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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
MAY 8, 2005
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: We have been in a spiritual
2 adventure. We're on day 36 and for those of you who have
3 been holding out on buying an journal, I know why, because
4 now they are half price.

5 You can get a journal today, even yet today, they
6 are \$3.50, and some of you paid \$7.00, but they are on sale
7 this week and for the next three weeks actually.

8 I read in the journal this past week, a suggestion
9 in the journal was that you could buy another one and then
10 start again working on another spiritual habit.

11 Our hope and prayer for you is that this has been a
12 time of accelerated spiritual growth.

13 But if the only thing that you take away from this
14 adventure, if you take away only one spiritual insight that
15 is, Pastor Mark and I hope that that spiritual insight is
16 the recognition that our Lord Jesus Christ is present with
17 us every day, every hour, every moment.

18 We have been praying for you, that the scales fall
19 off your eyes and your ears become unmuted so that you can
20 hear his voice.

21 We have been praying that your spiritual eyes are
22 getting a clearer vision of the unseen Christ in our midst.

23 Because when we recognize that Jesus Christ is in
24 our midst it changes how we do life.

25 The first week when we started talking about the

1 unseen Christ and how his life transforms our lives, we
2 talked about the fact that it would change our singing if we
3 realized that Christ was sitting in one of these pews.

4 Of course, he is, and I think it has helped changed
5 our singing a bit and our worship.

6 But it changes the way we do life when we practice
7 the presence of Christ.

8 When we drive in our van and car on the way to work
9 and we have Jesus Christ invited in the passenger seat, and
10 we start talking to him, who cares what the world has to
11 say.

12 They might look at your car and say he or she is
13 talking to herself, but we know different.

14 Christians are supposed to be in the world, but not
15 of the world.

16 When we practice the presence of Christ it changes
17 how our drive goes. It can change it.

18 When we always leave an empty chair at our table of
19 fellowship, I hope you do that, I hope that you don't take
20 the chairs away when you don't have enough.

21 Leave an empty chair for our Lord. Remember that
22 childhood prayer?

23 Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts
24 to us be blessed.

25 I hope you're leaving an empty chair, because it

1 changes how you do conversation at the table if you realize
2 that Jesus is right there listening to your every word. It
3 changes the way we do life with one another.

4 So we hope that you are gaining some spiritual
5 insight, but mostly recognizing that Jesus Christ is present
6 with you on your daily walk.

7 At the 7:45 service today and the 5:30 service last
8 night, the services that we have in the chapel, we sang that
9 old Easter song "In The Garden".

10 "And he walks with me and he talks with me and he
11 tells me I am his own," some great words, "and the voice I
12 hear is so clear," that's what our Lord and our God wants
13 each and every one of us to know.

14 He walks with us and He talks with us in our daily
15 life.

16 So when we practice the presence of Christ in our
17 midst, we do a lot of things different.

18 We talk different, we say things different, we sing
19 and pray differently.

20 It would be inconceivable, wouldn't it, if we
21 imagined our Lord with us each and every day and we wouldn't
22 talk to him. That would be strange, wouldn't it?

23 So today I want to focus on that walking and
24 talking, talking to our Lord Jesus Christ.

25 Because when we talk to him on a daily basis we

1 practice his presence with us.

2 Today I want to talk about authentic prayer. Now,
3 one of the reasons, not a lot of people do this, but some of
4 the reasons that people come to church is that they like to
5 encounter something other than their human world.

6 They want to encounter the supernatural. They want
7 to experience anew the wonder of the living Christ, and
8 that's awesome and that's a good reason to come to church.

9 But authentic prayer is more than going through the
10 motions.

11 Believers who practice the presence of Christ, they
12 experience authentic prayer.

13 It's not about going through the motion. It's not
14 about holding your hands and bowing your head every time.

15 It's naming our mothers and smiling as we hear
16 saying Ion, that was that came out at 7:45 service, Iva,
17 Elise, Ruth, Jackie, Shelly, that was prayer.

18 We were remembering with love and affection, even
19 though our eyes were wide open and we were smiling and
20 listening, that was authentic prayer.

21 Today I want to talk about, in view of the words of
22 the Lord's Prayer, talk about what Jesus was really getting
23 at.

24 It's about a relationship. It's not about saying
25 those words in church every time. It's about a relationship

1 of prayer.

2 One of the things that I do when I am going to
3 speak on the weekend is I ask God on Sunday and Monday to
4 put people in my path throughout the week, people that he
5 wants me to connect with, people that he wants me to have
6 experiences with so that I can share them with you and share
7 our conversation.

8 And I always marvel. God answers my prayer every
9 time I do that.

10 This past week Russ sat across from me in my
11 office.

12 I introduced you to Russ during the Wednesday
13 services leading up to Easter.

14 I should say Russ allowed me to talk about him. He
15 gave me permission to talk about one of his faith struggles.

16 And he has been weary at his present place of
17 employment. Some of you who were at the Wednesday service
18 remember that.

19 Russ started reading the book "If You Want To Walk
20 On Water You Have To Get Out Of The Boat".

21 When he came to talk to me in February he didn't
22 know what his boat was and his countenance was very clouded
23 and troubled.

24 This past week when he sat down in one of my office
25 chairs his countenance was full of light and peace.

1 "I have good news," he said.

2 He had a big smile on his face.

3 "I know what my boat is. I finally figured out
4 what my boat is and I now know that I can get out of that
5 boat, now that I know what it is, and walk on water."

6 As Jesus did, not just Peter, not just Russ, but
7 each and every one of us, to get out of your boat and walk
8 on water and trust that he will take care of all our needs.

9 Russ said to me, "Wenda, it's not about going
10 through the motions anymore for me," and I'm logging that,
11 because I'm thinking I had just written that down in my
12 message, I had just written that word, it's not about
13 prayer, it's not about going through the motions, and then
14 Russ says that to me.

15 That's what I mean, and Russ has given us our first
16 definition, he is teaching us what authentic prayer is.

17 It's not about going through the motions. It's not
18 about being very religious and saying all the right words.

19 It's not about that at all. It's about trusting in
20 God.

21 Russ is the type of guy that likes to get up early
22 in the morning and he uses that time on the treadmill and
23 lifting weights for his prayer time.

24 If any of you wonder where and when you can fit in
25 your prayer time, that's an excellent time to do it.

1 When you are on the treadmill, when you are
2 swimming laps, where you are lifting weights, this rep is
3 for Jenny, who is sick, what a great way to strengthen your
4 spiritual life while you are strengthening your physical
5 body.

6 Remember what Pastor Mark taught us last week?
7 It's physical, and if we ever doubt that all we need to do
8 is look at that rugged cross.

9 That was not a spiritual experience for Jesus on
10 the cross when he was dying for us.

11 It was physical and any scientist can explain
12 exactly how that went and everything that happened inside
13 his body. He physically died for us.

14 It's a physical life, this Christian life. That's
15 why when Jesus was teaching on this earth he picked up a
16 mustard seed, or picked off a fig leaf, and gave it to the
17 disciples to feel.

18 It's a physical life. That's why we get the bread,
19 so we can feel it, and smell the wine, it's physical. It's
20 not about going through the motions.

21 And Russ prays, he has been praying daily on that
22 treadmill and asking the Lord to show him what to do next.

23 He said he prays almost hourly, moment-by-moment,
24 and it was so good to see his countenance, so good to hear
25 him say, "I know what it is," and God will deliver, because

1 it's not about going through the motions; it's about a daily
2 communion with Him.

3 I have this pocket prayer book that I keep in my
4 purse.

5 It was given to me by Leola, Mark's paternal
6 grandmother. It was given to her by her mother. So it's
7 pretty old.

8 The copyright is 1908. It's in great shape. There
9 are some beautiful prayers in here.

10 There is one called "For Morning Praise" that
11 really aptly describes exactly what prayer is about.

12 "Dear Lord, I thank you that I can awake in the
13 morning," has that beautiful old English, the thee and thou,
14 "I thank you that I can awake in the morning and turn my
15 face toward thy face and believe that thou art looking into
16 mine. I do not understand, Dear Christ, and yet I have a
17 feeling that thou art near, a mystic feeling, an inner
18 consciousness, a warming of my spirit. No, I do not
19 understand, and yet this grows to be the richest experience
20 of my life. Like the sunrise shining through my eastern
21 window, so thy presence comes with the dawn of day. Oh may
22 I allow no disobedience to thee to hinder our communion all
23 this day."

24 Thou art near; mystic feeling; inner consciousness;
25 warming of my spirit.

1 JOHN: As I was growing up I attended church
2 regularly because I went to private schools and I went
3 through the motions that I was told to go through.

4 And then about twenty years ago I joined the
5 service and I was alone and afraid and I was given the
6 opportunity about three weeks into basic to attend a
7 service.

8 And so I went to a service and while I was there,
9 immediately when I went inside and the service began I felt
10 an overwhelming sense of warmth and comfort.

11 And it was at that point that I realized that I was
12 going to make it through.

13 Then as the years went on I simply turned to prayer
14 whenever I needed help, and it was a cycle where I just
15 continued to pray God would help me.

16 And then I would go back to my old pattern of not
17 praying and things wouldn't go so well.

18 About a year ago when I started at Bethany I began
19 to pray every day and things, and you can ask people that
20 know me, things in my life began to change.

21 I'm a much more peaceful person, easier to get
22 along with, more patient.

23 And I come to church now and I still get that
24 feeling that I had twenty years ago when I come to Bethany.
25 It's the warmth and the love that I feel here.

1 God gives us the gift of tears, just one of the
2 gifts God gives us, to cleanse the lens so that we can see
3 our way forward in faith a lot more clearly.

4 And I really appreciate it when a tough guy like
5 that admits to his sisters and brothers in Christ that he
6 cries in church sometimes.

7 He said last week in Fremont a church was holding a
8 get a cup of coffee and a prayer.

9 So he drives in this church, this is great idea, I
10 would like to do this, offer a cup through the window and
11 pray for the person in their car, what a fantastic idea.

12 John pulls up in the police car and everybody
13 stops, oh-oh, you know, but John pulls up to the window,
14 "Can we help you, "Officer?"

15 "Yes. I want a cup of coffee and a prayer."

16 They relax, they had the prayer, and it was a great
17 story. Thanks, John, so much.

18 The words in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6, let's
19 take our Bibles out and look at that.

20 I want to point out a couple more things. It's
21 about relationship.

22 It's about having that realization and recognition
23 that that warm feeling, that is if we have given ourselves
24 to our Lord, it's early in the day, if we awaken and say I
25 see your face, Jesus, and I see you looking into mine, if we

1 have given our day over to the Lord in the way that morning
2 praise prayer did, we can count on God walking and talking
3 with us.

4 We can count on the things that other people say to
5 us as perhaps the Lord speaking to us.

6 If we haven't, then we can say that's just what
7 Jenny said to me, or that's just what Mark said to me.

8 But if we have commended our day, this is what is
9 fun about being Christian, I think, it's what is awesome
10 about the journey, that when you give it over to him, you
11 can hear some incredible things.

12 He will walk and talk and the sound of his voice
13 will be clear.

14 Matthew 6, I want to point out a couple of things
15 about this teaching of Jesus.

16 Always when we look at the scripture, we look at
17 what is around the scripture.

18 And that's why sometimes we don't say the words of
19 the Lord's Prayer at Bethany.

20 We don't say them, you'll notice, every Sunday,
21 because I don't want you to get into the habit of using
22 those words without really thinking about it.

23 It's so easy to say them without realizing it, and
24 it's important to see that Jesus was teaching about prayer
25 in and amongst other things.

1 When we read the scripture we always look at what
2 is around it and what the old words mean.

3 And look at 5 through 7 for just a moment. Jesus
4 said I don't want you to be like the hypocrites.

5 In other words, that word for hypocrite is I don't
6 want you to be phony.

7 I don't want you to put a mask on and only pray
8 when others see you.

9 In other words, you guys, don't just do it in
10 church.

11 Let other people find you in times of stress and
12 need and defeat, let them find you, find yourself in prayer
13 then, not just in church, and that's what the scripture is
14 really about.

15 It's about the relationship. It's about turning to
16 God and having all day long communion in all those different
17 kinds of times.

18 We often forget that. We think the Lord's Prayer
19 belongs in church.

20 But what Jesus is teaching is here is how I want
21 you to depend on me.

22 That's what the Lord's prayer is all about. You
23 can depend on me for every single need of yours.

24 Verse 7 where it says when you are praying don't
25 heap up empty phrases, in other words, it's not about words;

1 it's about a relationship.

2 And when you pray you are supposed to go into your
3 closet and shut the door.

4 That phrase, go into your room and shut the door
5 and do it in secret, what that means is, it doesn't just
6 mean your closet, although that's not a bad place either, it
7 means every place that others might not see you.

8 Your bedroom, your living room, your locker, right
9 when you are in the school hallway, there.

10 It doesn't mean just someplace like this where
11 people could see you.

12 It means all the places in your life where people
13 probably wouldn't see you and they aren't watching. That's
14 when God wants you to talk to him.

15 Yes, in church, too, this is good, our fellowship
16 strengthens our faith, we need to come here, but this is
17 about a relationship.

18 Verse 9 when Jesus says pray like this then, "Our
19 Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," use that for a
20 springboard, disciples, so you say that and you stop and you
21 tell God how great he is, you are holy, you are mighty, you
22 are loving, you are full of grace.

23 Thank you for loving me and calling me by name.
24 You use that as a springboard.

25 "Your kingdom come. Your will be done."

1 I love Martin Luther's explanation of this part of
2 the petition.

3 Luther says God's kingdom is going to come whether
4 we pray for it or not.

5 God's will is going to be done whether we ask for
6 it to be done or not.

7 That's what I love about Luther. He has such
8 intuition about these things, such a scholar.

9 But he says in this prayer we ask that it might
10 happen in our hearts.

11 See, it's about relationship. We pray that your
12 will, your way, you will have your way with me is what we
13 are praying when we say your kingdom come, your will be
14 done. It's not about something out there.

15 "Give us this day our daily bread."

16 Favorable weather, friends and family, food,
17 shelter, these are all the things that mean daily bread.

18 So you could stop there, disciples, and say thank
19 you, Lord, for Mother's Day. Thank you for my mother.
20 Thank you for the good and the bad we had in our
21 relationship, help me to sort out that which is charitable
22 and that which isn't.

23 Daily bread means all those relationships and all
24 that which sustains us in life.

25 So you can stop there and jump off and pray and

1 thank God for all the blessings.

2 And, of course, then in Matthew in particular he
3 really hones in on forgiveness.

4 Because, as it says in 14 and 15, one cannot expect
5 a relationship with the Father unless all is right with
6 other people.

7 So we are able to forgive others, we need to
8 forgive others, because we have been forgiven, and think
9 what we've done.

10 And if you can't forgive someone yet, then you
11 commend them to Christ.

12 Christ, would you please forgive them for me
13 because I can't quite yet do it.

14 That's how flexible our Lord and our God is, but
15 it's he, it's he in our life to forgive others if they have
16 offended or hurt us that is key, because our relationship
17 with God then is distorted, unless it's right with others.
18 That's what Jesus teaches in 12 and expounds on it in 14
19 and 15.

20 Just a few nuggets. Mostly what I want you to
21 remember about this is that it's about a relationship. Our
22 Father in heaven.

23 It's about everything we need today, about
24 depending on our great God for everything in this life.

25 You heard John share and I am going to ask

1 Christina to come up now and if she would share.

2 Christina is another newer member of the family of
3 faith here at Bethany.

4 Christina is the coordinator of youth discipleship
5 here at Bethany and she's also going on the Bolivia trip.

6 And she told us the other night that she also grew
7 up in a very religious family and I want her to tell about
8 it.

9 CHRISTINA: I grew up in a Catholic family. My
10 mother wanted to be a nun and my father wanted to be a
11 priest, I don't know how it happened but they got steered
12 off that course.

13 I loved going to mass and I didn't realize that
14 until I got older because when you are younger you feel like
15 you are forced to go to church, or I did.

16 But I love now the candles. I was telling Pastor
17 Wenda I love the candles and I love the hymns and I love all
18 of that, but I still wasn't feeling connected to God until
19 when I had my son.

20 And my son is the most precious gift that God could
21 have ever given me and he's the reason why I am the person
22 that I am.

23 He's the reason why I want to go to Bolivia and
24 help these children, help these little boys that don't have
25 mothers, that just need someone to show them that they love

1 you.

2 My place that I feel God is just through the
3 simplest things.

4 Water, I love to pray by water, I love to pray out
5 in nature, and that's where I feel God.

6 It's not always just in church, it's just by being
7 what God gives us in the gift of life every day.

8 PASTOR FRY: Thank you, Christina.

9 (Applause)

10 I love what Christina said about prayer, and I'm
11 just going to quote her.

12 "I pray silently in everything I do. Prayer for me
13 is very peaceful. It is my conversation with a friend, so
14 I'm prayerful in all that I do."

15 One of the things that I was really struck by when
16 Christina spoke the other night was the fact that she spent
17 a time in her life, an exhausting time in her life, when she
18 thought she would find the closeness to God in the church.

19 She kept going from church to church and it wasn't
20 until she realized that it wasn't necessary, she craved a
21 relationship with her maker and redeemer, and I don't know
22 if this happened to you when you were sitting on the banks
23 and overlooking the water, but you realized that God had
24 been speaking to you all along in your life and you just had
25 not been listening, and then she attested that the birth of

1 her son brought new life.

2 And I love what she told us the other night. She
3 said, "God says to me every day, Christina, are you going to
4 trust me today or not?"

5 Disciples, this is authentic prayer. It's all day
6 long communion with our God who made us and who loves us and
7 redeems us.

8 It's not about this building. This is good. We
9 need to come in here and hear our stories and share them
10 together because it strengthens us.

11 We are not alone, and I really commend John and
12 Christina today for coming forward and sharing.

13 It's hard to talk about these things, but I think
14 when we do we are strengthened.

15 It's such a privilege. It's holy ground when we
16 talk about how much our Lord and our God means to each and
17 every one of us.

18 It's a privilege to look for him all the day long,
19 and we need to continue to ask God to take away the scales
20 from our eyes and unmute our ears so that we, like John and
21 Christina, can hear what he's telling us; like Russ can get
22 out of the boat because he has heard what God is saying to
23 him.

24 Let's pray about being in tune with our Lord Jesus
25 Christ.

1 Lord, I thank you so much for the faith stories
2 that were shared today through Russ and John and Christina.

3 I thank you for their willingness to come forward
4 and I know it wasn't easy for them, but it's so important
5 that we share our stories with one another, because then we
6 begin to look for you in new ways.

7 I pray for each and every heart here today, that
8 they might see you anew this week, that they might hear you,
9 and if they need to get out of a boat that they might jump
10 out and take your hand and trust that you will hold them up
11 as they walk on water with you.

12 Thank you, Lord. Each and every one of us are in
13 need of your prayers for us.

14 We are thankful that you pray for us while we work
15 and wait and watch and sleep.

16 Thank you, Jesus, for being our living Savior. In
17 your holy name, amen.

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