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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
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PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: Again, what we are doing, this is
2 kind of an accurate picture of our living room at home and
3 hopefully then you'll see your living room in the same
4 context.

5 Jesus does say in my Father's house there are a lot
6 of rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I
7 go to get a place ready for you.

8 So what we want to do is we want to look a little
9 bit about the living room, but we want to look at that in
10 the context of the Lord's prayer, because that's where we
11 need to live, we need to go to God and live.

12 So grab your Bibles. Matthew 6. My sermon is
13 a two-parter.

14 It's going to talk a little bit about the Father's
15 character and then the Father's kingdom.

16 And I get those two divisions by looking closely at
17 the Lord's prayer, which is verses 9 and 10.

18 "Pray then in this way. Our Father in heaven,
19 hallowed be your name."

20 That's kind of the character part, and then, "your
21 kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in
22 heaven." That's the kingdom part.

23 Those are my two divisions and I want to show you a
24 little bit, I'm going to sit down to read this part, because
25 this is kind of cool.

1 I have a book I'm attempting to read, and I'm just
2 going to read it, but the points come up on the slides.

3 Because we need to understand, when Jesus is doing
4 what he's doing there in that 6th Chapter, he says, "When
5 you are praying, don't heave up a lot of empty phrases, as
6 the Gentiles do. They think they will be heard because of
7 their many words."

8 In other words, it's about quality, not quantity,
9 of prayer.

10 Verse 8, don't be like those guys, "for your father
11 knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then this way.
12 Our Father in heaven."

13 Of all his names, Father is God's favorite. We
14 know he loves this, this name most, because this is the one
15 that Jesus used the most.

16 While on earth Jesus called God Father over two
17 hundred times.

18 His first recorded words, this is from Luke 2:49,
19 Jesus said, "Don't you know that I must be in my Father's
20 house?"

21 Jesus is a teenager and that's the first words out
22 of his mouth in Luke's Gospel.

23 In his final triumphant prayer in Luke's Gospel he
24 proclaims, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,"
25 Luke 23:24.

1 So in Luke's Gospel those are the bookends. He's
2 always calling God Father, in the beginning of his life and
3 at the end of his life on earth.

4 In the Gospel of John alone Jesus repeats the name
5 Father over 156 times. That's one book of the Bible.

6 God loves to be called Father. It's difficult for
7 us to understand how revolutionary it was for Jesus to call
8 Jehovah, the almighty God, abba, daddy.

9 What is a common practice today was unheard of in
10 Jesus's day.

11 The New Testament scholar, Joaquin Jerimias,
12 describes how rarely the term was used prior to Jesus.

13 "With the help of my assistants I have examined the
14 prayer literature of ancient Judaism. The result of this
15 examination was that in no place in this immense literature
16 is this invocation of God as father ever to be found. Abba,
17 daddy, was an everyday word. It was a homey family word.
18 No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner, and
19 yet Jesus did it always in all of his prayers which are
20 handed down to us, with one single exception. That was the
21 cry from the cross where he said, my God, my God, why have
22 you forsaken me. Every other time it was Father. In the
23 Lord's prayer Jesus authorizes his disciples to repeat the
24 word abba after him. He gives them a share in his sonship."

25 In other words, he's my Father, he's your Father,

1 that's why we pray our Father.

2 "He empowers his disciples to speak with their
3 heavenly Father in such a familiar and trusting way."

4 Daddy. Dad.

5 "The first two words of the Lord's prayer are
6 significant. Our father reminds us is that we are welcome
7 in God's house because we have been adopted by the owner of
8 the house."

9 Isn't that cool? I never really thought of it in
10 those same terms.

11 But it's amazing, as you look through the
12 scriptures and then you start seeing things in a different
13 light, and one of those cool things that we can maybe see is
14 found in Luke 15.

15 This is one of the defining stories that Jesus
16 tells.

17 It's the story of the prodigal son and the way that
18 story begins in the 15th Chapter of Luke, the 11th Verse,
19 he says there was a father, a man, who had two sons.

20 And what he does is he divides the inheritance up
21 and he gives half to one and half to the other and the
22 younger brother goes off and he blows it all.

23 And then the younger son, the younger brother, he's
24 out in the field and he has come to himself, this is
25 horrible, I've done this horribly stupid thing, I would

1 rather eat what these pigs are eating, and he's feeding
2 pigs, which is totally taboo in the Jewish religion. He's
3 at rock bottom.

4 So he comes to himself and he says, you know what I
5 am going to do?

6 I'm going to go back and I'm going to tell dad what
7 I did wrong. That's what I'm going to do.

8 He rehearses his speech and he is going to come,
9 Verse 18, I'm going to get up and go to my father and say to
10 him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.
11 I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

12 So he sets off in Verse 20 and he went to his
13 father, but while he was still far off, he wasn't in the
14 living room yet, his father saw him, and he was filled with
15 compassion, he ran and put his arms around him and kissed
16 him.

17 "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before
18 you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."

19 The point being the son is willing to stop being a
20 son, I'm not worth it, but the father is never willing to
21 quit being a dad.

22 Never will he be ever capable of not being a
23 father.

24 The son is willing to stop being a son, but the
25 father is not willing to stop being a dad.

1 The son has left the table, but he has not left the
2 family.

3 The father always will welcome him back, and
4 hopefully on a very regular basis in the living room.

5 You know the rest of the story. He kills the
6 fatted calf, gives him a ring, gives him a robe, puts new
7 shoes on his feet, gives him a shower, and they have a huge
8 party.

9 He's back. He's back. Thanks be to God.

10 So the father's character, you see, is defined by
11 welcome and love and forgiveness, even when you don't feel
12 worthy, you're still my son, or daughter, that defines his
13 character.

14 We see it even more closely I think in Romans 8,
15 which is one of the great chapters of the Bible.

16 In my Bible it's on page 150, Romans 8, Verses 15
17 and 16.

18 "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to
19 fall back into fear."

20 Notice what the son says, I just want to be one of
21 our slaves, one of your servants, I'm not worthy to be your
22 son anymore.

23 But Paul says, "You did not receive a spirit of
24 slavery to fall back into fear. You have received a spirit
25 of adoption. When we cry Abba, Father, it is that very

1 spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children
2 of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint
3 heirs with Christ."

4 The key point being with the forgiveness comes the
5 adoption. With the forgiveness comes the adoption.

6 We are in the family, come hell or high water,
7 literally.

8 We have got two kids, they are both biological
9 kids, one is 18, one is 23, and we love them with all our
10 hearts, but they were planned, more or less.

11 I'm not so stupid as to think you plan when you are
12 going to have your kids entirely, but they were planned
13 pregnancies.

14 There are in this world unplanned pregnancies, but
15 there are no such things as unplanned adoptions.

16 Think about that theologically. Some people have
17 an unplanned pregnancy, but there are no unplanned
18 adoptions.

19 Somebody who is going to adopt has to go through a
20 lot of work.

21 And you have been forgiven, loved, welcomed,
22 adopted, because what has happened is God has adopted you.

23 He sought you out, he found you, he signed the
24 papers.

25 You aren't an accident, and you're not an accident

1 either if your parents didn't plan you, but you understand
2 the theological significance of that.

3 He signed the papers in and beyond his own blood by
4 giving his Son that he might have another child in the
5 family.

6 That's the intimacy of the Father in heaven with
7 his kids, that's you and me, and that's revolutionary. That
8 can change the world.

9 We got back from visiting our son on Tuesday night,
10 it was really late, and then Wednesday was a full day and I
11 was kind of tired.

12 So I went home and had some lunch and I turned on
13 the radio.

14 Oftentimes on my lunch hour I listen to the Jim
15 Rome radio show.

16 He's a sports guy, he's a little bit caustic,
17 sometimes a little bit on the edge, but I love him because
18 he's all about accountability.

19 He had an interview on Sunday with a guy, his name
20 is Jim Macleran, I have a picture of the guy, Jim is the guy
21 right there next to Oprah, and then Emanuel is the kid on
22 the far left, but you need to know a little bit about Jim.

23 He was a very famous athlete. He was a Rhodes
24 scholar, he was from an underprivileged background but he
25 went to Yale on an academic and football scholarship.

1 He weighed about three hundred pounds, he was about
2 six-five, he was a very good football player.

3 And after his football career ended, as an athlete,
4 he got real interested in triathlons.

5 And so he started training and he lost a bunch of
6 his weight and he got to be a world-class triathlete.

7 And in one of his races, I think it was in New
8 York, he was running, and in triathlons you swim and you
9 ride a bike and you run.

10 This may have been just a marathon, I don't know,
11 but he's in New York, and he's setting world records, or
12 right in the top five, and he gets hit by a car and he
13 literally was dead.

14 He was on the concrete and the police came around
15 and pronounced him dead and they did the chalk outline of
16 his body on the ground.

17 His spleen was ruptured, his liver was just mauled,
18 and he lost his leg.

19 You can kind of see, he lost his whole left leg,
20 and so what he did is he overcame that incredible obstacle
21 and then he became a triathlete again, a second life, and he
22 not only was winning all of the ones against disabled
23 people, but he thought I'm not disabled, I am going to go
24 against able-bodied people, and he got to the top five in
25 the world doing that, riding his bike, swimming, running

1 with a fake leg.

2 He's in one of those races, and I believe he's in
3 Hawaii, and he's in the bicycle part of it and he's going
4 down the street and there was a security issue that somehow
5 a van got out of control and came through the barrier and
6 knocked him off his bike and he's paralyzed from his neck
7 down.

8 Horrible story, but he somehow overcame a lot of
9 that and then all of a sudden he was now a wheelchair
10 athlete.

11 And what happened in the midst of that, he said it
12 was probably his hugest victory, was then he became addicted
13 to drugs, because he had no feeling from his chest down, so
14 the only thing that felt was his head, and he was in this
15 horrible pain, so he started taking cocaine and narcotics,
16 and he overcame that.

17 It came to him one day, he's in Maui, and he is
18 taking drugs, that's where he used to do the triathlon.

19 But Jim Rome was talking to him, and he just
20 received the Arthur Ashe Courage Award from the ESPE
21 Foundation.

22 Now he's a speaker and he goes out and tells his
23 story to people.

24 And the part that just jarred my preserves was when
25 Rome asked him a question and he said, "I have never been

1 happier in my whole life."

2 Rome is like what?

3 "If you would have told me twenty-five years ago I
4 would be on your show telling my story, I'm not defined by
5 my body, and I'm not defined by what I can't do. I'm
6 defined by who God has made me."

7 And he's not blaming God for the accidents in his
8 life, he's not blaming God for the chemical dependency he
9 had, or the amputation, or anything else.

10 He's just getting a heck of a lot more comfortable
11 in the living room of his soul.

12 And now he's off drugs, he's in constant pain, but
13 he has never been happier in his life.

14 That blows me away. What a cool guy. You can look
15 him up, JimMaclaren.com and he tells the story far better
16 than I. There's a little clip on there and you can watch a
17 video of him talking.

18 But take a look at this verse from Galatians. Paul
19 was also a guy who learned that he wasn't defined by his
20 body.

21 Galatians 4, page 181, but again, with the Father's
22 character, love, forgiveness, adoption, Chapter 4, Verse 4,
23 "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son,
24 born of a woman, born into the law, in order to redeem those
25 who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as

1 children."

2 The key word being receive. Some of us don't
3 welcome it or receive it, because we either think we are
4 unworthy or we have a blockage.

5 "And because you are children, God has sent the
6 spirit of his Son into our hearts crying Abba."

7 Daddy. Daddy.

8 "So you are not longer a slave but a child, and if
9 a child then also an heir."

10 That's where the kingdom kicks in. Heir of what?
11 The Father splits the inheritance, gives you your share, and
12 you need to be generous with it and give it back and not
13 squander it and blow it, but notice that it's a beautiful
14 thing.

15 We are children of the Father. We are children of
16 the King, the kingdom, and the living room of that is it's
17 really comfortable, but it's not naive.

18 We need to bask in that relationship with God. We
19 need to put our feet up, sometimes take our shoes off, take
20 down our barriers, and we need to kind of fall into that,
21 Father, Jesus. It's not about the empty phrases. You're in
22 heaven and I'm sitting here on this couch Sunday morning.

23 Father, thank you for this great day we're having,
24 but, you see, my kids, when they were a little younger, they
25 were really outspoken, which is great, we taught them to say

1 what they thought and felt, and I'll never forget my
2 daughter, she came up with this great expression, build me a
3 bridge, cry me a river, and get over it.

4 But if we don't have a healthy relationship with
5 our earthly father, we don't need to build a bridge, God has
6 done that for us.

7 And maybe today is the day we give a little prayer
8 for our heavenly Father relationship in terms of our earthly
9 father relationship, and that's a growing edge for me, so
10 that's an invitation, a little later in the service, you
11 might give some prayer for that.

12 I've got some scar tissue. I couldn't call my dad
13 daddy.

14 He was kind of old school, and I was growing and
15 figuring out who I was and stuff, but I just didn't ever
16 really go to that living room.

17 And I'm learning now, because I'm doing a new
18 thing, Isaiah 43 says, and he's doing it in me, and I just
19 need to get past some of that stuff.

20 I need to get over that, because that's blocking my
21 relationship with my Father in heaven. He doesn't want
22 that.

23 So that is a little bit on the character. That's
24 the character of the Father's kingdom.

25 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as

1 it is in heaven.

2 I want to make a couple of points on that.

3 Oftentimes when we look at that in Matthew 6 we think those
4 are separate things.

5 Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your
6 name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it
7 is in heaven.

8 And I'm recently discovering and learning about the
9 benefit and the truth of keeping those two things together
10 instead of separate.

11 In other words, if I think in my mind's eye, what
12 does God's kingdom look like, you know that song "I Can Only
13 Imagine", I can only imagine what it's going to be like in
14 heaven.

15 Okay, in heaven, no pain, no sorrow, no sadness, no
16 alienation, no brokenness, no abandonment, that's the
17 kingdom.

18 What is the will? What is God's will for us? Does
19 he want brokenness and pain and sorrow and abandonment and
20 disconnectedness and abuse?

21 Is that God's will? No.

22 Those are the same thing. Your kingdom come, your
23 will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

24 In other words, when I look around I'm not seeing a
25 lot of that as I look in the world, but this prayer invites

1 that.

2 And I'm dealing with something in my family. My
3 mom was married to a dear, dear man.

4 My step-dad was married to my mom for about four
5 years, and then he died.

6 But now it's cool, because I have a whole bunch of
7 cousins and grandcousins that I never knew.

8 Now all of a sudden they are part of our family,
9 and Jeff is 23 years old, he's a graduate of Luther College,
10 cool kid, awesome kid, reminds me of a lot of my daughter,
11 same age, Sydney.

12 But he's now down in Houston, Texas, and he has to
13 have his whole pelvis torn out and he's going through his
14 fifth round of chemo.

15 He has this horrible cancer, and now when I pray
16 for Jeff, and I encourage your prayers for Jeff, too,
17 sometimes we are tempted to go, Our Father in heaven, I pray
18 that you bless Jeff as he's getting through this cancer down
19 in Texas, if it be your will.

20 And I don't pray that way anymore, because it is
21 his will.

22 It is not God's will that Jeff at the age of 23 has
23 to have bone grafts and his pelvis removed and he's going to
24 be on crutches for the rest of his life, and maybe with the
25 grace of God he's going to be a wheelchair athlete.

1 But you see what we do, your will be done, on earth
2 as it is in heaven. Your kingdom come.

3 I want it and I'm not going to apologize for it,
4 I'm going to believe it is going to happen, and if it
5 doesn't happen it's not God's fault.

6 His will is his kingdom, it's the same thing, so we
7 have to quit separating that out, because when we do that we
8 lose the game before we start.

9 I really want you to heal Jeff, if it be your will.
10 We lose our accountability in that.

11 I am going to be there, I'm going to be knocking on
12 that door, and if they need me to help in any way I'm going
13 to get on the first flight to Houston and I'm going to help,
14 because I'm going to be accountable for that healing
15 process.

16 It is God's will that Jeff gets through this thing
17 and looks back on it, and maybe he's on Oprah.

18 And I'm not saying that as a pie in the sky
19 optimist; I'm saying that as a person of faith.

20 And I want you to think of that. When you pray for
21 somebody, don't doubt. If it be your will.

22 If we have a healthy relationship with the Father,
23 we already know what his will is.

24 It's healing, wholeness, balance, integrity,
25 putting together wounds, and bringing it to the next level.

1 That's his will.

2 You think you are frustrated with cancer. Imagine
3 God's frustration. It's one of his kids that has got it.

4 He's just my little grandnephew, and I love him,
5 but God loves him a heck of a lot more than I do, and he
6 goes to a different church.

7 You see, this is all about the Father and his
8 character and his kingdom.

9 When you pray, avoid the empty phrases, Jesus says,
10 in Verse 7.

11 That's what those become, is empty phrases, when we
12 start apologizing for God in advance that maybe he just
13 really can't do it, he doesn't have enough power. Those are
14 empty phrases.

15 What I want you to consider, perhaps for the first
16 time in your life, is maybe sometimes the best prayers are
17 the one word prayers.

18 Father. Dad. I couldn't say it while he was alive
19 in this life, but boy I can say it now. Dad.

20 Thanks.

21 One word prayer.

22 Please.

23 Help.

24 I'm sorry.

25 Those are not empty phrases when they come from our

1 hearts into the loving arms of our Father who sent his Son
2 to die for us.

3 I'm kind of sad this morning. I got sick during
4 the night, and I'm not sad of that, but I was up and I
5 thought, well, okay, I'm in the bathroom so I better finish
6 this book I started last week, and sure enough, I'm kind of
7 sad because I'm done.

8 And this book is called "Blue Like Jazz" by Donald
9 Miller.

10 There is a quote in this thing, there are several,
11 if you want a great book, buy this book, I bought it at
12 Borders for twelve bucks, it's on our web site, it's
13 available.

14 This is about a young guy and his story and his
15 faith struggle. It's an awesome book.

16 He said, "I believe the greatest trick of the devil
17 is not to get us into some sort of evil, but rather have us
18 wasting our time. This is why the devil tries so hard to
19 get Christians to be religious."

20 Isn't that ironic? The devil is trying to get
21 Christians to be religious.

22 "If he can sink a man's mind into habit, he will
23 prevent his heart from engaging with God."

24 Think of that in the context of the Lord's Prayer.
25 Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. They

1 kingdom come, thy will be done, that's a habit, and I'm not
2 saying that's an unhealthy habit. There is worse.

3 "But if the devil can sink a man or woman's mind
4 into habit, he will prevent their heart from engaging God.
5 I was into habit," he confesses.

6 "I grew up going to church, so I got used to
7 hearing about God. He was like Uncle Harry, or Aunt Sally,
8 except we didn't have pictures. God never sent me presents
9 either. We had this dumpy house, and we had a dumpy car,
10 and I had zits. Looking back I suppose God sent sunsets and
11 forests and flowers, but what is that to a child?"

12 Here is the crescendo for me.

13 "If you don't love somebody it gets annoying when
14 they tell you what to do or how to feel."

15 If you don't love God, and he's telling you that
16 stuff, how annoying that is.

17 "When you love them, you get pleasure from their
18 pleasure, and it makes it easier to serve. God loves it
19 when we call him daddy. That just makes him smile. We get
20 pleasure from his pleasure."

21 And he confesses, "I didn't love God, because I
22 didn't know God."

23 Some of us don't really know God. Some of us are
24 into the habit, and some of us are into the whole religious
25 observance, I'll get my card punched, been there, done that,

1 I hope I don't get hit by lightning on the way home because
2 I really wasn't into it today, or whatever.

3 What we invite you to do is in your living room,
4 that's in your home, this is not your home, this is your
5 church, huge difference, huge difference.

6 In that living room would you attempt to get
7 comfortable with your Father in heaven and maybe do some of
8 those one word prayers.

9 I have a little thing we are going to do here at
10 the end.

11 Sit in the living room chair. This is your
12 invitation today.

13 There are eight different spots around the room
14 here, you can use mine when I'm done here if you want.

15 The prayer ministers will be at those places and
16 they will place a hand on your shoulder and they will invite
17 you to open your hands to receive what God has for you
18 today.

19 This is the posture. You will sit in one of these
20 couches, or one of these chairs, and a prayer minister will
21 lightly put a hand on you and ask you, "What do you want
22 Jesus to do for you today?"

23 Okay? That's first step.

24 I want now to invite the middle school kids that
25 were on the Alpha retreat this weekend.

1 They made these really cool gifts that they are
2 going to give you this morning.

3 They had a Holy Spirit weekend this weekend. Their
4 Alpha weekend was awesome.

5 The song the band is going to be doing is "I'll
6 Lead You Home".

7 While the song is going on, you can go to any one
8 of those stations around the worship center, and you'll
9 receive a card, and you'll also receive some of these really
10 cool beads, and they are different colors for the color
11 codes on the card.

12 And then what you are invited to do, you can take
13 that then, and that will remind you of the Lord's prayer,
14 you can be prayed for by one of the prayer ministers, or you
15 can go back to your seat and pray the Lord's prayer, pausing
16 after each petition, and then we'll sing together the
17 refrain of "I'll Lead You Home".

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