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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN NEBRASKA

NOVEMBER 14, 2004

PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: As I said at the beginning of  
2 the service, we are in a November worship series that is  
3 focusing on table fellowship and the reminder that whether  
4 we eat Taco Bell in the van, or we prepare a special meal  
5 for friends or family, or we go out to a restaurant, no  
6 matter what our table looks like, Jesus wants to eat with  
7 real people like you and me.

8 And Jesus wants to be our guest at those tables,  
9 wherever they are, and we can make every single meal, every  
10 single table fellowship meaningful and a blessing to our  
11 bodies and our spirits.

12 I kind of had a little fun with the title for the  
13 series "Reality TG".

14 I thought that might catch your attention because  
15 reality TV is such a popular thing in our American culture.

16 Just a show of hands, and please don't be  
17 embarrassed, but how many of you do watch reality TV, you  
18 have one show or something.

19 That's what I thought. Myself included, I watch  
20 one too, I'm not going to say what it is because you would  
21 think it's just so trashy.

22 (Laughter)

23 But I do watch one, I have my show, and for the  
24 rest of you that don't watch that, go ahead and pity us,  
25 that's okay, perfectly okay.

1           But I guess that "Survivor", according to  
2 Foxnews.com, "Survivor" and "The Bachelor" have been on for  
3 four years and they have been taking a little different  
4 twist.

5           But the ratings have declined significantly for  
6 those two shows.

7           What has risen to the top is this one called  
8 "Extreme Makeover" and I think Pastor Mark mentioned it last  
9 week.

10          Now, I have a question. Is that just about people?  
11 Is it an extreme makeover for a person?

12          Okay, but did it used to be, and this was their  
13 twist, that they would make over a house?

14          That's true, isn't it? That's what I thought.

15          But did any of you see that extreme makeover on a  
16 house a couple weeks ago where the family, a family of four,  
17 and the two parents were deaf and the older boy could see  
18 and talk and he had all his faculties in that sense and  
19 their younger child was autistic.

20          And it was really kind of cool. Adrian and Mark  
21 and I sat around and watched this, they came in and gutted  
22 this house and then they made it over completely so that the  
23 family could function better.

24          They took the walls out and they made this very  
25 special basement area for the autistic child that matched



1 be the one they would be one.

2 Now, granted, the Bible doesn't tell us that they  
3 were married.

4 But because they had an entirely different approach  
5 to serving and hosting a meal, I think the reality TV show  
6 that they maybe would be on would have been "Wife Swap".  
7 Just a thought.

8 (Laughter)

9 In honor of our fourth graders taking this faith  
10 step today and taking time out to learn how to do a  
11 devotional, and this is so important, because I had in my  
12 interviews with our confirmation students that were  
13 confirmed just about a month ago, there was a student who  
14 did not know what a devotional was.

15 And that concerned me a little bit so I went back  
16 to my shelf and I just gave him one.

17 But that's an excellent thing that we are doing  
18 here in our faith community, is taking time out to teach our  
19 young people, and we need to be doing probably at every  
20 level in our discipleship.

21 But in honor of them today we are going to do a  
22 devotional.

23 It's a called a do-votional actually. The welcome  
24 team is handing them out right now.

25 What I would like you to do is cluster together

1 like in groups of four or five and we are going to do this  
2 do-votional together.

3 Just to refresh your memory, the first thing you do  
4 when you do a devotional is you read the story.

5 Let me read the story again. This time I am going  
6 to read it from a different translation called the "Message  
7 Bible".

8 So as those are being passed out I invite you to  
9 listen.

10 "As they continued their travel Jesus entered a  
11 village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and  
12 made him feel quite at home. She had had a sister, Mary,  
13 who sat before the Master hanging on every word He said, but  
14 Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen.  
15 Later she stepped in, interrupting them. "Master, don't you  
16 care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell  
17 her to lend me a hand."

18 The Master said, "Martha, dear Martha, you are  
19 fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over  
20 nothing. One thing only is essential and Mary has chosen  
21 it. It's the main course and it won't be taken from her."

22 Does everyone have a do-votional and you are in a  
23 little group? Go for it. Introduce yourself to someone if  
24 you don't know them.

25 How are you doing? Are you pretty much done?

1 Let's check our answers.

2 Why do you think Jesus went to Martha's and Mary's  
3 house?

4 What did you put? Mark, what did you put?

5 He needed their fellowship.

6 Did anybody else put something different?

7 You guys put A. They were close friends. I think  
8 that's good.

9 C is a possibility. I mean, if you think about it  
10 it, he liked their cooking. He had spent a lot of time with  
11 them.

12 Number two, what do you think Jesus meant when he  
13 said Mary has chosen what is better?

14 I'm pretty sure the Nygrens choose B. "People who  
15 let their housework go are more spiritual," right? There's  
16 quite a few of you that chose that, didn't you?

17 (Laughter)

18 What did you put there? E. Spiritual matters come  
19 first, okay.

20 Does anybody have something different?

21 C, people are more important than a clean house.

22 That was a very loud C, whoever said that, they said it  
23 really loud, okay, we got your point.

24 (Laughter)

25 What about D? That's not too bad, if you think

1 about it. It's not too bad of an answer.

2 Number three, if you had been Martha how would you  
3 have responded to Jesus's remark.

4 Me, I would be picking F for sure, the supper  
5 burned.

6 What did you choose? E, accepted the rebuke. Did  
7 anyone else choose something different?

8 A, gone to my room and pouted? Immature --

9 (Laughter)

10 That reminds me of the time Sydney, our daughter,  
11 was like twelve years old or something like that, we had  
12 kind of a skirmish downstairs and she lived upstairs in the  
13 attic room and she marched up there and she said, "Well, at  
14 least I'm immature."

15 (Laughter)

16 It was one of her better lines. It was great.

17 Were there other ones there? D, felt put down.

18 Someone else said that at the 7:45 service, to be honest,  
19 they would have felt put down.

20 Four, why do you think Jesus said it? What did you  
21 choose?

22 C, he knew her well enough to say this without  
23 hurting her?

24 Did anybody else choose something different? D,  
25 yes, because this actually happened in the last week of his

1 life when he had dinner with Mary and Martha, so he knew he  
2 had one more week and he wanted to spend the time with them.

3 Now, turn it over and let's do the prayer together.  
4 "Dear God, thank you for Mary and Martha. Help us to sit at  
5 your feet, listen to your voice, and choose a life of  
6 devotion to you, in Jesus's name, amen."

7 Yes, see, doing a devotional can be fun, and if  
8 some of you out there don't have a devotional booklet and  
9 you would like us to help with that, we can do that, that's  
10 what we're here for.

11 We are here as spiritual mentors and guides and to  
12 keep you on your journey, but doing a devotional doesn't  
13 have to be a chore. It can be fun, just like what we did  
14 this morning.

15 Let's look at that story just a little more  
16 carefully.

17 I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke, Chapter  
18 10, Verses 38 to 42.

19 Verse 38 says, "Now as they went on their way he  
20 entered a certain village where Martha welcomed Jesus into  
21 her home."

22 That seems like something that wouldn't be a very  
23 big deal, it's just a simple statement, that Jesus was  
24 welcomed into Martha's home.

25 But in actuality there was a lot of expectations on

1 hospitality in the ancient Near East.

2 This means more than Martha just opening the door  
3 and welcoming Jesus.

4 What this is meaning is that she was expected to  
5 put on a feast.

6 She was expected to have a big meal and the reason  
7 she was expected to have a big meal is because it was  
8 expected of you to open your home and offer whatever you had  
9 and make it very fancy for weary travelers. That was just  
10 part of the hospitality custom.

11 And here is something that I had never realized  
12 before, but Martha probably entertained over one hundred  
13 people at this dinner.

14 I had never realized that before, but here is how  
15 we know. Look with me at Chapter 10, Verse 1.

16 It says, "After this the Lord appointed seventy  
17 others."

18 What does that mean? Others besides who?

19 Besides the twelve disciples, exactly.

20 And then look with me at Verse 17, Chapter 10, he  
21 sends them out, go out and spread the good news, the harvest  
22 is plentiful but the laborers are few.

23 So he sends them out, in addition to the disciples,  
24 Verse 17.

25 The seventy returned with joy saying, "Lord, in

1 your name even the demons submit to us."

2 In other words, that wasn't that bad. They come  
3 back after spreading the news about Jesus's love and  
4 forgiveness and what has happened to them because they have  
5 been hanging out with their Lord Jesus Christ, how it's made  
6 a difference in their life, and they come back and they say  
7 that wasn't bad. We can do this.

8 And I love this verse, 21, "At that same hour Jesus  
9 rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father,  
10 Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these  
11 things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed  
12 them to infants. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious  
13 will."

14 In that line, it's almost pivotal for Jesus, in  
15 that exclamation Jesus is saying that he understands why the  
16 Father sent Him and why He is to send others.

17 "Oh, Lord, Father in heaven, this is what you  
18 wanted us to do. I understand your plan," is what Jesus is  
19 saying, and he's rejoicing in that.

20 I see now why I was sent and why we send others  
21 out.

22 I love that. It's almost like it's a revelation  
23 for Jesus and the reason for his ministry on earth, and then  
24 look at verse 23 with me.

25 "Then turning to the disciples," this is all one

1 narrative, and sometimes we have to look before a passage  
2 reading in the Bible and after a passage so we can get the  
3 sense of what is really happening, "Turning to the  
4 disciples," he has the seventy there, they came back, they  
5 said it wasn't so bad out there, and then he turns to the  
6 disciples and he talks to them a little bit.

7           And then 38, "Now as they went on their way," this  
8 is where New Testament scholar Edward Schweitzer gets the  
9 idea that Martha entertained well over a hundred people at  
10 this dinner.

11           Because there were the seventy, the twelve, and  
12 anybody else who was tagging along and loving what was  
13 happening.

14           So, isn't that amazing? No wonder she was  
15 distracted then.

16           Actually the better translation for Verse 40, "and  
17 Martha was being drawn around and around."

18           There's a word in there, the Greek word is actually  
19 used twice, and the word means around, and it is used twice  
20 in the original text.

21           So, in other words, Martha was going around and  
22 around. She was going around and around with much serving.

23           Have you any of ever done that? Have any of you  
24 ever gone around and around in circles?

25           I'll do that. I'll go down to the laundry room

1 and I think I will just go put in a load or something.

2           Then I will see something across the hall that  
3 needs attention and then I will go and do that and then I  
4 forget what I'm doing and then the shirts get all dried and  
5 I go upstairs and I think now I have to finish the kitchen  
6 up there and then I will think, oh, I started another load,  
7 and I don't know if you ever do stuff like that, but you go  
8 around and around in circles.

9           Or maybe it's at your place of work. You have just  
10 started a project or a task and someone interrupts you on  
11 the telephone and you check in with a workmate and say I  
12 have not got a thing done. I've just been going around and  
13 around in circles all day and I haven't gotten anything  
14 substantial done.

15           We are good at that, but we can understand why  
16 Martha was doing that, because she had over a hundred guests  
17 and she thought that the better thing was to be serving.  
18 That's what she thought.

19           She's thinking I've got to do it, and you know what  
20 that feeling is like when you are doing the laundry and  
21 fixing up stuff and you're doing a little extra stuff and  
22 don't you just want to yell up to Pastor Mark and Adrian, or  
23 the people that live in your house and say, hey, can you  
24 guys help me with some of this?

25           That's what Martha did here. She said, where is my

1 sister?

2 I've said that, too, actually when I was younger.  
3 Why can't you guys help me do this?

4 But we do that, don't we? We start to complain  
5 when we feel like we are overwhelmed with so much to do.

6 And that's an easy thing to do, is to complain, but  
7 Jesus says to Martha, no, the better thing is not the  
8 serving, I know the you think the better thing to do right  
9 now is to serve us, but that is not the better. What is  
10 better is what Mary is doing.

11 So let's look at what Mary is doing. She's doing  
12 three things.

13 What is she doing? Can you find them?

14 She sits down. There's one thing.

15 She listens. That's the other thing.

16 To other one is a little more hidden. What is the  
17 other verb in that passage?

18 She chose. She makes a choice to sit down and to  
19 listen at the feet of Jesus.

20 Whenever we are going around and around in a  
21 circle, we are overwhelmed by health test results; when we  
22 are overcome with concern and worry about our relationship  
23 to our husband, or to our wife, or with our children, or if  
24 we are just inundated at work with projects and you just  
25 can't seem to find the time to be with your family, when we

1 are distracted by many things we can learn well from Mary.

2 She does three things to center her life in Christ.  
3 She sits down; she listens to everything Jesus has to say.  
4 She made a choice to do that.

5 And when we are kind of going around in circles we,  
6 too, can make a choice to simply sit down.

7 We are in a much better position to listen to what  
8 Jesus has to say if we sit down.

9 I'm not against you praying in your van or in your  
10 car on the way to work.

11 I'm just saying get up fifteen minutes earlier and  
12 sit in your chair, just sit there.

13 Sometimes I just sit in my devotion chair, just  
14 sit, because then I can hear. I'm in a better position to  
15 hear the Lord's voice.

16 This is what we, too, can do. This is what Mary  
17 teaches. She chooses. She chooses to sit down.

18 Someone told me last night at 5:30 worship, flopped  
19 into their worship chair and said that's the first time I  
20 had a chance to sit down all day, and I am happy for you if  
21 you can do that in worship, I'm glad we can accommodate, but  
22 that's not right, people of God.

23 There has to be another time where you just sit.  
24 Give yourself a time out. Sit down and listen to what the  
25 Lord has to say.

1           This afternoon I have a concert. I play the  
2 trumpet in the Omaha Municipal Orchestra.

3           It's just a bunch of wannabes. We just all want to  
4 be professional musicians.

5           But it's fun to get together and make music and one  
6 of the best things about the orchestra is we get to  
7 accompany people, soloists that are professionals, like Dr.  
8 James Johnson, he's a great pianist and he teaches at UNO  
9 and we are going to accompany him this afternoon on  
10 Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto and I have a tacit on the  
11 second movement.

12           That means I sit out, and I'm not going to try to  
13 sing it for you, but its one of the most beautiful pieces of  
14 music in the whole world and Dr. Johnson just softly touches  
15 the first four bars of the second movement, just lays right  
16 down on that piano, and it almost immediately moved me to  
17 tears the other night at rehearsal.

18           I found myself reaching in my purse, clearing away  
19 the extra dental floss and the gum wrappers and the sticky  
20 stuff and reaching for my New Testament that I keep in  
21 there.

22           It's a hazard for my New Testament to be in my  
23 purse, but I reached in there, and I didn't make a big scene  
24 of it, Dr. Johnson is playing, I just put it on my lap and I  
25 opened it to the 25th, 26th, 27th Psalm, the music is

1 playing, the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should  
2 I be afraid of?

3           Though mother and father will forsake you, I will  
4 never forsake you.

5           I found myself sitting and listening at Jesus's  
6 feet, and that's why you want to get a New Testament and get  
7 it in your pocket, men.

8           And, women, get one and put it in your purse. You  
9 can get really thin ones, so that you can choose to sit at  
10 the Lord's feet and listen and be ready to sit and listen at  
11 his feet.

12           I think that's really what Jesus is trying to say  
13 to Martha.

14           Martha, you're missing the point of good table  
15 fellowship.

16           What is good table fellowship is you sit and you  
17 enjoy each other's company.

18           Maybe you have been a guest in someone's home where  
19 you never really see them, when they are having you over,  
20 you think I should just go home because I'm not visiting  
21 with them, because they are going around in circles serving  
22 me, and I sometimes am guilty of that as a host myself.

23           But Jesus says you're missing the point of good  
24 company, and more than that, what she was missing out on was  
25 the company of Jesus Christ, her Lord. That's what she was

1 missing out on.

2 He says Mary has chosen the better portion. She  
3 has chosen the better part.

4 She is sitting, and she's listening, and she  
5 teaches us well how to center our lives on Christ.

6 And we have to ask ourselves, people of God, what  
7 is our life centered on?

8 We have to ask ourselves, because there are a lot  
9 of things we can choose.

10 We can center our lives on ourselves, because if we  
11 don't take of care of ourselves who will. We could do that.

12 We could center our lives on our marriage. We  
13 could do everything we possibly can to serve the other one  
14 and almost worship the spouse.

15 Or we could center our lives on work, because after  
16 all it is our livelihood, it is important.

17 We could center or lives on our wealth. We could  
18 center our lives on our health, that's the only thing we  
19 would be concerned about is our health.

20 We could even center our lives on bitterness and  
21 hatred, which some are known to do, and you kind of shake  
22 your head and wonder why. There is so much joy to be had.

23 But Jesus teaches us how to center our lives,  
24 because, see, he centered his life on his Father in heaven.

25 That's why he turned in that moment and said,

1 "Father, I see your plan now. You sent me and I send them  
2 and this is your gracious will."

3 He teaches us how to center our lives on God, and  
4 Mary teaches us how to center on lives on Christ.

5 For the last several weeks I have been in the upper  
6 room at Boyd and Charlie's barbecue restaurant downtown and  
7 Perry is the owner of Boyd and Charlie's, he's such a  
8 gracious community person, and he redid the upper room of  
9 his establishment there, and it's a party room, but we get  
10 to use it on Wednesday nights.

11 And I have been with about thirty 7th graders in  
12 there every Wednesday night.

13 And this week is our last one, we are going to  
14 actually present the Passover meal to our parents, the kids  
15 are.

16 So they were practicing on Wednesday night, and I  
17 don't know if you remember Wednesday, it was kind of cold  
18 and rainy, and so I was driving up to the restaurant there  
19 and I got out of my car and it's dark now at this time of  
20 night at 6:30.

21 And I looked up and in the upper room there were  
22 these 7th graders, they dressed in disciple costumes,  
23 because we brought the costumes over so they could practice,  
24 and it was great.

25 They were looking out the window in their disciple

1 costumes, just the cutest thing, and I smiled to myself.

2 Little did I know what they were looking for is me  
3 so they could scare the bejabbers out of me as soon as I got  
4 up to the top of steps.

5 If I would have known that I wouldn't have gone in  
6 there and taught that night.

7 So as soon as I open the door I screamed like for  
8 five minutes straight and then I had to try to get my heart  
9 out of my throat before I could start teaching.

10 But it was awesome, because they were all dressed,  
11 they kind of mixed and matched Christmas and Easter.

12 Like one kid was wearing like a king's hat, plus  
13 the drab disciple's uniform. It was great. It was really  
14 awesome.

15 Or like a really gold shiny thing, like something  
16 the kings would wear.

17 I said to Barb, our director of youth discipleship,  
18 "Don't send that one costume," it was made out of like cloud  
19 material.

20 And she goes, "Oh, Mary picked that out."

21 She was happy as ever in that blue cloud costume.  
22 It was awesome.

23 But Barb, our director of youth discipleship, said,  
24 "Wenda, every year I want our young people to take a few  
25 moments and write about where they are at in their faith

1 journey, on their discipleship journey."

2 I said, "Okay. Great."

3 She said, "I want you to set aside twenty minutes  
4 for that."

5 I said, "What? That is going to be mayhem. I  
6 don't think that's going to work at all."

7 She goes, "No, it will work. Just put on some  
8 contemplative music. It will work. They'll write for  
9 twenty minutes. Just invite them to write complete  
10 sentences, complete thoughts."

11 I said okay and so I put the music on and we sat  
12 down, we all sit on the floor there because that's what the  
13 disciples did in the upper room, they reclined.

14 So we all reclined and I started looking around and  
15 they are wearing their costumes, their costumes are all  
16 twisted, and this one kid had Jesus right on some name tag  
17 from last year's drama.

18 And they started writing, and it made me cry,  
19 because here they were, thirty disciples, dressed, in the  
20 upper room.

21 And the question was how have you grown spiritually  
22 through this experience?

23 Name something that has helped you to feel God's  
24 presence.

25 And Hannah Riggle let me share this with you. She

1 wrote, "The candle shadows danced around the walls of the  
2 upper room and made shapes that looked like Jesus and his  
3 disciples. I could feel his warmth always and I know I am  
4 safe in his arms."

5 "Are you sure they can write," I said to Barb?

6 "Yes," she said.

7 Recall one of the activities you've done in these  
8 last weeks, something that has meant the most to you.

9 Hannah writes, "Just sitting in silence. It lets  
10 me pray and it's very peaceful."

11 And you know what Jesus would say to Hannah today?

12 "Hannah, you have chosen the better part. Hannah, you've  
13 chosen the better part."

14 And when we choose to sit in silence, or to sit at  
15 Jesus's feet and to open God's word, he will say to each and  
16 every one of us, "Jen, you've chosen the better part."

17 "Pat, you have chosen the better part."

18 "Denny, you've chosen the better part and it will  
19 not be taken away from you."

20 "Michelle, you've chosen the better part. It will  
21 not be taken away from you."

22 "Sue, you have chosen the better part. It will not  
23 be taken away from you."

24 In just a few moments we are going to be served at  
25 the table of fellowship of by our MOMS.

1           The MOMS is a group of several groups. There are  
2 about sixty women in our faith community, some belong to  
3 Bethany and some don't, but they get together, it's an eight  
4 week course, and it's an eight week course that teaches them  
5 to center their lives on Jesus Christ, and it strengthens  
6 them in their family relationships and in their Christian  
7 work.

8           That's the purpose of MOMS and while they are  
9 getting ready I'm going to read to you something from Beth,  
10 and that is what MOMS has done for her.

11           "As a busy mother of four, MOMS has taught me to  
12 find spirituality or grace-filled moments in the everyday  
13 tasks of motherhood. I have learned to find God in doing  
14 the laundry, cooking, changing diapers and carpooling. Not  
15 only has MOMS taught me to find God, but also to listen and  
16 obey him. MOMS reassured me that sometimes saying no is  
17 okay and that God wants me to be still and rest in his  
18 presence, and other times learning to obey God involves  
19 saying yes. Many times saying yes has taken me out of my  
20 comfort zone in areas of prayer, serving, and teaching, but  
21 with each experience I have been drawn closer to God."

22           What Jesus would say to Beth today is, "Beth,  
23 you've chosen the greater portion, the better portion, and  
24 it will not be taken away from you."

25           I've asked the women to bring their own china and

1 their own wine goblets today, so we will be served by the  
2 Marys and Marthas in our faith family.

3 Last night I asked Marjorie to bring over her china  
4 and she said to me on the phone, "Pastor Wenda, I don't have  
5 anything good enough. I don't have fancy stuff."

6 I said, "Marjorie, just bring what you have. It's  
7 going to be great."

8 You see, it doesn't depend on what we bring. It  
9 doesn't depend on the china.

10 It doesn't depend on the goblets, and that's what  
11 got Martha into trouble.

12 She thought that she was the host and that Jesus  
13 was the guest, but it was the other way around.

14 Jesus was the host and Martha and those other one  
15 hundred people at the dinner, they were his guests.

16 And it's the same for us today in this family life  
17 center.

18 Jesus is our host, because he told his disciples at  
19 the last supper, he said, "I came not to be served, but to  
20 serve and to give my life as a ransom for many."

21 Today when you come he is here to serve you. He's  
22 here to feed you.

23 He's here to give you his very life, so that you  
24 can begin to choose more and more to sit and at his feet and  
25 listen to what he has to say.

1           We remember the night in which Jesus was betrayed  
2 he took bread, gave thanks, and gave it to his disciples and  
3 he said, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do  
4 this in remembrance of me."

5           And again, after supper, he took the cup from the  
6 table and he gave thanks and he gave it for all to drink  
7 saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, given and  
8 shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins.  
9 Do this in remembrance of me."

10           Would you hold a hand next to yours as we pray  
11 together the prayer our Lord taught us.

12           Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy  
13 name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is  
14 heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our  
15 trespasses as we forgive those who are against us, and lead us  
16 not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is  
17 the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever,  
18 amen.

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