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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
JUNE 10, 2007
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: I am going to be talking a little
2 bit about Spam.

3 I had to call a couple different stores before I
4 could get a receptionist that knew what it was, which is kind
5 of interesting.

6 And one of my little helpers this morning said, "My
7 mom makes really good Spam stuff at home."

8 It's an old concept, but it's a word that has
9 changed its meaning.

10 As I get ready to preach on the weekends I try to
11 look for things that God is telling me hopefully I'm on the
12 right track.

13 Thursday night my wife and I were celebrating. We
14 have been married for 28 years.

15 Our anniversary was last week and so we had a quiet
16 evening at home and I had some fish that I was grilling and
17 we just sat down and had our prayer and a sip of wine and my
18 second bite of fish and all of a sudden I went oh-oh, and
19 sure enough a fish bone had gone down my throat.

20 And Wenda goes, "Are you okay?"

21 "I think so."

22 I got up and do what you do, eat the bread and the
23 whole deal, and that wasn't giving me any relief.

24 So I called my friend, who is a physician, and he
25 said, "Can you see it in the mirror?"

1 I said, "No."

2 So he said you probably better go in, so we went in
3 on Thursday night and spent about six hours at Lakeside
4 Hospital and I got to get the IV and get knocked out and the
5 whole deal.

6 They took an x-ray and sure enough I had a fish bone
7 down in my gullet that was about like that.

8 And so now I have this nasty thing inside my mouth
9 where they put the tube in and all that stuff.

10 But thank God I didn't live a hundred years ago. We
11 would have had to just let that thing sit there. Quite
12 frightening.

13 But I used that as my basis for my message yesterday
14 for a beautiful wedding we had here about how important it is
15 that we have people sitting beside us that don't talk a lot,
16 but they pray a lot.

17 And I was blessed to have a wife of 28 years who was
18 there with me and every time I would move or try to talk that
19 darn thing would be in there wiggling around and I'm just
20 like, man, I want to stay real still here and wait, and it
21 was just really kind of a holy ground experience.

22 But getting back to the Spam thing on that, it was
23 interesting because at the hospital they said really we don't
24 get many people with fish bones, it's usually meat, and they
25 had some kid who had a glob of turkey in his esophagus and

1 they had to carve around that to get it to go down.

2 We tend to put things into our bodies in ways that
3 aren't particularly healthful.

4 So now to get to the message of that. We've got a
5 Spam filter on our computer at home, and we have a Spam
6 filter on our computer here at church.

7 It seems like there are three types of Spam that
8 sneak past that, and if you are not a computer person you may
9 not know what Spam is.

10 But Spam is like the junk mail of the 21st Century,
11 and there are three things that filters do not seem to be
12 able to stop:

13 Mortgage rates, stock offers, and pharmaceuticals,
14 and there is not a day that goes by that I don't have some
15 get rich quick scheme or get healthy quick scheme that is
16 coming in one of these Spam attacks.

17 And it's really the way our world has kind of
18 embraced this concept of quick fixes to long-term issues,
19 isn't it?

20 And it's always about doing the next best greatest
21 quick thing.

22 Well, as we look at God's word today, we are going
23 to notice that that's not a new concept.

24 We'll see that that's the way Israel used to do it,
25 too.

1 So I invite you to look in the scriptures. We are
2 going to look at the Prophet Jeremiah.

3 We don't often preach on the prophets, and I think
4 you'll see why as we dive into this, because these are kind
5 of convicting verses.

6 In my Bible it's on page 716. I'm going to be
7 looking at Jeremiah 2.

8 The prophets are behind the Psalms there, before you
9 get to the New Testament, and there are all these great
10 prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Nahum, all of these ones.

11 We are going to look at Jeremiah 2, and this is a
12 very timeless word, I believe, but let's look at this and
13 then we'll put it in the context of Spam.

14 Jeremiah 2, beginning at Verse 4.

15 "Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and
16 all the families of the house of Israel."

17 That means us. We are one of those houses. As
18 Christians we consider ourselves to be members of the house
19 of Israel.

20 Israel's twelve tribes. That's our family tree way
21 back through the Old Testament.

22 So that is the covenant that we're part of. So we
23 see this, we see the house of Israel.

24 "Thus says the Lord: What wrong did your ancestors
25 find in me that they went far from me and went after

1 worthless things and became worthless themselves.

2 "They did not say, where is the Lord who brought us
3 out of the land Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a
4 land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep
5 darkness, in a land that no one passes through where no one
6 lives?

7 "I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its
8 fruits and its good things, but when you entered you defiled
9 my land and you made my heritage an abomination.

10 "The priests did not say where is the Lord? Those
11 who handle the law did not know me. The rulers transgressed
12 against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and went after
13 things that do not profit.

14 "Therefore, once more I accuse you, says the Lord,
15 and I accuse your children's children.

16 "Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to
17 Kedar and examine with care, see if there has ever been such
18 a thing.

19 "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are
20 no gods?

21 "But my people have changed their glory for
22 something that does not profit.

23 "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be
24 utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed
25 two evils.

1 "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living
2 water, and they have dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked
3 cisterns that can hold no water."

4 We'll pause there and we'll zoom in on this in terms
5 of the Spam.

6 We notice it right away in the 5th Verse. "What
7 wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from
8 me and went after worthless things and became worthless
9 themselves."

10 It's kind of a two step waltz into perdition. They
11 go after worthless things, and then they become worthless
12 themselves.

13 It's hand-in-glove and it's interesting that that's
14 the predicament, the people have all gone astray, they have
15 forsaken God.

16 And what we notice in Verses 5 through 7, it was
17 kind of the laity, you might say it was the average citizen,
18 it was the average Jewish person.

19 And then he's very specific in Verse 8 that the
20 clergy were also involved.

21 He says, "The priests didn't say, where is the Lord?
22 Those who handle the law didn't know me. The rulers
23 transgressed against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal."

24 That means that even the religious people weren't
25 looking to God; they were looking to other idols, small G

1 gods, and they are giving these announcements that everything
2 is fine, and Jeremiah won't tolerate that.

3 The word of the Lord comes to him and he says
4 everything is not fine, it is fouled up, and we need to
5 return to the Lord, is what these verses are here.

6 In this blistering indictment the Lord accuses the
7 people of two great evils.

8 In Verse 13, "They have forsaken me, the fountain of
9 living water, and they have dug out cisterns for themselves,
10 cracked cisterns that hold no water."

11 Again, it's a two step, isn't it? They have
12 forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and they have dug
13 out cisterns for themselves.

14 They have done things that they are going to do that
15 I can't do, they won't let me do.

16 And in this part of the world it's important for us
17 to realize it's a very arid climate throughout the Middle
18 East.

19 They don't get very much rain and so they have these
20 huge cisterns in all of the villages and a lot of the
21 families have their own little cistern, that when there is an
22 abundance of rain it falls into these limestone pots that
23 they seal with kind of a plaster of paris type of a mortar on
24 the inside of it and then when the dryness comes they have
25 water in surplus.

1 They don't have to count on just the rains at those
2 particular times to water their crops; they can go to the
3 reserve.

4 But what he's pointing out here is they have done it
5 with vessels that don't hold water and so he's being
6 metaphorical and he's also being actual.

7 In other words, you guys think you can store up for
8 yourselves, and you've chosen all of these different
9 lifestyle things that will not hold water.

10 They are just Spam. They are just these little
11 fly-by-night things.

12 You have such a bad memory; that it was me who
13 provided for you in the past.

14 It was me who brought you out of the land of Egypt
15 through the desert, through the drought, and now you have
16 made all this stuff for yourselves, you've forgotten where
17 you've come from and you've forgotten who brought you to
18 where you are.

19 It's interesting thing, I had my prayer partner with
20 me on Wednesday, June 6th, it was about 3:30 in the afternoon
21 and Dan said to me, it's interesting to me, we are both kind
22 of World War II nuts, he said I got up this morning and
23 watched the Today Show and read the paper and went off to
24 work, and I did the same, read my paper, did my devotions and
25 stuff, went off to work, and there wasn't anything on the

1 news that I saw that commemorated that it was June 6th.

2 June 6, 1944, was the quintessential moment when the
3 Allies landed at Normandy Beach in the North of France.

4 It was interesting to me, as media savvy as we are,
5 I didn't see anything about it.

6 Maybe there was something. They found something, I
7 know in Russia they found a bunch of places where Stalin was
8 killing people and stuff, but I didn't hear one reference to
9 the Allied invasion. I thought that was interesting.

10 Dan didn't either. He said that's really
11 interesting, because we've forgotten the way the kingdom gets
12 expanded and we care more about Paris Hilton than we do about
13 looking back and giving thanks to God for the sacrifice.

14 Isn't that interesting? Just a reality check for
15 all of us that we have this lousy memory.

16 But let's put that in context of what kind of Spam,
17 what kinds of things are hitting us that are maybe feeding us
18 something that is not particularly nourishing and we start to
19 slip, we go after these little worthless things and before
20 long we become worthless.

21 The first one that I recognize is a Spam that
22 doesn't hold water, but we hear it a lot this time of year,
23 it's that God is a nice guy and he can be found anywhere.

24 I hear people talk about this a lot and they say,
25 "You won't see me much this summer."

1 "Okay. What is going on?"

2 "Well, we're going boating a lot and our best
3 worship time is in our boat."

4 Other people, "Well, you know, Sunday morning is my
5 favorite tee time."

6 And, "The summer, that's when I go to the mountains.
7 I feel the closest to God when I'm on the mountain," or at
8 the ocean, or at the cabin.

9 And I'm not saying there is anything wrong with
10 that, because we did a series on down time is up time if it's
11 God's time.

12 God is everywhere, he's omnipresent, but what we
13 start to buy into is we start to think that I like that
14 feeling and so I'll just go there at the expense of the
15 other, and God is always smiling on me because I'm always
16 happy when I find him on the golf course, even if my golf
17 game is horrible.

18 But we have this notion, and it's Spam, that God is
19 just this nice guy and he approves of whatever we do and he's
20 found everywhere.

21 He's in the casinos, he's all over the place, and we
22 just sort of have him like this little pet, he's a nice guy,
23 and we just keep him well-nurtured so he won't bite.

24 That doesn't hold water when we look at the Old
25 Testament or the New Testament.

1 You remember Jesus coming in and cleansing the
2 temple because people had made the temple into a marketplace.

3 Jesus is not meek and mild, a nice guy all the time.
4 In fact, he has some things to say about those of us that
5 take God for granted.

6 The Lord came specifically to Israel, and in the
7 context of these verses from Jeremiah we need to be real
8 careful about the little Baals that are out there, the little
9 G-O-D-S, gods, lower case G, the little gods that call to us
10 and they tell us it's okay, this won't matter, you don't need
11 to worship, you don't need to be a disciple, or you just go
12 once a week and get your card punched.

13 But God is not just a nice guy who can be found
14 anywhere.

15 The God of Israel is the source of the true
16 abundance.

17 And it's interesting when he says you have forsaken
18 me, the living water.

19 It's the living water, it's not just a stagnant
20 pool, and unfortunately sometimes we need to be accountable,
21 that maybe we've made the church into a stagnant pool.

22 But I believe in the 21st Century Jesus has come
23 along, he is stirring that up, and there is something new
24 happening.

25 And he's asking all of us to get in the flow of

1 that.

2 And one of ways we do that is by regular worship,
3 even in the summer time.

4 The second Spam that I hear oftentimes is a message
5 that Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior and that's good
6 enough. The key word being my personal Lord and Savior.

7 One of my reservations before I investigated the
8 Luis Palau Heartland Festival was, gee, I hope they are not
9 doing that whole personal Lord and Savior thing.

10 And it's really based upon what is called friendship
11 evangelism.

12 They will get people to hear the Gospel, but then
13 they don't just seal the deal and send them home.

14 They make sure there is a linking of friends and a
15 community for those people to go back to, because evangelism
16 without discipleship is close to a sin.

17 It's like getting everybody into a big revival pitch
18 and then there is nothing. There is no net.

19 But what we've done with that is we kind of, I've
20 got my little bee sting time, and that was my personal time
21 that God came close to me, I'm good, my personal Lord and
22 Savior.

23 It's like we've got Jesus in our pocket, and that's
24 very dangerous.

25 That's another thing you see that Jeremiah is

1 commenting about, is there is a social aspect to this living
2 water.

3 It's not supposed to just be kept in your jar,
4 because that will start to leak if it is not given away with
5 frequency and blessed.

6 The grace we receive will become cheap unless we
7 stay disciplined.

8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a 20th Century martyr in
9 World War II.

10 He talks about this concept of cheap grace. He
11 says, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without
12 requiring repentance. It's baptism without church
13 discipline. It's communion without confession. It's
14 absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace
15 without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without
16 Jesus Christ living and incarnate."

17 And the name of this book that he wrote in English
18 is translated "The Cost of Discipleship."

19 Literally in German it's "To Follow".

20 It's not a one time thing, to be stung by Jesus and
21 then I'm good.

22 He's not just a nice guy who is found everywhere.

23 He's not just my own personal get out of hell free
24 card.

25 It's a corporate relationship we have, as well as an

1 individual relationship. Acceptance needs community.

2 The third point, the message that the church exists
3 for me and for my needs.

4 I was raised in a very conservative family. My dad
5 was a Barry Goldwater staunch Republican, and I remember back
6 in the '60s and all that stuff.

7 But I remember, whether you appreciated John F.
8 Kennedy or not, one of the great messages ever was don't ask
9 what your country can do for you, but what you can do for
10 your country.

11 The same is true for the church. One of the scary
12 things is that there is kind of this felt needs thing that
13 has been Spammed into a whole lot of hearts.

14 There is a theologian whose name is Dean Hogue and
15 he has done a lot of research about baby boomers, and I'm one
16 of them, we are especially susceptible to Spam and stuff like
17 that.

18 He says, "Baby boomers, when they church shop, they
19 are looking for high quality Sunday school and youth
20 programs, uplifting worship experiences, meaningful authentic
21 small group experiences, and a good cup of coffee."

22 There is nothing wrong with those four or five
23 things.

24 But, you see, what our culture has told us is that
25 it's okay, I know some people, and they've told me, well, I

1 just come to your church on Sunday, but I go to this church
2 on Tuesday, and this church on Wednesday, because I like the
3 music there, I like the youth ministry there, I like the
4 children's ministry there, and I like the whatever here, and
5 we can bring our coffee into worship at your place.

6 But that's dangerous, I guess is all I'm saying. I
7 used to think maybe that's not so bad.

8 But as I re-read the scriptures, and as I try to
9 listen to the Lord on that, I think that sacrifices community
10 and then we will put our toe in the water in a bunch of
11 different pools and we aren't really swimming; we are just
12 sort of getting a little bit of a drip here and there.

13 So let's be careful of that product that we
14 sometimes seek for our own convenience, instead of the
15 accountability that comes from being in a family or in a
16 church community.

17 The church doesn't exist for me and my needs. I
18 exist to be the church and so do you.

19 I don't know how many of you read John Rosemont.
20 Tuesday morning he's in the World Herald. He's a national
21 columnist.

22 He had a great article this week. It's called
23 "Let's Bring Back Family Picnics", and Rosemont is a guy that
24 calls it like he sees it.

25 He's a prophet. He really nails you once in a while

1 as a parent.

2 We read him all the time when we had our kids and,
3 oh, man, we've really screwed up, you know, but there's
4 always grace in what he says.

5 "For those of you who are too young to know what a
6 picnic is, or was, here is a brief synopsis.

7 "The parents pack a lunch of yummy, albeit unhealthy
8 stuff like fried chicken, potato salad, salty pickles and
9 various carbonated chemicals and then everybody gets in a car
10 and travels to a shady spot maybe out in the country away
11 from the hustle and bustle of the city.

12 "When a suitable spot is found, the tablecloth is
13 laid out on the ground or spread over a public picnic table.

14 "The food is placed on it and everyone eats while
15 commenting on the beauty of nature.

16 "Before and after the meal families might take
17 walks, throw frisbees, play guitars, sing, or maybe they will
18 lie back on a blanket and take a nap and get a sunburned
19 face.

20 "It wasn't real exciting, but that was the very idea
21 behind a picnic.

22 "It was an opportunity for the family to tone down
23 their daily lives, to get away from it all and relax and
24 enjoy one another's company.

25 "Unfortunately in these hurry-up got to go times

1 organized after-school and weekend activities such as soccer
2 have replaced relaxing activities such as family picnics, and
3 that's too bad, because watching a child play a sport and
4 yelling your head off is not a family activity, nor is it
5 especially relaxing. Yelling and relaxing do not compute.

6 "Today's families need to relax and spend some time
7 together where there is no score, where there are no goals,
8 where there are no rules, which is why I'm calling for a
9 national movement to bring back the family and church
10 picnic."

11 He's got something there; that we have to stay in
12 balance with God, and with believers, and then we're okay to
13 go to the world.

14 And it's interesting, isn't it, we have just had a
15 family picnic together here with communion, but it can really
16 quickly again kind of become this it's just me and Jesus,
17 isn't it?

18 And that's one of the reasons that I really sense
19 God calling us to do Bible school differently, is because we
20 need to spend a little more time at the table together.

21 And I know how busy this community is, believe me,
22 but on Sunday mornings we would like you to just come and
23 worship, breathe again, relax.

24 And then just have some snacks and some fun and to
25 see the Bible school stories enacted and to have some fun and

1 a petting zoo and kind of a throw-back to the way things used
2 to be.

3 And I'm not one of these guys that wants to get rid
4 of cell phones, computers, and all that technology and stuff.

5 But there are some things that our culture has sadly
6 missed out on.

7 It's being, as well as doing, so that is kind of
8 where we are at with that.

9 But there is a verse from Proverbs that is really
10 interesting.

11 Proverbs 11:1, "A false balance is an abomination to
12 the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight."

13 You see, Israel had a problem with corruption of the
14 system, and they are talking about literally the method of
15 exchange, if the balance is not equal, it's kind of like the
16 butcher putting his thumb on the meat scale, but he's also
17 just talking about the way we live life.

18 If we aren't balanced, God has something to say
19 about that.

20 And I believe he says a lot in Jeremiah 2 about
21 returning, about repenting, about changing.

22 Worship is an opportunity for us to glorify God and
23 to meet God in word and sacrament.

24 It's not a musical pep rally or a self-help group;
25 it's just an opportunity for us to come together as a

1 community, to be on the same page together for a little
2 while, and then to do that in your own families.

3 It's important that you're on the same pages
4 together.

5 Preaching has a prophetic edge to it. It's not just
6 to afflict the comfortable, nor is it just to comfort the
7 afflicted.

8 I know life is tough, and I wish you the comfort and
9 the grace of God's Holy Spirit.

10 But I also know myself well enough that I fall into
11 the pattern of this Jeremiah 2 and I will easily stray and
12 I'll go for that which is easier instead of that which is
13 better.

14 I've got some cracked leaky cisterns that I have
15 invested in, and we need to have things that will hold water
16 for the long run.

17 People should have their legitimate needs met in a
18 church, and if we aren't, I want to hear about it.

19 But it's not just about you, and it's not just about
20 me; it's about faithfulness to our heritage and our tradition
21 and the scriptures and the sacraments and the community.

22 It's the up, the in, and the out. It's a balance
23 thing.

24 God did not ask people to choose him and use him.
25 Jesus did not ask people to choose him and use him.

1 Jesus invites people to see him and be him, and if
2 we look at our Lord, we notice he's balanced.

3 He's incredible, the way he's able to withstand the
4 changes and challenges of the culture that we find him in,
5 and anything less than such a balance does not hold water.

6 The prophetic words of Jeremiah are a gift to us on
7 June 10th, 2007, to say remember where you've been, it was me
8 that got you through that, and I'm the one that is here with
9 you now.

10 Don't invest in that which will not truly satisfy.
11 I'm the living water.

12 I'm not a stagnant pool and don't let a stagnant
13 pool arise in your own soul.

14 He stirs the water. John 4:14 says a spring of
15 water gushing up to eternal life.

16 That's the metaphor that Jesus then uses. If you
17 have been baptized, and you believe in me, that's what is
18 going to be inside of you.

19 It's going to be this wonderful fountain of grace
20 for other people in a thirsty and dry and parched
21 drought-stricken world.

22 It's interesting, one more shot at the text, it's
23 interesting, Verse 12 says, "Be appalled, O heavens, be
24 shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord.

25 The behavior on earth shocks the heavenly host, and

1 I'm not one of these guys that gets a big jolly from
2 preaching hellfire and brimstone.

3 I think that so oftentimes if anything is condemning
4 it's not from God; it's from the enemy.

5 But there is some conviction that I think our nation
6 and our lifestyle does need to stand under.

7 It's shocking to God, the way we've defiled and the
8 way we've changed some things.

9 So those behaviors will not hold water for the
10 long-term. God delivers living water, not Spam.

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