 She said, "No, I didn't know that."

24 So we knew where to go, because, as she said, he
25 opens up doors.

1 somebody else, and that's what you saw in Karen.

2 I got a huge kick out of the fact that she told me,
3 "I can't believe I'm going to Bolivia. I've never even been
4 to Kansas City," and she's open, and so that is what God is
5 asking us to be, is open, and to live with love.

6 Let's pray about doing that as a community of love.

7 Thank you, Lord. Thank you for the privilege of
8 being called by your name, Christian, and for the promise of
9 the Holy Spirit.

10 Apart from you we cannot do anything. We try
11 sometimes without your help and it just ends in disaster.

12 Words cannot express today our gratitude for giving
13 us the help we need to be your disciples.

14 We pray that you would well up inside us now and
15 send your power and your peace, because we know the world,
16 even a small town, can't give the peace that we long for, the
17 belonging that we long for.

18 But you, Lord, you are the prince of peace. We take
19 a moment and just breathe in your peace, and your mercy, and
20 thank you for this moment to sit in your love.

21 We want to be people of love. Help us. Help us.
22 In your name we pray. Amen.

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