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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
AUGUST 5, 2007
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: Lord, we do thank you that we can
2 laugh, and when we laugh, Lord, it's not meant to be anything
3 that is irreverent.

4 It's just that you have given us a full range of
5 emotions and a whole myriad of wonderful stories in the Bible
6 that are funny, and sad, and convicting and amazing.

7 So thank you, Lord, for today. Your grace, your
8 wide open space, and your nearness are what we seek today.

9 Thank you, Lord, for this time. Bless us now in the
10 strong name of Jesus. Amen.

11 The verse the kids sang was just fantastic, that be
12 strong and courageous, do not be terrified. That's from
13 Joshua 1.

14 I want to tell you where we have been on the trail
15 and show you where we are going today.

16 I have a little summary of each of these chapters in
17 the Book of Joshua, and we are using Joshua because it was
18 really a gift.

19 We were kind of led to this through a whole lot of
20 prayer and then all of a sudden one day in my office appeared
21 the Avalanche Ranch Bible school stuff and it's about Joshua.

22 So we thought this is an opportunity for us to
23 celebrate as God's family here, because in Joshua 1 it says
24 be strong and courageous.

25 Moses has died and a new leader needs to take over

1 and his name is Joshua, and he hears three times in that
2 first chapter be strong and courageous.

3 He hears three times from God and he hears it once
4 from God's people.

5 And so that's an affirmation to him and he's going
6 to proceed forward and he's going to take the Israelites
7 across the river into the promised land, the holy land, and
8 so the Joshua book is about that.

9 Joshua 2 is this wonderful story of Rahab. She is a
10 woman of ill repute.

11 She's a prostitute who allows these two spies to
12 have sanctuary in her home and so she houses them in Jericho
13 and makes a deal with them and says when you come back, I
14 want you to save me and my family, and they say we'll do
15 that.

16 And so we learned in that that God even can use
17 people like Rahab that have less than honorable pasts, like
18 me and you.

19 Then Joshua 3 and 4 came along and it was this
20 strong word about you're going across there, and it's a way
21 you've never been before.

22 Joshua 3 was about this promise.

23 Joshua 4 was about the providence and just the fact
24 that this is a legacy that we're leaving behind, too.

25 And it says several times your men need to tell the

1 stories to their kids, and so twelve stones.

2 Everybody got little rocks that day. We got a bag
3 of rocks and everybody got a little stone, so when our sons
4 and daughters ask, we as men can say this is a rock that is a
5 symbol of how God loves me and he has provided for me in the
6 past.

7 And last week Pastor Wenda preached on the walls of
8 Jericho come tumbling down in Joshua 6.

9 So what we need to do is we need to rewind a few
10 years back and in the story what we are going to be looking
11 at today took place a few years before that, and Moses is
12 still alive, although he's not going to be mentioned in the
13 story.

14 We are going to look at the Book of Numbers, so if
15 you have your Bible out there, we have been also learning
16 that Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, those
17 are the five books of the law. Those are the five books
18 authored by Moses.

19 And then Joshua is neatly tucked in right behind
20 those, but we are going to look at Numbers 22.

21 And I don't claim to be a professional Bible expert
22 or anything, but it's interesting to me, there are so many
23 cool names for books of the Bible.

24 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and I'm
25 like Numbers?

1 That's a weird name for a book of the Bible.

2 Numbers?

3 You look through and there are a whole bunch of
4 numbers in there.

5 But I didn't know this until this week when I was
6 doing research that the Hebrew word for Numbers is actually
7 the word for in the wilderness, or in the desert.

8 Numbers is like a forty year travelogue. It's like
9 an adventure series with all of these facts and figures and
10 dates and places and chronologies and genealogies of people,
11 of all this stuff that happened in the wilderness.

12 This is a forty year travelogue. I thought that was
13 neat, that in the Hebrew language it doesn't mean numbers; it
14 means in the wilderness, in the desert.

15 So we have rewound a few years to one of these
16 stories that's going to take place in the desert.

17 We are going to look at Numbers 22 and it's a
18 fabulous story.

19 It is one of my favorite stories in the Old
20 Testament and favorite stories in the Bible and I think you
21 are going to see why as we go into it a bit.

22 It begins in an odd way, and let's just dive right
23 into Numbers 22.

24 "The Israelites set out and camped in the plains of
25 Moab and across the Jordan from Jericho."

1 In your mind's eye you need to understand that there
2 is this beautiful picture of the landscape.

3 At the top you have the Sea of Galilee, and you've
4 got the Jordan River, and then you've got the Dead Sea, and
5 that's the river that they are going to be crossing over in
6 Joshua.

7 But in the meantime they are on perpetual hold being
8 to the east of the Jordan River.

9 And so the plains of Moab are on that east side, and
10 there is always this longing to be able to go over to this
11 other side, you see, the holy land, the promised land, the
12 land flowing with milk and honey.

13 So the Israelites are camped in the plains of Moab
14 across the Jordan from Jericho. They can see it from there,
15 the point being.

16 "Now Balak, son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had
17 done to the Amorites.

18 "Moab was in great dread of the people."

19 Moab is the nation and Balak is the king. What we
20 need to understand here is we've got two key characters that
21 we are going to learn about.

22 It's Balak, the king, and we are going to meet in a
23 few verses his alterego, Balaam, and he's our guy.

24 Balak is the king and Balaam is going to be our guy.
25 Let's read here so we know who these guys are.

1 "Now Balak, son of Zippor, saw all that Israel had
2 done to the Amorites.

3 "Moab was in great dread of the people, because they
4 were so numerous."

5 The Israelites' reputation as a fighting group was
6 legendary.

7 They knew that God fought for them, and God
8 delivered them from Egypt, so they had a reputation as being
9 very powerful, and they had already won a lot of battles, and
10 so people are afraid of them, and that's the case here.

11 Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel,
12 and Moab is a big nation, but they know that these Israelites
13 are very mighty.

14 "And Moab said to the elders of Midian, 'This horde
15 will now lick up all that is around us as an ox licks up the
16 grass of the field.'

17 "Now Balak, son of Zippor, was king of Moab at that
18 time.

19 "He sent messengers to Balaam, son of Beor, at
20 Pethor, which is on the Euphrates, in the land of Amaw, to
21 summon him."

22 I don't know about you, but when I read the Bible
23 I'm like what's this, son of, son of, son of?

24 We need to understand in this there are two
25 characters.

1 Balak is a king and Balaam is not a king. What he
2 is, he's a diviner from Mesopotamia, and that may have gone
3 right over your head, too.

4 But the Euphrates River to this very day, the Tigris
5 and Euphrates Rivers, that is the most fertile land, that's
6 where Balaam is from, and he has a reputation of being able
7 to hear God.

8 And so Balak is this political leader who is afraid
9 of the Israelites and so he's going to be thinking to
10 himself, I need to recruit somebody to come in and do
11 something for me, and that's what we are going to see.

12 He's going to recruit Balaam because he had heard
13 that Balaam is this Mesopotamian diviner.

14 He's like one of these tarot card reader guys that
15 people are going to invest money in, and he has a connection
16 with God, so Balak wants to get him on his team, so that is
17 what we're seeing here.

18 "He sent messengers to Balaam, son of Beor, at
19 Pethor, which is on the Euphrates, in the land of Amaw, to
20 summon him saying, 'A people has come out of Egypt. They
21 have spread over the face of the earth and they have settled
22 next to me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they
23 are stronger than I. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them
24 and drive them away from the land, for I know that whomever
25 you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is cursed.'"

1 That's what he wants. He wants Balaam to come,
2 because Balaam has this reputation of being able to bless and
3 curse people. He's a powerful guy.

4 Balak wants some of that, so that is what is going
5 on.

6 "So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian
7 departed with the fees for divination in their hand."

8 They took a big bunch of money to go get Balaam so
9 he would come back to curse the Israelites so that they would
10 be defeated in battle. That's what they are trying to do.

11 So Verse 7, "So the elders of Moab and the elders of
12 Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand
13 and they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message."

14 In other words, they come and go, hey, Balak wants
15 you to come over and curse those Israelites, and here is what
16 Balaam said.

17 "Stay here tonight, and I will bring back word to
18 you, just as the Lord speaks to me.

19 "So the officials of Moab stayed with Balaam."

20 In other words, they have given him this great
21 offer, to come and curse the Israelites, and here's Balaam
22 error.

23 He doesn't say no. He says I have to pray about it.
24 Isn't that interesting?

25 He knew at that very moment that he shouldn't do it,

1 but what he does is he hides behind religious rhetoric and he
2 says I need to pray about that, and that's what he does.
3 That's what we see then.

4 He says, "Stay here tonight, and I will bring back
5 word to you, just as the Lord speaks to me."

6 "So the officials of Moab stayed with Balaam. God
7 came to Balaam and said, 'Who are these men with you?'

8 "Balaam said to God, 'King Balak, son of Zippor of
9 Moab, has sent me this message. A people has come out of
10 Egypt and has spread over the face of the earth. Now come
11 and curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight
12 against them and drive them out.'"

13 He's talking to God. He's like this is what they
14 want me to do.

15 "God said to Balaam, 'You shall not go with them.
16 You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.'"

17 It's like why would you do that? You know who I am.

18 So Balaam goes back and what he does is he comes
19 back to them and he says to them, he got up in the morning
20 and heads to the officials of Balak, "'Go to your own land,
21 for the Lord has refused to let me go with you.'

22 "So the officials of Moab rose and went to Balak and
23 said, 'Balaam refuses to come with us.'"

24 Wouldn't it great if it ended right there?

25 But my point is, he knew right from wrong, and he

1 didn't have the guts to say yes or no.

2 He said I need to pray about it. What is that? He
3 hesitated, and God says don't do it.

4 But it's interesting, because now what we are going
5 to see is this intensified.

6 Verse 15, "Once again Balak sent officials, more
7 numerous and more distinguished than these."

8 Balak is no dummy. He knows the guy must have
9 hesitated, so I am going to send a little bit more money.

10 I am going to send some other big shots and they are
11 wearing nice three piece suits and they have really nice
12 stuff and they will be able to persuade him to come, and
13 that's exactly what he does.

14 "They came to Balaam and said to him, 'Thus says
15 Balak, the son of Zippor, do not let anything hinder you from
16 coming to me.'"

17 In other words, cost is no object. I want you to
18 come and curse these Israelites.

19 "'For I will surely do you great honor, and whatever
20 you say to me I will do; come, curse these people for me.'"

21 And again, it's interesting, Balaam could have said
22 what about no don't you understand, but he doesn't.

23 "But Balaam replied to the servants of Balak,
24 'Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and
25 gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God to

1 do less or more. You remain here, as the others did, so I
2 may learn what more the Lord may say to me.'"

3 In other words, he doesn't still have the guts to
4 say no.

5 He says it again. I need to pray about it. Isn't
6 that fantastic? So he does.

7 "'You remain here, as the others did, so I may learn
8 what more the Lord may say to me.'

9 "That night God came to Balaam and said to him, 'If
10 the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them.'"

11 It's almost like God says this guy is not listening
12 to me anyway, whatever, go with them, but listen to me, don't
13 tell them what you think they want hear; you ask me what to
14 say to them.

15 So he lets him do that, and that's exactly what is
16 happening here then.

17 "'If the men have come to summon you, get up and go
18 with them, but do only what I tell you do.'

19 "So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his
20 donkey, and went with the officials of Moab."

21 Here is the deal, see. Balaam knew that the Lord
22 couldn't be bought and sold, but he didn't say no.

23 And here is my hunch. He's thinking I'm such an
24 idiot. I should have said no.

25 I'm so stubborn. I'm so stupid. What have I gotten

1 myself into now?

2 He's got that paradigm going on, and I just want to
3 sit there for a second, because I think that all of us have
4 been in that position where we knew we should have said no,
5 but we have hesitated, and maybe we've even hidden behind
6 religious rhetoric.

7 I'll go ask God, as if God can be bribed, or as if
8 there is not a clear understanding of right and wrong.

9 We've been in that position. We know the answer is
10 no, but we click on it anyway.

11 What will this hurt? I'll get forgiveness anyway.
12 We have been in that position.

13 Here is my notion. If we put ourselves in Balaam's
14 position of I'm such an idiot, now the story takes on
15 incredible significance because now we are into this
16 interesting part.

17 Here is the other deal. Balaam was a prophet. He
18 was a Mesopotamian diviner and he could be prophetic, so why
19 couldn't he say no?

20 How prophetic is no? No is the most prophetic word
21 in the world and this world needs to hear it.

22 No.

23 I know so many religious people, they don't say no;
24 they say I'll pray about it, and I've done that, instead of
25 just a clear no. It's wrong.

1 I'm a sports fan. Baseball, basketball, and
2 football, three great examples. No to steroids, gambling,
3 and dog fighting.

4 No.

5 But we are going all hear this whole monkey business
6 thing about how much did he know? How much didn't he know?

7 No. Gambling is wrong. Dog fighting is wrong.
8 Drug abuse is wrong. Just say no.

9 When will the church speak no to the world? What we
10 have is laryngitis.

11 It's interesting, the Lutheran magazine, the cover
12 article, "A Cure For Lutheran Laryngitis".

13 Why don't we speak, and some of us have the audacity
14 to say I'll pray about it.

15 No. Pornography is wrong. No. Some things are
16 very obvious, but Balaam is like I don't know, and you
17 increase the ante, I'll give you some more money, that sounds
18 pretty good.

19 And then he's probably thinking with a little extra
20 money I could do some things, may I will win the lottery and
21 I can give ten percent back. That's where his mind is at.
22 We've all been there.

23 So now we zero in, you see. It's interesting,
24 because now what we are going to see is this reluctant and
25 reticence in speaking the truth.

1 He's a prophet, for heavens sake, but he's in it for
2 the profit. That's the irony of it.

3 Now is the donkey part, Verse 22, this is the best
4 part.

5 "God's anger was kindled because he was going."

6 He gave him permission to go, but God is going, this
7 guy, what am I going to do with this idiot?

8 He has a relationship with me. At least he hears
9 me, but he doesn't have a relationship with me.

10 He can hear me, he has been blessed that way, he has
11 a gift, but God is angry, go with them, tune into this
12 channel and I'll tell you what you need to say, so he's
13 going.

14 "God's anger was kindled because he was going and
15 the angel of the Lord took his stand on the road as his
16 adversary."

17 In other words, the angel of the Lord is not always
18 a nice guy. The angel of the Lord is there to bring him
19 down.

20 "Now he was riding on the donkey and his two
21 servants were with him.

22 "The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in
23 the road with a drawn sword in his hand, so the donkey turned
24 off the road and went into the field, and Balaam struck the
25 donkey to turn back onto the road.

1 "Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path
2 between the vineyards, with a wall on either side.

3 "When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord it
4 scraped against the wall and scraped Balaam's foot against
5 the wall, so he struck it again.

6 "Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in
7 a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the
8 right or to the left.

9 "When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord it lay
10 down under Balaam and Balaam's anger was kindled and he
11 struck the donkey with his staff."

12 The donkey sees the angel of the Lord three
13 different times, but, remember the state of mind Balaam is
14 in.

15 He's like I should have done this, I should have
16 done that, he has this tunnel vision.

17 This is the first documented case of road rage.
18 That's what this is.

19 And what he's got is he's got a donkey that is being
20 a faithful companion, and here is the irony.

21 The donkey is literally saving his life. He sees
22 the angel of the Lord with the sword, and he's a faithful
23 donkey, he doesn't want his leader, his rider, to be killed,
24 so he goes off the path.

25 What are you doing, you idiot? He hits him and gets

1 back up.

2 He gets up and scrapes the wall, scrapes his foot,
3 Balaam is getting madder and madder, stupid donkey, he gets
4 off and kicks him and stuff.

5 The third time he finally just lays down and Balaam
6 is just furious.

7 Isn't that great? He struck him again. When the
8 donkey saw the angel of Lord he lay down.

9 "Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey and it
10 said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have
11 struck me these three times?'

12 "Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have made a
13 fool of me.'"

14 He saved his life. You've made a fool of me.
15 You're not being obedient to me. Isn't that fantastic?

16 "Balaam said to the donkey, 'Because you have made a
17 fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand. I would kill
18 you right now.'

19 "But the donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your
20 donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day?
21 Have I been in a habit of treating you this way?' And he
22 said, 'No.'"

23 Isn't that a great story? There is none so blind as
24 those who refuse to see. It's interesting, isn't it? He
25 sees it three times.

1 I know people that have been saved from car
2 accidents, or whatever, and they don't think that God had
3 anything to do with it. They are so blind, because they
4 refuse to see.

5 You know, you're hearing some of that in
6 Minneapolis, wonderful testimonies of people on the bridge.

7 Another minute, it could have been me. Yes, it
8 could have been me; it could have been you.

9 But if we are not looking for the Lord, we'll get
10 stubborn, won't we?

11 We'll be stupid and we'll be willfully disobedient
12 and we will get this tunnel vision thing that is just sort of
13 like road rage, or whatever, and it's really not the other
14 car; it's the driver, the nut behind the wheel, as they say.

15 That's Balaam. It's a great story, and it's
16 interesting, he says this, the donkey turns around and talks
17 to him, and it doesn't even surprise him.

18 Isn't that great? He's beating the donkey and the
19 donkey turns around and goes why are you beating me, and he's
20 not even surprised. That's how mad he was.

21 And he says you have been riding me for all these
22 years, have I ever done this?

23 And that's the moment. Right then is the moment of
24 grace.

25 It penetrates. He goes no. He finally says no.

1 Isn't that interesting?

2 Just say no. He finally says it, no, and now God
3 can work with him.

4 And then that's fabulous, because what happens then,
5 you see, is he says no, and then the Lord opened the eyes of
6 Balaam.

7 And it wasn't like the Lord had closed his eyes.
8 Balaam had made that choice by his own behavior.

9 Tunnel vision is usually human. It isn't always
10 God. Most of the time it's us.

11 We just don't see God, because we refuse to. This
12 is all about us, but he finally says no.

13 "Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw
14 the angel of Lord standing in the road with the sword in his
15 hand, and he bowed down, falling on his face."

16 He's like, oh, my word, this donkey actually saved
17 my life instead of scraped my foot, and he worships.

18 "The angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why have you
19 struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an
20 adversary, because your way is perverse before me. The
21 donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If
22 it had not turned away from me, surely just now I would have
23 killed you and let it live.'

24 "Then Balaam said to the angel of the Lord," he's
25 repenting now, "'I've sinned, for I did not know you were

1 standing in the road to oppose me. Now, therefore, if it is
2 displeasing to you I'll return home.'"

3 Now he's like, okay, now I think I am on the wrong
4 path, I really don't want to go with these guys.

5 "The angel of the Lord said to Balaam, 'Go with the
6 men, but speak only what I tell you to speak."

7 "So Balaam went on the officials of Balak."

8 So he repents, but it's interesting, because, "When
9 Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at
10 Ir-moab, on the boundary formed by the Arnon."

11 And he's going to go back there, and he is going
12 say, okay, I'm here, and Balak is going to strike a business
13 deal with him and he's going to make an offering and stuff.

14 And then what we have in the next couple of chapters
15 are the oracles of Balaam and they are very faithful.

16 He's going to speak on God's behalf. He's not going
17 to curse the Israelites; he is going to bless them.

18 But this is another interesting twist in the story,
19 because what we read a little bit later in Numbers 31 is that
20 Balaam, who is going to die by the sword in one of those
21 battles, and what read through the history of the scriptures
22 is that Balaam is an embarrassment, not a hero.

23 Remember how we heard about Rahab, a prostitute whom
24 God redeemed, and she is listed in the faithful in Hebrews
25 11.

1 We see these interesting little pieces of Balaam in
2 the New Testament, way in the back of your Bible on page 227,
3 you'll see in 2 Peter, the second chapter, Verses 15 and 16.

4 "They left the straight road and they have gone
5 astray, following the road of Balaam, son of Mozer, who loved
6 the wages of doing wrong, but was rebuked for his own
7 transgression, a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice
8 and restrained the prophet's madness."

9 It's interesting, because just a few verses before
10 that, God has such a great sense of humor, because in that
11 second chapter, Verse 12, Peter is writing about the people
12 and he says:

13 "These people, however, are like irrational
14 animals."

15 In other words, we've always thought that donkeys
16 are stubborn, but you haven't seen people yet. These people
17 are like irrational animals.

18 A few pages after that, Jude 11, "Woe to them for
19 they go the way of Cain and abandon themselves to Balaam's
20 error for the sake of gain and they perish in Korah's
21 rebellion."

22 In other words, if you sell out your convictions,
23 you might just die by the way of the sword like Balaam did.

24 Again, you might want to consider the word no as
25 your answer.

1 And he's listed again in the Book of Revelation, but
2 we won't look that up, you can on your own time, if you want.

3 But we need to make some conclusions about this
4 interesting story in Numbers 22.

5 Do you remember how we learned in Joshua 2 that God
6 can use just about anybody, and he still can.

7 He could have really used Balaam to just say no, but
8 he still used him to prophesy and to do these four wonderful
9 oracles that he does pronounce.

10 But it's interesting, because he knew what he was
11 supposed to do, but he refused to speak.

12 He knew that God sees into the human heart and yet
13 he dodged that reality, and he hid behind religious rhetoric
14 to do so.

15 God doesn't like that. That's dishonest, and it's
16 also preaching for profit instead of being a prophet.

17 He hates that. That's a mortal sin, by the way, by
18 his example.

19 It's interesting, because God's blessing and God's
20 curse is not bought and sold, but it is pronounced by God's
21 people.

22 And we need to speak that, no and yes, and it's
23 interesting because hardened hearts will cloud our eyesight,
24 and that's what road rage is like.

25 We get all purpose driven, instead of spirit fed,

1 and the purpose is usually ours and not God's.

2 If it's God's, that's a little different deal, isn't
3 it, but we get stubborn, stupid, disobedient.

4 And here is where I want to come into it, is in that
5 part where he is first offered the job in those Verses 7
6 through 12 there.

7 And I wish he would have just said no, and I hope
8 you can learn to say no.

9 Today is a new day. God is always in redemption,
10 reconciliation, restoration, but sometimes we just need to
11 say no.

12 And as I really pressed in on this story this week
13 my conclusion is that Balaam is the Judas of the Old
14 Testament.

15 Remember the story of Judas. Judas, for money, sold
16 out the Lord, and Judas had his good qualities.

17 He walked with Jesus for three years. He's
18 passionate. He wanted to bring in the kingdom through the
19 sword. He's a zealot, but he didn't know how to say no.

20 A lot of us don't know how to say no and don't know
21 how to say yes properly, and that's a learned art, and please
22 don't hear me say that you shouldn't pray about your
23 decisions.

24 I'm just saying when you have those opportunities to
25 say no, by golly say it.

1 The Bible is clear on it and in the Sermon on the
2 Mount Jesus said it this way:

3 "Let your word be yes or no. Anything else comes
4 from the evil one."

5 That's Jesus in his best sermon.

6 And then Jesus' brother James, several years later,
7 the Book of James, the 5th Chapter, Verse 12, is quoting his
8 brother Jesus.

9 He says almost the same exact thing. "Let your yes
10 be yes and your no be no so that you may not fall under
11 condemnation."

12 So I don't want to be Judas. I don't want you to be
13 Judas, and I know you won't be, because you're going to
14 learn.

15 You're going to ask God how to say no and how to say
16 yes. It would be a good thing.

17 That's where I'm at. I would like to be right on
18 that donkey. It's kind of precarious, isn't it? Yes. No.

19 And I'm praying for our church Lutheran assembly
20 that are getting together in August in Chicago.

21 Lord, would you teach them to say no to some stuff,
22 and yes to some stuff, but no more of this we don't know. We
23 will pray about it. It's clear. It's a love story.

24 So, Pastor Wenda, do you want to lead us in
25 response?

1 I didn't tell you anything about my message this
2 week, so I kind of ambushed you at the last second, but I
3 like that yes and no and that land of maybe is really a
4 frustrating think isn't it?

5 PASTOR WENDA: Yes, and you were pretty clear today,
6 Mark, along with the scripture, about the word no. So thank
7 you for that.

8 And I know a little bit about the story because I
9 did the leader's devotion at the vacation Bible school for
10 families.

11 And we looked at the story a little bit and one of
12 leaders looked up and said why couldn't Balaam see the angel
13 of the Lord?

14 I said what do you guys think?

15 And she said he was so focused on his task, so
16 focused, wasn't he, that's all he was thinking about, was
17 what he was going to do.

18 And then we talked about how sometimes God does give
19 us guidance through angels, either to oppose what we are
20 thinking of doing, or to bless what we're thinking of doing,
21 and we can't see either.

22 Someone else suggested that it was maybe because we
23 think our way is the best way.

24 So, I had not seen that, Mark, I love that in Verse
25 30, "Haven't I been your donkey and you've ridden me all this

1 time and haven't I been in the habit of treating you this
2 way," and he said no.

3 I didn't see that before. It's just clear.
4 Straight.

5 PASTOR MARK: It's interesting too, because Gene
6 called me about 7:00 this morning.

7 Gene's car died at Wal-Mart. He was buying coffee
8 and donuts for the musicians and he calls me and he says, you
9 know, my car is dead, can you pick me up?

10 I said I will be there in ten minutes.

11 I'm thinking of this Balaam story, and we could get
12 all wrapped around the axle and frustrated that the car died,
13 maybe that saved your life this morning.

14 He wasn't beating his car with a stick or anything,
15 but we could do that, couldn't we?

16 We could go, this stupid car, I am going to replace
17 this thing.

18 There may have been a head-on two minutes down the
19 road. We don't know.

20 PASTOR WENDA: I love that idea, the first
21 documented case of road rage, but a lot of times with road
22 rage, even myself, if I get frustrated it's usually because
23 I'm frustrated in myself about something.

24 And I'm thinking Balaam, as you said, knew the
25 difference between right and wrong.

1 He knew what he was supposed to do and what he
2 wanted supposed to do.

3 And then out of that came that frustration and the
4 blame and the beating, the road rage against the donkey, of
5 course.

6 So I guess I'm thinking in terms of a response
7 today, I love that when the word no is spoken, then the Lord
8 opened the eyes of Balaam.

9 So when we begin to see, and confess, and turn, then
10 God opens our eyes and we can see the angels, the holy army
11 of angels protecting us, or opposing us, so we can know the
12 way to go.

13 Today for a response I would simply invite those of
14 you, maybe you remember a time when Mark was preaching that
15 you did not say no and you know you should have.

16 I did, I thought of that time.

17 And I notice that when he says no, what he does next
18 is he falls down on his face and worships God and he
19 confesses his sin.

20 So if you like to come forward and kneel down, I'm
21 going to pray. Maybe you want to kneel right where you are
22 in your pew area or come out into the aisle to kneel.

23 We are not having communion today, but the word of
24 God always invites us to turn, to say no to those things we
25 know that we ought to say no to.

1 And then there is always grace, God must be a
2 cowboy, that is a great line, because of the wide open
3 spaces, and I think of the wide open arms of God's grace.

4 I think we've all said no at times, and we've said
5 yes at times when we know we shouldn't have.

6 Great and holy God, we praise you for your word. We
7 thank you for the story of Balaam and his donkey that served
8 him well.

9 You served us well on the donkey that you rode into
10 Jerusalem.

11 Some people knelt down and worshipped you that day.
12 Others wondered who you were.

13 Still others rejected you and said no to the life
14 you had to offer.

15 Today, Lord, we kneel in adoration. We kneel out of
16 respect for your word. It's a great story of faith.

17 We are grateful for your wide open arms, wide open
18 spaces of love. It covers our failures.

19 Even now as we kneel, we remember that Jesus said as
20 soon you turn from your sin you are forgiven.

21 We thank you. We ask that you stir in each of our
22 hearts faith to say no when we know that's what you want to
23 hear. We praise you for the grace that is covering us just
24 now, for our holy love, and your holy light, and your holy
25 name. Thank you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.