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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

MAY 15, 2005

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: There's a lot of fear and sorrow  
2 in our world today, not only in the nighttime, but right in  
3 broad daylight.

4 And that's why it's important that we introduce  
5 Jesus Christ and the light of the world to other people and  
6 that's what I'm going to talk about today.

7 We have been on a fifty day spiritual adventure  
8 called "Seeing The Unseen Christ; How His Presence  
9 Transforms Our Life".

10 We have been asking Christ to help us see his real  
11 presence among us, because seeing is believing, right?

12 Believing that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is  
13 with us, is risen, and is, as he said he would be, out on  
14 the road ahead of us.

15 He's in your work places, in your play spaces,  
16 every day of your life.

17 We have been asking the Lord to help us see his  
18 presence, not with our natural eyes so much but with our  
19 spiritual eyes of faith.

20 And when we encounter the risen Christ, when we  
21 believe with faith that he is with us, then it will  
22 naturally compel us to want to introduce him to other  
23 people.

24 When I speak of introducing Christ to others, I  
25 realize that there is a potential for great anxiety, when we

1 think about, oh, no, I have to share my faith with someone  
2 else, we begin to think how we are not equipped, or we might  
3 embarrass ourselves, or we might not do the right thing, or  
4 say the right thing.

5 But my intention this morning is not to produce  
6 more anxiety.

7 Neither is it to produce any guilt if you have not  
8 or I have not been doing it as often as we are called to do  
9 it.

10 But hopefully what I'm speaking about today will be  
11 helpful to you.

12 If you are doing the journal, the action step for  
13 this past week is living a lighthouse lifestyle.

14 And I want to read to you from that action step the  
15 description of what it means to means to live a  
16 lighthouse lifestyle.

17 I like this. It's a fresh perspective on sharing  
18 our faith.

19 "The unseen Christ isn't content to be contained in  
20 our places of worship. He wants to make his presence known  
21 wherever his people go. Much like a lighthouse we are  
22 called to signal direction to those lost in a spiritual fog,  
23 in danger of eternal peril. Between Sundays, at work and in  
24 our neighborhoods, our lives are to be beams that bear  
25 witness to the transforming presence of Jesus. According to

1 scripture he desires to illuminate his world through us.  
2 Through an ongoing process of prayer and care, opportunities  
3 should naturally arise for Christians to share the good news  
4 of Jesus naturally and understandably. The end result,  
5 lives guided safely into the harbor of God's love."

6 Now we know we want that for other people. We want  
7 it for ourselves.

8 We want that hole in the world to be less big, the  
9 holes in our lives, the holes in our hearts, and the holes  
10 in our communities and in our world today.

11 So we know that this is a great idea, but how to do  
12 it, and how to do it effectively, that's what I want to talk  
13 about today.

14 When was the last time that you felt compelled to  
15 do something for someone else and you got a strong burst of  
16 energy and just got it done, and you did it because you were  
17 convicted, you were compelled to do it.

18 That kind of energy, I don't know what you are  
19 thinking of, but everybody is probably thinking of a  
20 different thing, that kind of energy is what we need to  
21 transfer into sharing our faith with other people.

22 Because if we are convinced that Jesus is alive, if  
23 we have been looking for him and imagining that his bodily  
24 presence is with us as we worship and sing, if we have been  
25 remembering that prayer is like breathing, it's to be as

1 natural as breathing, and we are beginning to see some  
2 differences in our lives, then we are going to want to share  
3 his light and his love with other people.

4 We are not going to be able to be quiet about it.  
5 We are going to be compelled to do that.

6 There are graduates in our midst, graduate parents  
7 in our midst today, and I'm a graduate parent myself, and  
8 last week, I think it was on my third trip to Ace Hardware  
9 and Diane Scott, employee, good friend of Bethany, she said,  
10 "You must have a graduate, Wenda."

11 I said, "How can you tell?"

12 "You guys just have a look in your eyes."

13 A look of determination as we go back down, I don't  
14 know what I was asking her to find for me, I was there on my  
15 third trip, getting the potting soil that time, and masking  
16 tape for the paint job, and then that paint job of course  
17 leads to another paint job, right, graduate parents?  
18 Because one thing leads to the next.

19 Diane said, "Wenda, parents are actually asking me  
20 do you think it will matter if I don't paint that wall? Do  
21 you think they are going to notice the scratch in the  
22 bathroom?"

23 And I said, "Wow, they are even consulting you?"

24 And she said, "Yes, it's just amazing."

25 I said, "How about you? Did you do that when your

1 kids graduated?"

2 She said, "Of course."

3 We all do, and why do we do that for our parties,  
4 our graduation parties?

5 Because out of love and respect for our graduates  
6 we want them to feel special that day.

7 We want other people to see how their lives have  
8 progressed.

9 That's why we are going through all those  
10 pictures -- and you professional scrapbookers out there just  
11 keep quiet -- you don't have to comment about that.

12 (Laughter)

13 But it's exhausting, because you laugh and you cry,  
14 and it's just exhausting being a graduate mom or dad.

15 But we do that, we prepare, we remodel, we get our  
16 parties ready because we are compelled out of love and  
17 respect for our graduates.

18 It's the same thing, we could transfer that same  
19 kind of energy, that same kind of love, to sharing our faith  
20 with other people.

21 If we are convinced that kids like this made a  
22 difference in our life, then we are going to be compelled  
23 out of love and respect for our Lord to share and introduce  
24 him to others.

25 I like that phrase, introducing him to others,

1 because think of a time when you introduced somebody you  
2 like to another friend.

3 It can be that easy. It's anxiety-producing, I  
4 know, but it can be that easy, and let's talk about that a  
5 little bit today.

6 This spiritual adventure, I really like some of the  
7 concrete suggestions they have for growing in our  
8 discipleship and in our walk with Christ, looking for him  
9 each and every day.

10 But sharing our faith with other people can be as  
11 simple as a three-step process, but they don't really  
12 necessarily go in order, but one thing that is very  
13 important is prayer.

14 We talked about that last week. It's a gift to us.  
15 Christ is nearer to us than our own breath, nearer to us  
16 than we are able to ask. That's the promise.

17 We are tempted to think we are just talking to the  
18 walls, but his promise is that he is near to us and he's  
19 nearer to us now than when we first believed.

20 I like that verse from Romans. He's nearer to us  
21 now than when we first believed.

22 That's an important verse because it helps us  
23 remember that we need to look back a little bit and see how  
24 far we have come in our faith journey, see that we have made  
25 some progress, see that we have taken some action steps.

1           But praying for others is important and if we are  
2 going to begin to share our faith, as we are called to do,  
3 then we have to begin with prayer always.

4           Now, I don't know about you, I've talked to you  
5 about having a space set aside in your home for prayer, and  
6 everybody's probably looks a little bit different.

7           I have a chair and a lamp and then I have this  
8 little sign that simply says pray and I have it in a  
9 beautiful frame and then I have a couple of angels that some  
10 of my teenage friends gave me, and then I have a basket full  
11 of devotional books and three or four Bibles.

12           It's a regular collection, because I'm not the same  
13 person every day, I'm different, I went through something  
14 different the day before, so why should my devotional life  
15 be the same thing every day?

16           That's why it's important to have a variety in  
17 there so you don't have to be locked into doing your  
18 devotions in the same way every day. That's not how we are  
19 wired.

20           But we might pray for, as the journal suggests, we  
21 might pray for neighbors and friends and family members who  
22 don't yet know Jesus Christ.

23           We might do that, and one of the phrases that I  
24 dislike in my life, and it's because people use it as a  
25 passing benediction, they'll say pray for me, because I

1 have to go, and then they'll say whatever they are going to  
2 do.

3 Or they'll just say pray for me, if they are not  
4 stressed about it, and then we say okay, and then we don't.

5 The world out there is watching us. They have  
6 gotten used to the fact that Christians say they are going  
7 to pray, but don't.

8 I think we do a lot more talking about prayer than  
9 actually doing it.

10 I'm going to tell you a story, something that  
11 happened to me this past week, that took even me by  
12 surprise.

13 I went to my seamstress, and she's great, I have  
14 known her for about three years.

15 We have a passing acquaintance, we are not good  
16 friends, we chat a little bit, most it's like where do you  
17 want this hemmed? Take it in here, let it out there, that  
18 kind of thing, mostly it's that, but every now and then we  
19 just chat about life stuff.

20 And she, I think it was a year and a half ago or  
21 something when she was fixing my dress for the 25th  
22 anniversary, she asked me, she said, "What do you do?"

23 I said, "I'm a pastor. So is my husband."

24 "Oh."

25 That was it, and then the next visit when I came

1 back to get my dress she said, "My daughter went to Midlands  
2 College. Is that the same Lutheran flavor?"

3 I said, "Yes, it is," and that was pretty much  
4 that.

5 This is how it goes, there is not a lot of talk,  
6 not really.

7 And so last week as I was leaving her house I said,  
8 "You said you've got finals or something. What is  
9 happening?"

10 She starts listing off like twelve things. "I have  
11 finals."

12 She has a new venture, she got out of the boat and  
13 is walking on water is how I would interpret it, but she's  
14 doing finals this week, she's sewing all the bridesmaids'  
15 dresses for her stepdaughter's wedding, she is making the  
16 cake, she has a second job, and she really did look  
17 exhausted.

18 And I said, "I'll pray for you."

19 I know she's thinking like of course you will, you  
20 are a pastor, right?

21 So I said, "How about right now?"

22 And you should have seen her face. She went into  
23 shock and disbelief, because the world has gotten used to  
24 the fact that Christians just say we are going to pray, but  
25 we don't do it.

1 I'm going to stop at this part of the story, too,  
2 because I know this about you guys.

3 You think I do that stuff all the time, but I  
4 don't.

5 When you say to me in here, when we are in here and  
6 everywhere on the campus, you say "Will you pray for me,  
7 Pastor Wenda?"

8 I will grab you and pray. It's easy in here.

9 I have the same problem as you have out there. I  
10 don't want people thinking I'm weird. It's bad enough in  
11 here.

12 (Laughter)

13 So I grabbed her hand, and she was just shocked,  
14 color drained from her face, and I started to pray, and  
15 always when I pray, no matter whether it's in here or out  
16 there, or in my prayer chair, I ask the Holy Spirit to pray  
17 through me.

18 I say, "Holy Spirit, pray through me."

19 Then I don't have to worry about what I say, right,  
20 Vessels of Love? So you start that way.

21 Vessels of Love, those people that pray for you in  
22 prayer teams, they won't remember what they say, because God  
23 gives us those words. God will give us those words.

24 So I could feel her hand was very tense in my hand.  
25 We were just standing right at the threshold of her doorway,

1 and it was tense, and I kept praying and it was still tense.

2 I knew she was still in shock and disbelief,  
3 because they have gotten used to the fact we just say we  
4 will, but we don't.

5 And I don't really remember what was said, but I  
6 could feel her hand relax into my hand, not squeeze it, but  
7 warmly hold my hand, like she had let go, that's what it  
8 felt like.

9 And I know that it wasn't flowery. I know I  
10 thanked God for her talents and I asked God to help her with  
11 her many tasks that she had to do this spring and I thanked  
12 that she was so creative and a designer and blessed her  
13 family.

14 It wasn't much, you guys, and then I said, "In your  
15 name. Amen."

16 And she wouldn't let go of my hand, and I just  
17 looked at her, I opened my eyes and I looked at her, and she  
18 said, "Thank you. I needed that."

19 I just turned and walked out the door and she said,  
20 "I'll call you when the dress is done."

21 That's how it went. I don't know how long it was,  
22 maybe three minutes, two, that whole exchange was about that  
23 long.

24 But she went, and so did I, actually, because the  
25 blessing comes back to you, she went from all the list of

1 the stressors and me listening to the list of the stressors  
2 to a calm moment where we were both blessed, so all I had to  
3 do was just turn walk out the door and she said, "I'll call  
4 you when the dress is done."

5 It felt good getting into my car. I tell that  
6 story because I know you think I do that all the time, but I  
7 don't.

8 But we are called to do that. We are not called to  
9 say yes, I'll pray for you; we are called to do it, because  
10 God will give us the words to do that.

11 So, I'm challenging you this week, if you want to  
12 lead a lighthouse lifestyle, ask God to put people in your  
13 path this week that you could possibly pray for.

14 Or maybe you want to start with just as Pastor Mark  
15 talked about a few weeks ago, a secret random act of  
16 kindness where you don't expect a thank you note, where you  
17 do something for someone because you think it will be fun  
18 and actually you really feel like you are getting away with  
19 something when you do that.

20 You feel like a kid again when you are ringing the  
21 door bell and running off and laughing.

22 When you do something for somebody when you don't  
23 expect a thank you note it's a great feeling.

24 Maybe you want to start that way. That's why I  
25 said it's a process.

1           It's not one step, first we pray, then we do the  
2 secret act of kindness, and then we share our faith with  
3 others.

4           It's not like that. It's probably a little bit of  
5 both and it's always moving and always going.

6           So you pray for others and the second part of the  
7 process is caring for them as Jesus would.

8           The next one is pray for opportunities to share  
9 your faith with other people.

10           And it can happen anywhere. It can happen on the  
11 soccer field.

12           It can happen in a hallway. It can happen across  
13 the cubbyhole. It can happen over the phone.

14           You can do it, because we have been called to do  
15 it.

16           When Paul says do not accept the grace of God in  
17 vain, that is a direct challenge to all believers.

18           You have a responsibility to share your faith with  
19 other people.

20           It's not about coming in here; it's about going out  
21 there.

22           So we are going to look at the scripture in just a  
23 second.

24           But I wanted to comment, last week John and  
25 Christina actually had the guts to get up in front of you,

1 it's scary up here sometimes, it's not easy being up here.

2           They came up here with strength of mind and heart  
3 and I know that Christina even felt a little embarrassed by  
4 the tears, but it was real and you guys responded.

5           Some of you responded in love to them and I think I  
6 know why.

7           Because they weren't judging you. They were simply  
8 sharing their story, and when someone simply shares their  
9 faith, nobody can say anything to you about that. It's just  
10 your faith.

11           You're not judging others and telling them how to  
12 live. That's what is so beautiful about sharing faith.

13           Of course you want to ask. "How about now, Jolene?  
14 Would now be okay?" You just ask.

15           Or, "I would like to share a thought with you.  
16 Would it be okay?"

17           If they say no, you're off the hook at least for  
18 that time.

19           But if they say yes, then you say to yourself,  
20 "Okay, God, here we go. You said you would make good. You  
21 said you would give me the words to say. You said you would  
22 put those people in my path."

23           Don't have a conversation with him right there and  
24 argue, just get after it, don't say, "I really don't want to  
25 do it right now."

1 (Laughter)

2 Don't do that, because you've already asked him.  
3 If you prayed in the morning and said put those people in my  
4 path, give me the words to say, you have to act on it.

5 So that's the process of sharing our faith. It's  
6 important to do that. We are called to look at it.

7 There are a couple of verses in the scripture for  
8 today. I want to point out a couple of things.

9 Get your Bibles out if you want to. Chapter 6,  
10 Verse 1.

11 "As we work together with Him," this is what Paul  
12 is charging the believers at the church in Corinth, by the  
13 way, the First Letter to the Corinthians is written to them  
14 by Paul after he spent 18 months with them trying to get the  
15 church going.

16 And after the church was going he wrote them and  
17 encouraged them.

18 The Second Letter to the Corinthians really ought  
19 to be read like a personal letter.

20 This is Paul's diary and in the Second Letter to  
21 the Corinthians he's just about at the end of his rope.

22 He has had enough and he's talking about how  
23 difficult it is to work with the believers and the  
24 unbelievers in the church.

25 So he's pretty straight forward and direct. In

1 Verse 1 he said, "As we work together with Him, we urge you  
2 also not to accept the grace of God in vain."

3 In other words, the "you" is the believers there,  
4 and up in Chapter five, if you were to read that later,  
5 there is a beautiful set of scripture on what has been  
6 entrusted to us.

7 We have been entrusted with God's love and God's  
8 light.

9 The kids said it really well. If he has died for  
10 you and rose again for you, then what better gift to give to  
11 a friend?

12 We are not to accept his grace in vain. We are to  
13 take it serious, that's what he said there.

14 And then he goes on and he's kind of complaining  
15 about what has happened to him, but he's also hopeful,  
16 because he said the world doesn't know us, but then  
17 sometimes they do know us.

18 Jump up with me a second to 5:14. This is why we  
19 share the love of Christ.

20 "For the love of Christ urges us on."

21 It's really not very pretty in English. Urges us  
22 on in the original language is a word that really means, a  
23 better translation would be the love of Christ presses in  
24 upon us, it holds us to our task. That's what that word  
25 means.

1           So it would be better read, "For the love of Christ  
2 presses in upon us and holds us accountable for the task of  
3 sharing love and light with Christ Jesus."

4           That's what that verse means and Paul is really  
5 tired of these believers thinking it's all about them.

6           And that's why in 15 he says, "He died for all, so  
7 that those who live might live no longer for themselves but  
8 for Him who died and was raised for them."

9           His challenge is, it's not at all ever about you;  
10 it's about those for whom Christ has died, which fortunately  
11 for us includes us. So he said we have to live for others.

12           Now this month at Bethany we have a physical  
13 opportunity to introduce street children, children who live  
14 without mattresses, they live in sewers, they do not know  
15 the light and love of Christ.

16           And we have an opportunity as a church, as a people  
17 of God in this corner of the world, to put a little bit of a  
18 stop gap in that hole in that part of the world.

19           And I'm going show you a video now that Martha put  
20 together, our Power Point designer, it's a beautiful piece.

21           And I want you to watch the transformation of the  
22 kids in the sewer to when they are out of the sewer and they  
23 are in the home.

24           And 10 or 12 kids are at Barnaby, and we hope to  
25 build a home for ten other young people.

1           It doesn't seem like much, does it? But it's one  
2 stone at a time, one child at a time.

3           The thing that keeps me going on this is thinking  
4 that those young men will be able to go back into the  
5 society in Lapaz, Bolivia, and then make a difference  
6 because we introduced them to Jesus Christ. I love that.

7           Let's watch this.

8           There are approximately 2,700 children living on  
9 the streets of Bolivia.

10          We have a chance through this mission project to  
11 introduce these kids, Drew was saying to me, "There is no  
12 hope in their eyes. There is no life."

13          See the difference between the kids that were in  
14 the school and the kids that were on the street.

15          I want to read to you as you finish being generous  
16 with your gifts what Jennifer wrote last year as she  
17 debriefed in her experience.

18          She said, "It's a strange mix of emotions, both  
19 heart wrenching and hopeful, to think of the boys in the  
20 time before they were in the home and where they are today.  
21 The home is so filled with love and only in Christ can that  
22 kind of transformation take place. I have seen it with my  
23 own eyes."

24          We have been asking God to help us see him so that  
25 we can follow him more closely and love him more dearly.

1           And as we ask that hopefully we'll want to  
2     introduce him to others.

3           Hopefully that will compel us and we'll be  
4     convicted and even be delighted to share his light and his  
5     love with others.

6           Let's pray about that. Thank you so much for your  
7     generosity.

8           God, you have so loved the world that you gave your  
9     son, Jesus Christ, for the hole in the world. You have  
10    loved us extravagantly. We have so much. Thank you for the  
11    love we share here at Bethany, for the light we have been  
12    exposed to, it has scattered the darkness in our hearts and  
13    in our lives and we do want to be found faithful.

14          So may your love press in upon us and hold us  
15    accountable to the task of sharing your light and love.

16          May our hearts be generous in giving and in  
17    receiving.

18          Thank you for this day together and bless our  
19    graduates and their parents and fill their hearts with your  
20    love and with your light and peace. In your name. Amen.

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