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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA  
MAY 21, 2006  
PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: The kids today will be getting a  
2 coupon for a free hot fudge sundae.

3 You can go in and join them and make one yourself  
4 and the proceeds will go to youth missions.

5 Something stuck in my mind about being a hot fudge  
6 sundae church and I thought what would that look like. So we  
7 are going to talk about that today.

8 Do you know how the hot fudge sundae came into  
9 being?

10 In 1890 a Wisconsin merchant by the name of Smisson,  
11 he had a dairy, naturally, it was in Wisconsin, and he made  
12 ice cream and delivered it on the weekends in his horse and  
13 buggy to surrounding people.

14 But on Sundays, when the families had Saturday and  
15 Sunday off, he discovered that the demand for ice cream was  
16 too great for his supply

17 So they would come out and go for a little Sunday  
18 drive in their buggy in 1890 and come and see Smisson's dairy  
19 and have some ice cream

20 And so he figured out a way to stretch his supply  
21 and he cut back on the ice cream and started adding chocolate  
22 sauce and fruits and syrups and it became known as the  
23 Sunday, makes sense, doesn't it, S-U-N-D-A-Y, of course,  
24 because it happened on Sunday.

25 And it wasn't until a church person complained that

1 why would you associate a delicious treat with the Sabbath?

2 And so they had to change the spelling. He changed  
3 the spelling from S-U-N-D-A-Y to S-U-N-D-A-E.

4 Isn't that something? I love that story. That's  
5 how it came to be.

6 There is nothing like a hot fudge sundae, is there?  
7 We were over at a friend's last weekend, I had not heard of  
8 this new product, and I almost wasn't going to have an ice  
9 cream sundae, but there's a new product out, kids, you  
10 probably know it, it's called Magic.

11 You don't warm it up or anything, you don't put it  
12 in the microwave, you just take it, shake it up, and squeeze  
13 it right on your ice cream and right before your very eyes it  
14 turns into just a beautiful coating.

15 And it was so much to fun to use that. It's  
16 something we really like, isn't it, that chocolate and that  
17 ice cream flavor.

18 It's one of our favorite things, and especially if  
19 we warm up the chocolate.

20 There is nothing like a hot fudge sundae. There is  
21 something about the extreme of the cold and the warm.

22 Our post modern culture is in love with extremes,  
23 it's in love with the opposites, and that's why the hot fudge  
24 sundae makes a perfect post modern desert.

25 What do I mean by that? What do I mean by this post

1 modern culture loves a hot fudge sundae, loves a desert that  
2 has extremes, hot and cold in it.

3 Post modernism is a term that is used by social  
4 scientists to describe the world in which we live.

5 It's different than the modern world. The modern  
6 world was like at the turn of century, 1900, 1890, when  
7 Smisson had his dairy, and 1900 and on into the 20th Century.

8 The modern world gradually picked up modern  
9 conveniences, like turning the horse and buggy into a car for  
10 example.

11 When did Henry Ford do that, history buffs? 1906.  
12 Does everybody agree?

13 The modern world, it took a long time for the horse  
14 and buggy to get to be a car, do you see?

15 It took a while for the out houses to become in  
16 houses and for there to be indoor plumbing.

17 It took a while for someone to figure out that you  
18 can create a light in a light bulb and that you could turn it  
19 on with a switch.

20 In the modern world change happened, but it happened  
21 at a slower pace.

22 In the post modern world, the world in which we live  
23 today, change happens at a breath taking accelerated pace,  
24 and that's what social scientists call, the world in which we  
25 live, they say that's the post modern world.

1           This is a world that is in love with extremes. It's  
2 not either this, or that, it's both and.

3           I am going to continue to explain it to you because  
4 it's very important to understand what I'm going to say about  
5 the church in the post modern world.

6           The post modern world is a world in which, because  
7 of amazing technological advances and they happen so quickly,  
8 we can hardly keep up.

9           I can say hello to George, and George could travel  
10 to Bemidji, Minnesota, tomorrow, and I could say hello to  
11 him as if he was right next door.

12           This afternoon I could go home, and if I calculated  
13 the right, I would be able to catch Percy, our exchange son  
14 in Munich, Germany, I would be able to catch him and he would  
15 sound like he was right next door.

16           That's how amazing the technological advances have  
17 been.

18           We live in an instant communication world. The  
19 modern world was precell phone, precomputer, but right now  
20 you can just get right on the computer and you can find out  
21 anything as quickly as you want.

22           In fact, you can get images on there that you don't  
23 even want to see.

24           We live in an instant communication, instant  
25 gratification world.

1           That's what social scientists call the post modern  
2 world.

3           It doesn't mean that the modern world was bad and  
4 that the post modern world is good.

5           There are a lot of things about the post modern  
6 world, about the modern world, that were neither good nor  
7 bad. It just simply is.

8           That's why social scientists, futurists, church  
9 growth consultants, speak of the post modern world and they  
10 say that the church has not adapted well to the post modern  
11 world.

12           Just one more example. I want you to understand  
13 this.

14           The post modern world is a world view of irony or  
15 paradox, if you will.

16           We are consumers. We are producing more and more  
17 garbage, while at the same time we have an ecological  
18 consciousness that gnaws at us.

19           I was at a party just yesterday, graduation, and we  
20 were looking around trying to find a box to recycle all the  
21 bottles, the pop bottles, the beer bottles, the wine bottles,  
22 and it was just piling up and piling up.

23           And then somebody said they don't take glass in  
24 Omaha.

25           And a couple of us people that like to be conscious

1 about it, we thought they did. We had this conversation  
2 about it.

3 We are producing more waste, but we are also  
4 concerned about ecology and the earth.

5 So that is what I mean by both ends. We're eating  
6 out more, not only at those gut buster restaurants, but also  
7 at restaurants that are really nice.

8 Especially in western Omaha we eat out a lot. Just  
9 go down Center Street, or Dodge Street, Village Pointe, you  
10 will see how often people eat out.

11 We are eating out more and more and yet we all long  
12 to just sit at the table and relax, languish if you will,  
13 enjoy each other's company.

14 In our congregation in particular we long for this,  
15 because your lives are so busy and you have so many  
16 activities to take your children to.

17 So in this post modern world Americans are in  
18 particular in view, because we are part of a society, we are  
19 the most overcommitted, underconnected society in the world.

20 Overcommitted, stretched; underconnected to family,  
21 to friends, to neighbors.

22 It's just simply the way it is, and so that is why  
23 social scientists say we live in a post modern world.

24 Here is another example. We have smaller families,  
25 and yet we live in bigger homes.

1           People that deserve those big homes were those  
2 people having fifteen, eighteen kids, do you remember?

3           It's amazing. That's the paradox in which we live.  
4 It's called the post modern world.

5           And the post modern world is a world that changes  
6 rapidly, whether we like it or not, and the church has not  
7 adapted well to that.

8           Maybe some of you have seen this e-mail about  
9 Christians changing a light bulb the Christian way. Have you  
10 seen this?

11           How many Christians does it take to change a light  
12 bulb?

13           Charismatic, only one; hands are already in the air.

14           Pentecostal, ten; one to change the bulb and nine to  
15 pray against the spirit of darkness.

16           Presbyterians, none; lights will go on and off at  
17 predesigned times.

18           Roman Catholic, none; candles only.

19           Baptists, at least fifteen; one to change the light  
20 bulb and three committees to approve the change and decide  
21 who brings the potato salad and fried chicken.

22           Episcopalian, three; one to call the electrician,  
23 one to mix the drinks, and one to talk about how much better  
24 the old one was.

25           Methodists, undetermined; whether your light is

1 bright, dull, or completely out, you are loved, you can be a  
2 light bulb, turnip bulb, or tulip bulb.

3 Bring a bulb of your choice to the Sunday lighting  
4 service and a covered dish to pass.

5 Unitarian, we choose not to make a statement either  
6 in favor of or against the need for light bulbs.

7 However, if in your own journey you have found that  
8 light bulbs work for you, you are invited to write a poem or  
9 compose a modern dance about your light bulb for the next  
10 Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light  
11 bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-  
12 way, long-life, and tinted, all of which are equally valid  
13 paths to luminescence.

14 Lutherans, none; Lutherans don't believe in change.

15 (Laughter)

16 Amish. What is a light bulb?

17 It's awesome, isn't it, to laugh at ourselves and to  
18 laugh at the Christian church.

19 And we have to laugh at ourselves, and we've got to  
20 repent, we really do, because the people that are out in that  
21 world that have not got a clue about Jesus, who are on a  
22 difficult path in life and don't know anything about Jesus  
23 being an open door, they look at something like that, they  
24 laugh and say, yes, there is those Christians again. They  
25 try to save us, they can't agree on anything.

1           We laugh about it, and we need to laugh at  
2 ourselves, but that's the truth about the Christians in the  
3 world today.

4           Many people look at them and say they can't even  
5 figure it out.

6           They can't agree on one thing, and that's the world  
7 in which we are living, and it shows all the time.

8           Whenever Pastor Mark and I have a wedding, we will  
9 get a couple that come in, one is, in their words, a  
10 recovering Catholic, and another one is a Methodist and grew  
11 up passing dishes, covered dishes to pass.

12           We will get Jews and Christians and they will wonder  
13 if they can have a rabbi at the ceremony.

14           We will get a person who has grown up in the Baptist  
15 church and a person who is familiar with the Mennonite  
16 tradition, or Lutheran tradition.

17           It happens all the time and rather than lament that,  
18 the Christian church on earth, not just Bethany, but the  
19 Christian church on earth has got to figure out a way that we  
20 can open our arms to that hurting world, because that's what  
21 Jesus wants us to do.

22           It's not an either/or world anymore. It's not bad,  
23 it's not good, it just simply is the case.

24           It's a both and world and Jesus calls us to be the  
25 open door in a world that hurts with all kinds of pain and

1 confusion.

2           The other thing that I think we forget about  
3 sometimes, especially we are who are in the church, we forget  
4 about how much courage it takes to come through those doors.

5           You've heard me say that many times, but when we  
6 come through the door, it's just a natural thing for me to  
7 walk in through a church door.

8           In fact, I don't have any problem walking into any  
9 church in the whole world.

10           I just help myself, because I just love the church  
11 of God, and I love to go into just about any church, but  
12 that's not the case for a lot of people.

13           And we want to be an open door and a welcoming door  
14 for the world. That's what Jesus is, and he asks us to be  
15 the same.

16           He says I am the door in Revelation 3. I stand at  
17 the door and knock, and if anyone opens to me, I will come in  
18 and eat with him, eat with her.

19           That's Jesus. He wants us to be like him. So if  
20 someone comes to our door and they knock, we are supposed to  
21 open it and eat with them.

22           I saw it on Pastor Mark's face last week after he  
23 helped with the Mosaic Community Hunger Bus.

24           I saw in his face how moved he was when that  
25 homeless person said to him, "Thank you so much for letting

1 me be here."

2 I could see that Mark just hated the thought,  
3 actually, that she would even say that.

4 And so what he did instead, he said, "No, thank you.  
5 Thank you for being here."

6 He talked to us about our reputation we have out  
7 here in western Omaha.

8 It's not something necessarily bad, but we have a  
9 challenge.

10 We have a challenge to be an open door to people who  
11 have homes and people who don't have homes.

12 That's a real challenge for us and that's what Jesus  
13 says.

14 Let's go to the Book of Revelation and look at the  
15 text a little bit today and see if we can learn something  
16 else from God's holy word with regard to being church with an  
17 open door.

18 The Book of Revelation, Chapter 22, Verse 8, the  
19 Book of Revelation is often not preached on, often not talked  
20 about, because it's widely misunderstood and widely  
21 misinterpreted.

22 A lot of people just look at it and say I don't get  
23 that, so I'm not going to read it

24 And other people look at it and say I'm going to  
25 figure this out and see if I can find some of these symbols

1 and signs in my day, and that's not too bad, either. That's  
2 a better response than the first one.

3 But the Book of Revelation, and any book in the  
4 Bible, really, disciples, you ought to come to the Bible with  
5 just two questions.

6 What is this teaching me about almighty God? And  
7 what is it saying to me about the love of Christ?

8 You could ask that question of any passage in the  
9 Bible and you can get something out of it.

10 Or a third question might be, to what hope is this  
11 pointing me to?

12 Is there any hope or any challenge in this? That  
13 could be a third question.

14 But always we have to come at scripture with what is  
15 this teaching me about our great God?

16 And John, Verse 8 of 22, there we get the idea who  
17 is writing the Book of Revelation, or writing the revelation.

18 "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these  
19 things."

20 Go back with me to Chapter 1, Verse 9, and we'll get  
21 a little bit more about John.

22 1:9 says, "I, John, your brother who share with you  
23 in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom," there is both and,  
24 "and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos  
25 because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was

1 in the spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud  
2 voice like a trumpet saying write in a book what you see and  
3 send it to the seven churches."

4 So, we get a little bit more about John. John was a  
5 preacher and basically he was on retreat, doing a little  
6 abiding on the island of Patmos.

7 He was on retreat, and he was praying, and he  
8 brought the word of God with him and the Spirit descended  
9 upon him and said write these things down.

10 He was given a revelation, or a vision, several of  
11 them in fact, and so we learn a little bit more about that.

12 I am planning on do that this week myself. This  
13 preacher is planning on taking a little time, I don't know  
14 how long I can do, I know I have appointments on Tuesday and  
15 Thursday and Friday, but I'm hoping to go overnight and to  
16 just take my Bible and pray, to go on retreat, because God  
17 speaks to us when we pause and I want to be sure as to what  
18 he wants me to say when I get to Kearney on June 1st, if I  
19 even am called upon to speak, but I want to be prepared.

20 But that's a good thing for any one of us to do, is  
21 to put the life on pause a second, take your Bible and just  
22 seek the lord and see what he wants to say to you, what  
23 visions he will give you.

24 John isn't any more special than you and me. He was  
25 just willing to take the retreat and he was given all kinds

1 of visions.

2           And he was given seven visions here initially to  
3 each of these seven churches and I just want to point out a  
4 couple of things.

5           In Chapter 2, Verse 2, this is his pattern, he  
6 writes to the church and he tells them something that God  
7 told him to tell them.

8           Verse 2. "I know your works, your toil and your  
9 patient endurance."

10           Jump down to verse 4, "But I have this against you,  
11 that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

12           So to the church at Ephesus he's saying you guys are  
13 growing kind of lukewarm, you're cooling off on the love that  
14 you have for the Lord Jesus and I'm not for that.

15           Elsewhere he says you're neither hot nor cold,  
16 you're not a hot fudge sundae, you're lukewarm and I am going  
17 to spit you out. That's a tough word to hear.

18           The challenge here today is that we are to be alive  
19 in Christ.

20           We are not to be lukewarm, and so that is just one  
21 of the visions.

22           But I want to point out Verse 7 of Chapter 2, in all  
23 of the visions this is said, it's even said in the scripture  
24 we read in Chapter 22, "Let anyone who has an ear listen to  
25 what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

1           He says that after every single vision.

2           Now, if we are going to come at the text today with  
3 the question I suggested, Lord, what are you trying to teach  
4 me? What are you saying to us?

5           I can't help but think that he's saying to the  
6 churches, not just this church, but the churches in the  
7 Nebraska Synod, and the churches in the world, the  
8 Unitarians, the Methodists, the Mormons, all those churches  
9 that we read about how to change a light bulb, those  
10 churches, to let anyone who has an ear listen to what the  
11 Spirit is saying to the churches.

12           So we want to be about listening to what God is  
13 saying.

14           Now, go back with me to Chapter 22, and we get a  
15 little hot fudge sundae stuff here in Verse 12 and 13.

16           "See, I'm coming soon," Verse 13, "I am the Alpha  
17 and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the  
18 end."

19           If we are going to be a hot fudge sundae church we  
20 are going to be open to the extremes; someone who believes,  
21 and someone who wants to believe.

22           I remember a young man wrote me last year in the  
23 fall, I think, and said, "I want to thank you for saying that  
24 Bethany is a place for those who believe or who want to  
25 believe, because that has finally stuck with me and I think

1 it finally now has stuck on my brother."

2 He wanted to thank me because that was the kind of  
3 permission that that young Christian needed, and I praise God  
4 for that.

5 But Jesus is on the Alpha and the Omega. I'm for  
6 those who believe and for those who want to believe. I'm for  
7 them.

8 See, we live in a post modern world, and I grew up  
9 in the church, I love the church, and I grew up learning how  
10 to believe and behave first and then I could belong.

11 It's not been that many years and Christian churches  
12 still do it.

13 People ask me, "What do I need to do to become a  
14 member here?"

15 They still ask that, and fortunately we've got to  
16 the time and place now where we say you don't have to do  
17 anything.

18 We want you to be, and we want you to feel welcome  
19 here, and we want you to participate here, but mostly what we  
20 want is for you to become a disciple, a follower of Christ  
21 Jesus, not a member of the church.

22 It's not a club; it's a kingdom. We want you to be  
23 a part of our life together in Christ, which is why we turned  
24 the corner this past year, sharing lives shaped by Christ,

25 Because Americans are the most overcommitted,

1 underconnected people to their family, their friends, and  
2 their neighbors in all the world.

3 We are fragmented, but we were born with a  
4 connection requirement, and we have pushed that away, and we  
5 don't live in balance, in rhythm of life.

6 It's hard for us to do that, but we want to become a  
7 hot fudge sundae church.

8 I love Verse 16. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel  
9 to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root  
10 and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

11 So many churches need to fling their doors open, and  
12 open their windows and let the bright morning star come in  
13 and flood the place with light and truth.

14 There are so many churches that are dying, because  
15 they are worried about themselves.

16 And Jesus says I'm the root, I'm the morning star,  
17 open the doors, open the windows.

18 "The Spirit and the bride," and bride here is  
19 church, Jesus is the bridegroom, "The Spirit and the bride  
20 say come."

21 I love this, don't you?

22 "And let everyone who hears say come, and let  
23 everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the  
24 water of life as a gift."

25 So welcoming, so inviting, it's so life-giving. I

1 need that welcome.

2 I'm always failing either myself, or Mark, my  
3 husband, or my children, and sin against the Lord sometimes  
4 with my mouth, sometimes with my thoughts.

5 I need this welcome. Come, Wenda, come.

6 And if we as a church don't have a door that says  
7 this on it, then we are the most to be pitied.

8 Come, you who are weary and tired of fighting, you  
9 come.

10 You who are divorced, you come.

11 You who are single, you come, with 1.3 kids, we  
12 don't care here.

13 This is a place for all people. If you are a  
14 recovering Catholic, you come. Recovering Lutheran, come.

15 Let everyone who hears, that's you, say to them out  
16 in the world, come.

17 That's what the scripture says. It's awesome to me.  
18 I'm awe struck by the fact that the scriptures, the Book of  
19 Revelation, the very end of scripture ends with a welcome, an  
20 invitation that is so life-giving, and so inviting, and it's  
21 for each and every one of us.

22 Whoever is thirsty. I am.

23 Whoever hungers for reconciliation. I do.

24 Whoever needs forgiven. That's me.

25 I invited two people to come to my office on

1 Thursday night. I wanted to talk to them together.

2 I said, "Do you guys remember when you came to me?  
3 You called me up and asked if we could visit and you came  
4 about four years ago and you said to me, are we going to be  
5 welcome here? And I said yes, absolutely."

6 "Will others welcome us? The rest of the people,  
7 are they going to welcome us?"

8 I said, "Well, I guess I really can't speak for  
9 them, but I sure hope so."

10 And then they said, "Wenda, then do you remember  
11 what you said to us?"

12 I said, "What?"

13 "You said if anybody gives you a problem, come and  
14 talk to me."

15 I said, "Have they?"

16 She said, "No, we feel great here, but we do have  
17 friends that are wondering if they are welcome at Bethany."

18 I said, "Oh, really?"

19 "Yes, they want to know, they often tell us, and we  
20 tell them about Bethany all the time, and they often say, but  
21 would we be welcome there?"

22 Are we are going to be a hot fudge sundae church?  
23 Are we going to welcome the single mom, find a place for her  
24 amongst our married friends, not single them out.

25 Are we going to find a place for the recently

1 divorced who is really hurting?

2 Are we going to find a place for a family who just  
3 lost their job?

4 Are we going to be that welcoming, that life-giving?  
5 Are we going to say this is a place for those who believe or  
6 want to believe, bring your questions, we don't have all the  
7 answers, we are all disciples, we are lifelong learners, we  
8 are all learning, and we welcome you here.

9 I think we've got to be a church that says this is  
10 for people who believe or want to believe

11 And the reason I think so is because Jesus is the  
12 only one that can unify the tensions we find in the post  
13 modern world.

14 Remember, he's the one who laughs and cries. He's  
15 the one who is gentle, our gentle Savior.

16 And yet he gets angry at the temple people who are  
17 selling in his house, his Father's house.

18 Remember, one minute he's walking on water and the  
19 next minute he's kneeling down in front of his disciples  
20 washing their feet.

21 He's the one that unifies the tensions in our life.  
22 He is the one that comforts us when the test results are bad  
23 and there is a loved one on her death bed

24 And he's the one that gives life. He's the one that  
25 was crucified on the cross, and the one three days later that

1 burst open the door to eternal life for everyone.

2 Let everyone who has ears to hear hear this. He's  
3 the lion and the lamb.

4 He's the one who has come, and the one who is  
5 coming, and that is the mission of the church, is to hold  
6 that bow, if you will, taut, the tension in that bow taut.

7 I need a place of welcome, I don't know about you.  
8 Yes, I do.

9 I need to know that I'm welcome, and that my  
10 Savior's hands have bled and died for me.

11 I need that, and to that end we have to open the  
12 doors, pray about being an open door.

13 Thank you, Jesus, bright morning star, root of our  
14 lives.

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