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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

JULY 2, 2006

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: If you want return back to the
2 passage in the Book of Acts, that will be our launching pad
3 this morning.

4 As I say, we're in this series of life, really
5 looking at what does it look like if we're alive, and all
6 living things move, and dead things don't move; they just
7 sit.

8 And so my son Adrian is going to help me again this
9 morning, and he's home for one more day.

10 He's getting on an airplane tomorrow and going back
11 to Seattle, so I'll introduce him here in a little bit.

12 But I want to set the context for where I sense the
13 Spirit going with this text that might be helpful for me and
14 you.

15 But if you are in the Book of Acts, I mentioned at
16 the beginning that it is written by the same author of the
17 Gospel of Luke, so let's look at Luke so we see a little bit
18 of where Luke has us, where God has us through this
19 fascinating story.

20 So if you are looking at Luke 24, I'm on page 85
21 down on the bottom of the right-hand column Jesus says this
22 in Verse 48.

23 The context is after the crucifixion and it's Easter
24 Sunday.

25 He has had a meal with them, they were walking

1 along, they were very confused, and he opened their minds to
2 understand the scriptures there in Verse 45, and then down in
3 48.

4 "You are witnesses of these things. I'm sending
5 upon you what my Father has promised. So stay here in the
6 city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

7 So his instructions are for them to hang right there
8 in Jerusalem.

9 The next verse is, "He led them out as far as
10 Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he
11 was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up
12 into heaven. And they worshipped him and they returned to
13 Jerusalem with great joy and they were continually in the
14 temple blessing God."

15 That's where Luke ends, and then Acts is right in
16 that same thing.

17 He's going that's what I told you in the first book,
18 here is the new book, that's what we read, "In the first
19 book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did from the
20 beginning," how he taught the disciples, all those cool
21 things that are happening, so they are waiting, the point
22 being. Stay here in the city until I get back.

23 So just imagine your body language of that, you're
24 here and you've just seen Jesus go up and you are going to be
25 like "whoa", like this holy elevator that he just went up in,

1 and the temptation is just to keep stargazing.

2 He's going to come back and you would almost be
3 like, "Is that him?" Is that him?" You would be wondering
4 when he's coming back.

5 The point being, they're staying there in the method
6 that he told them.

7 He said now hang in here, and he's going to come
8 back, but if you are like me, and you're a disciple, you are
9 going, I wonder if it's going to be the way it used to be?
10 He's coming back, we have had this three challenging years
11 together, walking along the road, he has been teaching us, we
12 have been feeding people, but then he had to die this
13 horrible death, I wonder if it's going to be the way it was.
14 I wonder if the cross is still going to be part of the
15 equation.

16 It's in the past, but is it going to rear its
17 life-giving head again?

18 So there is apprehension, there's excitement, there
19 is probably some confusion of what it's going to look like.

20 Is it going to be more comfortable this time? Are
21 we going to have the same disappointments?

22 And that's where we jump into the story in Acts 1-6,
23 we see the disciples literally asking this.

24 "So when they had come together they asked him,
25 "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to

1 Israel?"

2 In other words, are you going to make it look like
3 it used to back in the good old days, not only when you were
4 with us, but back when Israel really had a whole lot of
5 power.

6 Is it going to be a restoration project, and they
7 quickly learn that it's not.

8 It's going to be a reversal project to a lot of
9 their hopes, but it's going to be better.

10 It's not going to be like it was in the past, and
11 it's certainly not going to be the same.

12 So what we see then in Acts 1, they are waiting, and
13 Luke is real pointed in this and he says remember, you had
14 eleven apostles, we better get another one

15 So during that forty days waiting period they assign
16 another apostle.

17 We see that in the rest of Chapter 1. They pray
18 about these two wonderful candidates

19 And then in Chapter 1, Verse 26, they cast lots for
20 them, they prayed and they studied and these two nominees
21 were there, so they cast lots, similar to rolling dice, and
22 the lot fell on Matthias.

23 He's going to be the 12th apostle, because Judas is
24 dead.

25 So the lot fell on Matthias and he was added to the

1 eleven apostles. In other words, we have twelve again.

2 Then Pentecost happens, and literally all heaven
3 breaks loose.

4 This is the fulfillment of what Jesus had said, you
5 guys hang here together, and I'm coming back with power from
6 on high.

7 He comes and the Spirit descends upon them and just
8 kicks everything loose. They are speaking different
9 languages.

10 The point being, we shouldn't just be sitting here
11 looking up.

12 Helen King, our friend in North Omaha, a pastor, she
13 said the devotions out in Kearney in the Nebraska gathering
14 of all the Lutherans.

15 She said we shouldn't just be looking; we have to
16 get cooking, because the tendency is to be passive.

17 We live in a passive spectator society. We have to
18 get in the game.

19 We are not just supposed to be looking up; we are
20 supposed to be getting into it.

21 Show that you're alive and not dead, because living
22 things move.

23 A lot of you maybe have read that famous book,
24 "Purpose Driven Life".

25 Each one of those five purposes has movement as an

1 assumption.

2 We have five up there. Worship. You don't just
3 sit.

4 Ministry, you don't just sit.

5 Discipleship; fellowship; evangelism. It is an
6 active game.

7 It's the Acts of the Apostles today, and tomorrow,
8 that's us.

9 That proves we're alive, to be moving, and that
10 means in worship, that means in everything that we do.

11 We make eye contact with people. We hug people. We
12 hold people's hands.

13 We look them in the eye. We speak to them in love.
14 We hold them accountable.

15 Those are all activities. They are actions. It's
16 not just me and Jesus. It's a community game.

17 Again, when we do that it's amazing, because all
18 heaven breaks loose around those that we do it with.

19 When we get moving, it moves others. Scientifically
20 every action has an equal reaction. God is pleased when we
21 do that.

22 I just finished Eugene Peterson's book, it's called
23 "A Long Obedience In The Same Direction".

24 I highly recommend it to you. It's about
25 discipleship in an instant society.

1 It's a fabulous read and what Professor Peterson
2 does in this book, he's the guy that wrote the "Message
3 Bible", what he does in this, he uses Psalms 120 through 134,
4 because the context of them is every year, three different
5 times, Israel would go to Jerusalem, three times a year, to
6 worship.

7 And so Psalms 120 through 134 are Psalms of ascent.
8 They are going up the hill.

9 And literally really those fourteen or fifteen
10 Psalms would be sung while they are on the road moving
11 together.

12 And so he breaks each of those down and he talks
13 about how important it is that we keep moving, and oftentimes
14 it's hilly.

15 Jerusalem is on a hill, it's on Mount Zion, and so
16 these people are traveling together, they are not on their
17 bicycles in those days, but they are walking together and
18 they are singing.

19 "I lift up my eyes to the hills from whence does my
20 help come."

21 That's one of those Psalms. They are literally
22 seeing the hills.

23 There is a great quote in that about worship, how we
24 need to worship along the way.

25 He says, "At all times we are invited to bless the

1 Lord. You can lift up your hands regardless of how you
2 feel."

3 I find that interesting, because oftentimes when I
4 lift my hands it's based on how I feel.

5 I'll do this because I'm feeling this, but he's
6 taking that to another level.

7 He says, "You can lift your hands and arms
8 regardless of how you feel. It's a simple motor movement.
9 You may not be able to command your heart, but you can
10 command your arms.

11 "Lift your arms in blessing. Maybe your heart will
12 get the message and then be lifted up also in praise.

13 "We are psychosomatic beings. God created us that
14 way, body and spirit are interrelated.

15 "Go through the motions of blessing God and your
16 spirit will pick up the cue and follow along.

17 "Find the right things to do. Practice the actions
18 and other things will follow.

19 "Act your gratitude. Pantomime your thanks. You
20 will become that which you do, a living, breathing, moving,
21 praising being.

22 "God has created us that by changing our behaviors
23 we can change our feelings, not the other way around."

24 He's talking about there's times when we don't feel
25 like moving, but we need to move, and then our spirit will

1 follow. It's a fabulous read.

2 So I want to talk a little about that biblical
3 reversal thing, because I described to you what happens in
4 the Book of Acts

5 But you need to understand also that Luke is
6 somebody who knows his Bible very well.

7 So the very first book of the Bible is Genesis, and
8 I'm jumping into the 11th Chapter, because I want to show you
9 about this reversal project that God always does.

10 When we want to get things the way it used to be,
11 the Spirit comes along says, no, you're not quite on that,
12 I'm going to change some of your perceptions and I'm going to
13 move you. So we see it in Genesis 11, page 9, clear back in
14 the Old Testament.

15 This is the story of the Tower of Babel, and in
16 those days the whole world spoke one language, and it says
17 that in Chapter 1.

18 "Now the whole earth had one language and the same
19 words. And as they migrated from the east they came upon a
20 plain in the land of Shinar and settled there."

21 What the people are going to do, it's right there in
22 that verse, they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city
23 and a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a
24 name for ourselves."

25 They want to be famous, and they want to build this

1 huge structure that they literally can pierce the face of
2 God.

3 But they want to do it for their own reasons; not
4 for God's reasons.

5 Notice how they say that. "Let's build for
6 ourselves a city."

7 What happens in that story is God does come and
8 visit them, Verse 6.

9 "And the Lord said, look, they are one people and
10 they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of
11 what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now
12 be impossible for them."

13 He's saying that's not a good thing. They are going
14 to have a whole lot of power now and they are going to forget
15 who created them.

16 And they are going to think it's about them piercing
17 the heavens, instead of God opening the heavens.

18 So what God does is he visits them. He says, "Come,
19 let us go down, let's confuse their language there so that
20 they will not understand one another's speech. So the Lord
21 scattered them abroad from all over the face of the earth."

22 Here are the three things that happened. God visits
23 them. God confuses their language. They aren't speaking the
24 same language anymore.

25 Now all of a sudden there's German, there's Italian,

1 there's French, there's English, there is Ethiopian language,
2 dialects of Africa.

3 Everybody is scattered. In other words, they don't
4 speak the same language literally or figuratively. They have
5 forgotten to speak the language of love.

6 They wanted to do it their way and so they got
7 scattered through the whole face of the earth.

8 What Luke is teaching us is it's just the opposite
9 of that in the Book of Acts.

10 What happens in that is God visits them and he
11 translates their language.

12 Remember in the story of Pentecost they are all
13 speaking different languages, but they are understanding each
14 other.

15 And then what he does is he tells them to be
16 baptized and become Jesus's disciples.

17 In other words, the journey is not over; it's just
18 beginning. Get moving and be moved.

19 It's a reversal. Instead of confusing them, he
20 unites them, and that's what we are, we are united; not
21 divided, and the language we speak is the language of love.

22 And thereby what happens in the Book of Acts is that
23 the church becomes a people and not a place.

24 The church becomes an organism; not an organization.
25 And it becomes a movement; not a monument.

1 I think it is fascinating that he makes a living
2 moving as a dancer.

3 And he has been teaching his mom and I a bunch of
4 stuff about that, because it's kind of hard when your kid
5 moves away.

6 ADRIAN FRY: Good morning. It's good to be back
7 again for another week.

8 I'm leaving tomorrow and when I came here I asked my
9 dad what the weather has been like and what kind of clothes I
10 should be bringing, and he said not to bring any long sleeves
11 or long pants.

12 But I'm glad I did because of the air-conditioned
13 building, because it's freezing in here.

14 So, yes, the weather is hot and it's not like this
15 in the northwest at all.

16 But I'm enjoying my time here and I've really
17 enjoyed being able to be with you, my original spiritual
18 family, and to share with you about what is going on in my
19 life now.

20 So I have been in Seattle for the last nine months,
21 if you weren't here last week, and I'm going back to Seattle
22 for six weeks.

23 And then I'm moving to Portland, Oregon, for a job
24 and so that is what is going on with where I'm moving to.

25 But also in the last few months I've really moved a

1 lot in lots of other ways.

2 I first moved to Seattle in about September and I
3 got a studio apartment right away, and it was really nice,
4 close to school, and it was really easy just to be alone and
5 really not have to be super-relational.

6 It was comfortable. It was a lot easier to be
7 alone, and I didn't like it all the time, but it was there
8 and it was just something that was nice because I didn't have
9 to deal with people

10 And it was just comfortable, and I needed to break
11 out of that comfort zone eventually

12 So I had a friend reach out to me and invite me to
13 church

14 And she invited me to all these other groups and
15 stuff.

16 And I was like, no, you know, I don't know about all
17 this, and I don't know about all this God stuff, because I
18 didn't have a lot of God stuff in my life before, and I was
19 nervous about it.

20 The whole reversal project that my dad was talking
21 about between Genesis and Acts, I think Acts is such an
22 exciting book because there is so much action that happens in
23 it and so it's so alive.

24 Romans talks about the churches, and then Luke talks
25 about the life of Jesus, and there's nothing in between

1 So it's a good book to keep in between, but I like
2 how it's talking about a reversal project and just putting
3 things back in order

4 And that's what I needed to do with my life. I
5 needed to put things back in order.

6 I was so nervous, I was like do I go into this
7 community? Do I give my heart to God?

8 I was like I don't know why. If I didn't know if I
9 could be a dancer anymore.

10 I didn't know if I could have my family the way it
11 was.

12 It wasn't going to be the same. People are always
13 like I don't like change, I don't want it to be different.

14 It's not going to be the same, but it's going to be
15 better.

16 And you don't believe that when you're there. I was
17 like, no, please, it's not going to get any better than how
18 it is right now.

19 But it totally does, and so I read this book a while
20 ago called "Blue Like Jazz".

21 I'm sure that we have all publicized it, because
22 it's very great and I would suggest it, it's by Donald
23 Miller, and it's non-religious thoughts on Christian
24 spirituality.

25 And I pulled a few quotes from that for this

1 message.

2 It says, "Other people keep our souls alive, just
3 like food and water does with our body. I think it's
4 interesting that God designed people to need other people.
5 The soul needs to interact with other people to be healthy."

6 That's a message that we oftentimes miss, because
7 it's so easy to get in the zone, so easy to not be in a
8 community, not look around you and see who else is alive
9 around you, just to focus on what was going on

10 And so I was so convicted about March, because there
11 was this house that was kind of sponsored loosely with my
12 church, and there are a lot of other guys that live there,
13 and everybody wanted me to move in

14 And I was like no, you know, it's uncomfortable, I
15 don't like interacting with people, it's easier to live in a
16 studio apartment, really close to the ballet and all the
17 stuff

18 And I actually went in and I read the chapter about
19 community before I made the decision

20 And it was funny, because that's just how God works.
21 He'll use things and in the book he has a friend who is
22 trying to get him to move into a house, and I had a friend,
23 too, that just kept bugging me about it and I was so tired of
24 that.

25 There's a picture of some of the guys I live with.

1 The guy on the end, Kenny, the first one, he was the one that
2 kept bugging me, he was like come on, move in. What is the
3 problem? Why not?

4 And I gave bunch of lame excuses, but there really
5 wasn't an excuse

6 PASTOR FRY: And this is these guys when they are
7 entered into a dodge ball tournament, right?

8 ADRIAN FRY: Yes. This is not a current updated
9 shot.

10 PASTOR FRY: That's like half of the guys that live
11 in the house.

12 ADRIAN FRY: There are two missing, so that is
13 Kenny, Ian, Tyler, Eric, Andy and Louie.

14 It's a fun place to be, because we live on the
15 University of Washington on the campus surrounded by frat
16 houses, it's a very active neighborhood, and we're known as
17 the Christian house.

18 People feel so judged by us, but we don't do
19 anything like. We're just there and so people are so
20 convicted of us.

21 PASTOR FRY: Kenny is the drummer in your praise
22 service, the guy on the left.

23 ADRIAN FRY: We've got a drummer, and soccer
24 players, and Louie on the end is a hip hop dancer, and we
25 tried to collaborate a little bit, but that doesn't really

1 work.

2 (Laughter)

3 And a couple campus ministers live in the house and
4 it's a really great place.

5 We have a lot of couches, because we have a lot of
6 ministry events, so it looks like a dentist's office, but
7 it's really a great place to grow.

8 PASTOR FRY: I went to Seattle for the Father's Day
9 weekend.

10 Wenda and I went out on Thursday and the first thing
11 we went and met the guys, some of these guys, and the other
12 guys on Thursday, and more came in on Friday and on Saturday.

13 But the first thing they would do is they would just
14 look me in the eye and, "You must be Adrian's dad. We're so
15 glad to meet you. I hope you can worship with us on Sunday."

16 And these guys are so authentic, it's just bizarre,
17 and they are doing life together on a depth level of
18 accountability

19 And I go pick Adrian up for brunch or something
20 about 10:00 and all these guys are still sleeping in the
21 house and I would come around the corner and here's another
22 one sleeping a couch, but they are everywhere, and it's just
23 a community.

24 It's an amazing reality, and I shared last week, we
25 are going ready to leave and they all prayed for us.

1 On Sunday afternoon they worshipped in a Methodist
2 church at 5:00 o'clock

3 And about 4:30 I'm sitting there with the guys at
4 the table and they are all running around looking for their
5 checkbooks because they can't wait to give their tithes to
6 their church, and I'm just like, wow, this is not the church
7 I'm used to, but I can learn from it, and I love the church I
8 am used to, but that complacency thing.

9 I jumped in on you, Adrian, but tell us a little bit
10 about that, because it wasn't easy moving, and it's not easy
11 see to be in community.

12 These guys fight like brothers, but they have a way
13 of doing that with accountability as in Matthew 18 and all
14 that stuff of putting it to bed instead of being mad at each
15 other all the time. Tell us about your chores and stuff.

16 ADRIAN FRY: We don't have very many obligations or
17 anything in our house, but we have chores once a week, and we
18 have a house meeting once a week, and it's just a community
19 house, and it's in order to serve other people.

20 You're not doing it because you want your house to
21 be clean; you're doing it because you want others to enjoy
22 coming over

23 And you want other people to come into your lives
24 and come into your heart and understand what community is
25 really about

1 And so when I come home now, I'm surprised sometimes
2 because I'm saying things like can I do anything to help? I
3 have like a servant's heart now.

4 PASTOR FRY: You think you're surprised.

5 (Laughter)

6 ADRIAN FRY: But it's because of this community,
7 because you have people that get under your skin, and that
8 hold you accountable, and that want you to grow, and don't
9 want you to be lonely and be alone

10 So I have one more quote from this book. It says,
11 "Loneliness is something that happens to us, but I think it
12 is something that we can move ourselves out of. I think a
13 person who is lonely should dig into a community, give
14 himself to a community, humble himself before his friends,
15 initiate community, teach people to care for each other, love
16 each other. Jesus does not want us floating through space or
17 sitting in front of our television. Jesus wants us
18 interacting, eating together, laughing together, praying
19 together. Loneliness is something that came with the fall."

20 I think that pretty much sums it up of what God
21 wants us to do.

22 Because it's not about being alone, and being a
23 dancer, and doing that sort of thing, it was all about being
24 alone, because you are with other people, but it only you
25 that makes it happen, there's nothing else that contributes,

1 just like with any other athletics, it's not team oriented,
2 it's not at all, it's all about you, and it's so easy to let
3 that affect everything else and really let that cancer take
4 over your life.

5 But I think that this goes back to the reversal
6 project of putting the love back in order, and putting your
7 priorities back in order.

8 And it's more about family. It's all about having a
9 spiritual family, and having real family here that I can come
10 back to.

11 That's weird to feel, to actually feel like a family
12 now, and then to have a family in Seattle, a family in this
13 congregation, and just to be able to be a part of all these
14 different community systems really is satisfying

15 And so you have to give up a lot, being alone, but
16 once you look back on it, you're wondering where you were all
17 that time, because it's really vital to grow with others,
18 because that's what God wants. Where two or more are
19 gathered, God is with them.

20 PASTOR FRY: That's that the other scripture, of how
21 good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.

22 It's ironic to me that we call ourselves the United
23 States, and yet we do those things of division, red and blue
24 states, and different agendas, and different parties,
25 Democrat, Republican, conservative, liberal, all those things

1 that separate us, and we do theologically, and I don't think
2 that's helpful.

3 In fact, I think it's sinful, and God hasn't the
4 division thing, we've done the division thing and we've
5 isolates ourselves with I only like people that agree with me
6 kind of thing and we need to agree on the main thing, Jesus,
7 instead of on those little factions. Anything else?

8 ADRIAN FRY: That's it.

9 PASTOR FRY: It's just awesome to hear a young
10 prophet come home and do that, so thank Adrian for his
11 courage.

12 (Applause)

13 PASTOR FRY: I find it really interesting, one of
14 the big learnings from these guys that went to New Orleans
15 for their mission trip was on their way down there they
16 needed to stay somewhere in a Christian church, to be
17 accommodated, and this is horrible, but it is really one of
18 the great learnings, is these guys experienced injustice, not
19 only of the way people are treating each other, but there
20 were people who wouldn't let them stay in their churches
21 because of the denomination our kids were, and these were
22 Lutherans.

23 Do you understand how wrong that is? And I'm not
24 taking shots at our brothers and sisters of other Lutheran
25 denominations, but that's just plain sin of separation.

1 So I think they stayed in a Presbyterian or a
2 Methodist church because the Lutherans wouldn't let them.

3 What is God teaching us about unity? What is God
4 teaching us about a nation that calls itself the United
5 States, and then we have a Christianity that is so divided
6 and divisive, and it's not based on belonging; it's based on
7 narrow understanding of different issues that keep us apart,
8 instead of in the light of Christ and the power of the Holy
9 Spirit.

10 Bottom line, we have to move so that we can be
11 moved.

12 Thanks, Adrian, for coming and our prayers are with
13 you as you go now.

14 He's moving again, it's going to be hard to leave
15 that house, in five or six weeks and moving to Portland.

16 I'm trusting that God is going to have every bit as
17 good a community there as what he has in Seattle

18 I want our community to become with skin on those
19 same things about belonging, unconditional grace and love and
20 acceptance.

21 God loves us so much the way we are, he doesn't us
22 to stay that way. He want us to move and change and grow.

23 So you kids that have your bikes, you can come on
24 forward.

25 I'm going to pray a little bit. Our kids are going

1 line up their bikes again and go out.

2 We are going to have an opportunity for some
3 individualized prayer after the service.

4 Lord, thank you for being the mover. You come and
5 you visit, you translate, you unite, and now you scatter us
6 that we might go from this place and be bearers of grace and
7 love and life, not darkness.

8 Thank you, Lord Jesus, for Adrian, for him coming
9 home, and coming home a different person than the way he was
10 when he left

11 Now, Lord, thank you for all of us, that we can be a
12 different person now as we leave our worship service
13 together, that we can be reminded of our forgiveness, of the
14 Savior you have for us, the power of your Spirit.

15 Thank you, Lord Jesus. Send us from this place in
16 the name of Christ. Amen.

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