

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

December 6, 2015

A New Commandment I Give You

John 13:33-38

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you for your grace and your goodness, and for the ability that we have to come before you to just reflect on what you've done for us on the cross. Father, grant us today the presence of your Holy Spirit, give us the ability to hear the words that you have written in your book and to by your spirit's power make them of great and lasting effect, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as you know, it's the first Sunday of the month and this is the time that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the very last time he celebrated a Passover supper. And Matthew 26 describes it, it says this, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell*

you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took up bread and he took up wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples if they too would eat the bread and drink the cup to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat a remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call the Lord's table. Now we celebrate it once a month, other people celebrate it every week, but we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, we do that by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well once again we're back to the gospel of John and we are looking as we did last time to Jesus's response to Judas. If you remember last time we just marveled at Judas's willful ignorance, and that three times Jesus had not only spoken but more or less shouted warnings to Judas, and if you remember the first one was a general warning that a betrayer sat amongst them at this supper and we know that Judas ignored that warning. And then there was a second one given after Jesus had shared a morsel with Judas, and it was that

the betrayer would be someone who shared the same dish with Jesus, and we know that Judas ignored that warning as well. And the third warning dropped all pretense of subtlety and simply had Jesus saying to the inquiring Judas when he said, "Is it I, Rabbi?" Jesus said, "It is you, Judas. You have said so." And we know that Judas chose to ignore this warning from God himself that to proceed as he was about to would make him a man who would have been far better off having never been born. And we know that those warnings, they fell on deaf ears.

And so we pick up the story as Judas is about to leave to betray Jesus. This is *John 13:30*. It says: *Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately."* Jesus's comment as Judas is leaving is not at all what you would have expected given the circumstances. I mean, Judas is about to betray Jesus, he's about to deliver him into the most degrading, humiliating and inglorious experience a human will ever undergo. Jesus is about to be mocked and slapped and beaten and scourged and stripped and crucified, a complete horror to an ordinary man, but Jesus was no ordinary man.

And last time out we focused on Jesus as the creator and sustainer of the entire universe. We looked at *Colossians 1:16* which says: *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him.* We saw that the sun that we depend on for life itself was not even close in terms of size and glory to some of the other stars that Jesus himself spoke into being. He created Arcturus, he created Alpha Scorpii a and Canis Majoris which is a star 2.9 billion times bigger than our sun. *Psalm 33* says: *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.* We pointed out that a host is literally a number beyond counting, all spoken into existence by Christ. But then we came back to earth. Then we came back to a last supper that's about to turn deadly, and we find to our amazement that in God's eyes all of the glories that have been associated with creation are about to be surpassed by what the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit see as a far greater glory, and that's the cross. Just consider what Jesus said once again as Judas departed. It said: *So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately."* And what Jesus is saying here is that the ultimate glory in the universe is the cross. And as fantastic as Jesus's creative powers are, they

pale next to the ultimate power that he is expressing and that he wants to pass on to his disciples and that is the power of love. Absolutely astounding.

Our text this morning focuses on what Jesus said next. This is *John 13:33-35*. Jesus says, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Well, in fact where Jesus was going no one else ever, ever could go. For all eternity the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit had lived together in a glorious and inseparable unity that now at some point Jesus would begin to shatter. And he would shatter it by taking on the sin of his sheep. The very nature of God is absolute perfection and because of that perfection, God and man had become alienated in the Garden of Eden when Adam decided that everything that God had given to him -- and remember everything that God had given him was everything save for one piece of fruit on a tree, so God had given him everything and it wasn't enough. Adam believed the serpent when he told him that he and Eve actually deserved more and that God actually was withholding the forbidden fruit because he didn't want Adam to become as God

himself was. You know, that's a classic lie from the father of lies. You see, when Adam was approached by the serpent he was already like God in his perfection. And when he fully disobeyed God by listening to the serpent, the exact opposite of what he was promised took place. I mean after all, Adam who was like God in his perfection now ceased utterly to be like him in his fall. Adam had become alienated from his creator by sin, and worse yet, Adam was the fountainhead, he is where the human race had its beginning, the very source. And because of that, every subsequent son or daughter of Adam came into this world infected with the imperfection that he had voluntarily taken on. The very first offspring of Adam and Eve are Cain and Abel, the victim and the perpetrator of the very first murder. And so mankind went from perfection to absolute depravity to the delight of the serpent. *Genesis 6:5-7* states it clearly, it says: *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* And we see the history of mankind from the Garden of Eden through the flood of Noah through Abraham and God's chosen people and it's now at its turning point at this supper. The very people that God had chosen to bring the light and the truth to this rebellious creation have now completely turned on God's son and they're awaiting their opportunity to execute him. I mean, little did they know that God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all

sovereignly ordaining the wickedness of these events so that good would come out of them. I mean, the religious leaders from the government authorities all thought they were getting rid of this political and spiritual liability and in fact they were unwitting participants in the very sacrifice of God himself. See, the God of absolute perfection demanded the very same perfection from his image bearers and it was a demand that none of us will ever be able to meet. But it's also a demand that could never be rescinded without God's own perfection being destroyed. So God condemned man for his imperfection and then he became a man and bore the penalty of that imperfection on the cross. And though folks like to point out that the cross was a physically horrifying death, make no mistake about it, the word "excruciate" means from the cross, so it is as horrible and as diabolical an execution as you could ever imagine. But the fact is literally thousands and thousands of people have died through crucifixion. The fact is also that no one has ever begun to experience the horror of the spiritual torment that Jesus endured. The horror of the cross was far, far more than physical, it was perfection itself in the form of Jesus Christ taking on imperfection. It was the flawless light starting to become darkness, completely and utterly abandoned by his disciples on earth and by his Father in heaven. The disciples abandoned him because they were terrified, the Father abandoned him because he was perfection itself and his perfection demanded it. The beloved

son of God had become before his own Father sin itself. Rape, pornography, drug addiction, greed, gluttony, the list goes on and on; sin is what Jesus became. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* And so to see the cross which many, many people do simply as a physical form of punishment is to greatly diminish the torment that Jesus was undergoing. Perhaps the closest thing to sin that sin was to -- the closest thing that sin was to Christ is what extreme or excruciating pain is to us. I mean, we fear and we loathe the idea of physical torture. Jesus no doubt feared and loathed the spiritual torture that he was about to undergo on our behalf. And the bottom line is this, the horror of the cross lies way out of the capacity of human minds to fully grasp. We never will fully grasp it. And that's what Jesus was entering into and that is really what the disciples were absolutely clueless about. I mean even though they had been warned repeatedly by Jesus, they had no inkling of the horror that he was about to voluntarily step into. He had directly told them in *Matthew 20:18*: *"See, We Are Going Up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."* See only Jesus knew exactly what was about to transpire. And his disciples would not or could not begin to grasp

the enormity of the situation until it was long, long over. And only Jesus knew that the disciples who had gathered around him, who he had taught and lived with for three years, they would all abandon him. And even this warning that he gave them in the gospel of John went unheeded and unacknowledged. He said this in *John 16:32*, he said: "*Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will all be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.*"

So last time out we marveled at the love that Jesus had shown to Judas, a man who would betray him out of greed. And yet Jesus still chose to love Judas. His final words to his disciples that night were about the importance of a radical type of love that he had taught and demonstrated for the last three years. And now he was putting that love into action. In verse 34, he said this: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*" We've been trying to put that into action. We've been trying to kind of flesh that idea out and we've been looking at the good Samaritan. And we saw that love is not something that you feel; instead love is something that you do. It's interesting that the object of the Samaritan's love in that story of the good Samaritan was somebody who was completely unconscious. He represented nothing but a need. I mean, how each party felt about each other is immaterial. I've

often said that, you know, this person may have woken up while the Samaritan was helping him and said, "Get your filthy Samaritan hands off me." Who knows? Who cares? It doesn't matter. The reason why he's unconscious is because what he is has been reduced simply to a need. And the question of love is how do you meet that need? You know, we're so bound by Hollywood's notion of what love is that we have a hard time seeing love primarily as an action instead of an emotion. And what Jesus is demonstrating to us in this passage is the complete mastery of both. There is emotion but there's action as well. And that night as Jesus is extending the food morsel to Judas, he was demonstrating a cultural expression of the deep affection that he had for his disciples and for Judas. I mean, you did that only to people that you cared very deeply about. And obviously Jesus radically loved Judas because he repeatedly warned him and he also gave him clear affirmations of his love in spite of the fact that he knew he was demonstrating this love to his betrayer. But Judas wasn't the only betrayer in that room that night, and we'll talk about him shortly.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I want to shift our focus to that itself. I want you to just consider the love of Christ reaching out to someone who would sell him for 30 pieces of silver. But as you're thinking about that I also want us to consider the warning that God gives us about communion itself.

This is 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, God says this, he says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* You know, I repeat this warning each time and I basically say that communion is very serious, serious business, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner would be to court disaster. I tell you if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King or if you have a need first to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your gifts to the altar, then just pass the elements on and don't participate. Nobody's going to give you a hard time for that. But I also say that on the other hand we can make the opposite mistake of thinking that unless we're absolutely flawless we are unworthy to receive communion, and that too is a mistake. Being a child of the King does not mean that we don't sin, it doesn't mean that we never fail. What it means is this: That when we do fail, we recognize that we have salvation as a gift, not something that we have earned. I love to quote Dane Ortlund who puts it this way, he says, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify and the one thing that disqualifies

you is thinking that you do." And so we understand that when we do fail we are aware that we have sinned. Why? Because we have the Spirit of God living inside us. And when that Spirit begins to grieve us about the sin that we have committed, we understand that we have a Father who longs to forgive us. God says in *1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the king does not mean that we walk around as if we are spotless and without sin. It means we understand as believers that we have an advocate with the Father, we have someone who is speaking out on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, as our advocate and because we have his payment of our sin debt, we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. We say it all the time, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death that we deserved to die in our place and he did it so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So take a few moments now and just meditate on the idea of love, not just love but love extended to a deadly betrayer.

1 Corinthians 11 says this: *For I received from the Lord what I*

also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.

God the Father and God the Son both know that Judas walking out that door after that supper is the beginning of the end. They all knew that there was no going back. But as I had mentioned before, Judas was not the only betrayer in that room that night. The other one was someone who was much closer to Jesus. Jesus said this in John 13:33-38, he said: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow me afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

Jesus says to Peter, "Where I'm going you cannot come." In fact no one could ever go where Jesus was going. I mean the Son would soon face the wrath of his Father, the abandonment of his disciples, and now Peter's full denial. And in the face of that Jesus does two very extraordinary things. First he addresses his disciples with a title "little children." That's a term of extraordinary endearment and it's a term of endearment being extended to people he knows full well will either abandon him or betray him within the next few hours. And secondly he issues a new commandment, a new precept if you will. Jesus demands a level of love from his disciples unlike anything that's ever been demanded of them before, and he phrases it this way. In verse 34, he says: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."* Well, Jesus has just sent the demand level into the stratosphere and he did that by adding this one qualifier: *"As I have loved you you're to love one another."* And having said that, Jesus instantly provides us with a perfect example of the length, the width, the breath and the depth of that love in the conversation that takes place between him and Peter. Let me just repeat it. *Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."* Well, we all know that Peter indeed denied Jesus three times, and

the crowing of the rooster is what made him instantly remember what Jesus said.

You know, we've been studying the Sermon on the Mount and there we see Jesus defining our enemies by saying first bless those who curse you; second, do good to those who hate you; and third, pray for those who use you and persecute you. Here's what's astounding about what's taking place here. You see, between Judas and Peter, Jesus is facing not just his enemies but those who profess to love him who cursed him like Peter did, who hated him like Judas did, and used him like both did. I mean Judas saw Jesus as a ticket to riches. Peter saw him as a ticket to fame and fortune. What must it have been like for Jesus hearing Peter boasting about his bravery and his loyalty all the while knowing none of it was true, and not even Peter knew that. Mind you, Jesus is entering into the one time that he desperately needs the love and loyalty of his disciples, and he would get neither. And yet *John 13:1* says: *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

As the elders come forward to distribute the cup, I want to focus in once again on something that Jesus did before the rooster crowed three times that I've mentioned before but it bears repeating. It's something that you don't learn of in John's account, and it's

something so extraordinary it's often overlooked and that's really why we have four gospels. You have to kind of sometimes piece together the information from all four gospels to come up with a complete picture of what actually took place. So we know from John that Peter bragged that he would not disown Jesus and we know that he did. But in between those two events was something critical, something that points to the absolute and complete control that Jesus had over all the events that appeared to be spinning way, way out of control, and it also points to the absolute depths of the love, the unconditional love that Jesus had for Peter.

It was Joni Eareckson who suggested that Jesus's control over the events of his execution extended to the high pressure weather system that was over Jerusalem that night. That's an amazing assertion, I mean, we're so used to seeing Jesus as the victim in all of this that we seldom think of him as sovereignly guiding every single aspect of his sacrifice, of his crucifixion. He was guiding it as it was unfolding and this is a fact, while Jesus Christ was being spit on, mocked and beaten, he was also guiding the weather over Jerusalem that night. And we know that Jesus can be in complete control of the weather because we have an example of it. We know what happened when he was awoken from being fast asleep during this torrential squall that took place on the Sea of Galilee and the boat that he's fast asleep in is taking on water

and his disciples are growing more and more terrified and they wake him up and they say in *Luke 8:23*: "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

So we know that Jesus has that power and we know the same power that enabled Jesus to stop the storm also enabled him to create the weather in Jerusalem on the night of his arrest. Jesus needed the weather to be cold and so he commanded it. You see, it was the cold weather that Jesus had created that had Peter sitting in a circle by a fire. *John 18:18* says: *Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.* You see, the conversations that took place as Peter sat warming himself became a critical part of Jesus' discipling of Peter. And Jesus did it all without uttering a single word. Luke's account of this same event includes a critical detail. Let me just read it to you. This is *Luke 22:54-62*. It says: *Then seizing him -- this is Jesus -- they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of*

the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them. "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. About an hour later, another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. See, Matthew's account only tells us that Peter cursed three times and that the rooster crowed but it leaves out this one critical detail that Luke includes, and that's *Luke 22:60*, it says: *Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.* And verse 61 says: *The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.* You see, it wasn't luck, it wasn't fate, it wasn't circumstances, at that exact moment, a beaten and mocked seemingly powerless Jesus looking right into the eyes of Peter at the moment of his greatest failing. Peter was cut to the quick. I mean I think we all know how powerful one single look can be and how the eyes can communicate instantly something that no other form of communication can.

So we go back to this cold night and this warm fire, and sitting around this fire is Peter and his various accusers and they begin to accuse and Peter begins to curse and the accusations grow more and more threatening and the response grows more and more intense until Peter is virtually shouting his denial of Christ. And as a rooster crows, Peter finds himself locking eyes with the beaten and bloodied eyes of his Lord and Savior whose absolute unyielding determination to fulfill the law down to its last comma is what put him at the hands of those who would beat him, mock him, strip him, flog him, and execute him all so that the demands of the law could be met not by the payment of the penalty by us but by him. And there in the midst of that penalty being exacted stood the one who's not only absorbing our punishment but he's also teaching Peter. And he's teaching him through one look the folly of tooting his own horn, relying on his own strength and denying the very God who he had claimed to serve. As Jesus was being slapped, spit on, and mocked, he didn't have to say a single word. At precisely the right moment, he who was commanding the cold weather to settle over Jerusalem that night sent another command and he didn't send it to the earth to swallow up all of these wretched, rotten people who were tormenting him and he didn't send it to the sky to send down bolts of lightning for those who would dare touch the King of the universe. No, he sent out a commandment to a rooster. Verse 60 says: *Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.* Just try to

imagine the chances of Peter's eye to eye contact with the beaten and blooded Jesus taking place by accident. I mean when you start to tally up the probabilities of that accident, realize that Jesus stated the specifics of this event the night before it was going to happen. In *Matthew 26:34* he said: *"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* There's only two different conclusions you can reach about this, either Jesus was extraordinarily lucky that chance just happened to line up all of the different possibilities just right and that a rooster just happened by coincidence to crow right on cue or that the sovereign God of the universe who had entered this universe in the flesh from 33 years ago was now guiding the weather, the servant girl who was accusing Peter, and even the rooster who crowed right on cue. Again verse 60 says: *Just as he was speaking the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.* See, Jesus knew in exquisite detail exactly what would unfold while he patiently listened to Peter's description of his limitless loyalty. Again, verse 37, it says: *Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times."* See, the truth was the exact opposite of what Peter had declared. Someone indeed would be laying down their life for another but it would not be Peter.

Jesus had not only spoken his new command, he had also demonstrated it. Take a moment to consider that.

In *John 13:33* Jesus says: *"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now also I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Consider that love.

1 Corinthians, 11th chapter says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. So take, and drink.*

This is the head, heart and feet part of our meeting. This is where we begin to explore the practical realities of what it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. And so we see what Jesus is basically saying here is our task is to love one another as Christ has loved us. And he didn't just tell us, he showed us. And his example is our model for how we are to respond to the events that took place this past week.

I think everyone here knows that Aeden Roach, 13 year old was out hiking, had a tragic accident, fell, the fall severed his spinal cord. He is permanently paralyzed from the waist down. And so we want to understand how we are to respond to that, and I think Jesus has given us the model. Jesus' response to the crisis that took place in Peter's life was twofold. He did two main things in his life. The first thing that he did was he prayed. Luke's gospel tells us Jesus' response to Peter right before he made his boast is in *Luke 22:31*, it says this, this is Jesus's words: "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*" See, our response to the challenge that's facing the Roaches should be modeled after Jesus's, and what he identified as the first and primary need was prayer. That is the first and primary need of the Roaches right now. Any of you know I mean, I'm sure you've heard the term of "opportunistic bacteria." Opportunistic bacteria are bacteria that exist everywhere, they're on your skin, they're everywhere, they cause no harm until they're given an opportunity and a cut or an abrasion or contusion is that opportunity and then they can wreak havoc. There are also opportunistic spirits, fallen angels, the enemy of the kingdom, all those who would take this opportunity to attempt to wreak havoc on the Roaches. There's no question this has been an incredibly difficult, tragic time for

them and there's no question it brings out those opportunistic entities that want nothing more than to destroy them. And so first and foremost our task is to participate in the spiritual war that's taking place. I hope every one of us every day is remembering Aeden and Aivee and Sonia and Cyndi and Don, keeping them in our prayers, knowing that there's a spiritual war going on. So that's first and foremost. And we understand that these enemies want nothing more than to sow bitterness and despair rather than hope and determination. And it's amazing to see and to talk to and speak with Sonia to see that she senses the prayers that have gone up and the amazing determination and hope that they have, and a lot of it is because we are praying. Our prayer is beating back those opportunistic entities that want nothing more than to cause them to despair.

So the first and foremost thing that we have in terms of priority is prayer. Secondly, it's service. You know what Jesus did after Peter committed his terrible denial? I mean, we all know in the days immediately after the cross, Peter was beside himself with what he had done. *John 21* says this, it says: *Simon Peter -- this is afterwards, they're trying to figure out what to do with their lives -- Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was*

breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. When they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." So prayer, and service is the model that Jesus is presenting to us, and so we understand first and foremost the need there is prayer, secondly it's service. And that breaks down in three different areas. Number one is meals. And I don't think it's for nothing that Emily was -- was energized to move in the direction of kind of working to revitalize the way we deliver meals. It's amazing to see Vanessa, just the amount of food that has been brought together, it's been a huge blessing to them. That's part of the service that we are giving to them, that's part of us responding to what Jesus did model wise. That's food.

The second is money, finances. We, as I said today, if you make it, if you write "family" on the check, that would be something that would -- we would know that it would go designated to them. I know there's a Go Fund Me page that has been established and I think Go Fund Me is a wonderful thing, I think it's a huge blessing, it enables people who are farther and farther removed from the situation to contribute, they may be on the other side of the country and find out about it. The reason why I want to kind of have two separate things, the Go Fund Me for those folks and

something specific for us is because Go Fund Me charges 7 percent. I don't fault them that, but that's 7 more percent that we could put in their hands. So if you're thinking about Go Fund Me which is a marvelous blessing, I'm not knocking that at all, you might want to save 7 percent by just going through the church. Money is required. First of all, they have to rehab their house. That's a huge cost right there. They have medical expenses which we know, they're going to have living expenses. So there's going to be a very large cost component to all of this. And we are part of the solution to that, we are part of the service.

The third part is accommodation. So we're looking, first of all at meals, we're looking at money, we're looking at accommodation. You know, it's astounding to me and it's a measure of the character of Aeden, this little 13-year-old boy, that one of the first things that he said was, "How am I going to get to church?" That's an incredible thing for a 13-year-old young man to say. And we look at all of this and we understand Romans 8:28. If anything means anything to us, it's Romans 8:28: God causes all things to work together for good to those who love and who are called according to his purpose. I don't want to make the mistake of saying this is a blessing. This was a terrible thing that God is turning into a blessing. Two very different things. And so we understand Romans 8:28 to apply broadly across a whole myriad of areas. Part of that

has to do with how we're going to accommodate Aeden's future. You know, we've had a large debate in the church over the last couple of years, and part of that had to do with my son has adopted -- him and his wife have adopted some special needs kids and they had wheelchairs and they were in wheelchairs and we had a number of discussions when they were here, and one of the things that really stuck in my mind and in my spirit was she was saying -- and this is my daughter-in-law, she wasn't saying this in a hostile way, but she was saying is when you have nothing for the handicapped, you're in essence telling them, "You're not wanted. Go somewhere else." And it sends a very clear and distinct message, and we do send that message, it's not intentional, but it's the message we sent for literally years. And so we've been debating this back and forth and we've been debating do we need to move to another building to just get to a place where that cannot be a problem or do we do something here with the building that we've had. And good people on both sides have seen it in two different ways. We've been trying to work through what it is that God wants us to do. And so I want to send this out in general to everybody that we need to step up our prayer. Perhaps God does have another building for us. We don't know that. I don't want to cut that off. I want to still keep that an open and viable circumstance. But we are committed right here and now for Aeden's sake to putting in the ramps and the bathrooms and the things that have to be done. We want to see that

get done here. That doesn't mean we're not going to consider looking at another building as well, but it's going to involve a considerable amount of money.

A number of us are going to be meeting with a consultant who has worked with Ken Bontrager and Corey McGrail just helping them, helping us to have different eyes as we look at this building. We want somebody to come in who has not seen it before, and we want to present to him what we need, these are our big needs, this is our master list, this is our mini list, this is -- our mini list is Aeden can come here and find a bathroom and find a ramp to get him in and out of this building and that everybody who has that -- those kind of circumstances that limit them from coming here could feel comfortable being here. We don't know how that's going to work itself out. We don't know if God is going to eventually call us to another building. And so we really ask for your prayers specifically as we work through this process of taking in what this company has to say, giving us the data that they're going to be giving us, this is going to -- we're meeting Wednesday at 9:30, and he's going to give us kind of an overview of -- we hope, of what our options are. And the options are there's lots of barriers that are out there, we've got neighbors that we have unfortunately over the years have had some incidents, the reasons why you see those cones out there is because some of the neighbors have been very

offended that people have parked too close to their driveways. We may need a variance for some of the stuff that we do here. We want to have the support of the neighbors. Well, that's going to be a prayer request, everybody has to be praying that the neighborhood would be in favor of if that's what we do. And if it is another building that God has for us, we need to know that. We need to know that immediately. We're still going to go forward with what we want to do with this place in terms of a ramp, in terms of bathrooms, but we still want to keep our options open for where God would have us be, but I was -- I was really struck with this whole notion of the handicapped.

I was down in Baltimore visiting my son last week, and you know I came into a room and the church has opened up its doors to the handicapped and they have far more resources, it's a church of 1500, it's a very big church. It's very strange to go into a church that has on the front "Grace Fellowship Church," that's the name of the church in Baltimore. But you know, I went to a room and there's all kinds of exotic wheelchairs and there's people who are speaking via computer to one another. And they just reached out their arms to the handicapped community and people are going there from miles and miles away because they know these people care. We're not going -- we don't have that grandiose a vision, we have a much smaller vision for a much smaller church but we still

can do something along those lines. And I was really struck with a quote that my daughter-in-law was repeating that she had shared with her mom. When they adopted Shane, Shane was in a wheelchair and they adopted him and his -- Carissa's mom said, "You know, ever since Shane has come into our family, people in wheelchairs are coming out of the woodwork," and she said, "Mom, they were always here. You just never saw them." And I think that's what Aeden is going to do for us. I think they're always here. We just don't see them. And God is in a Romans 8:28 way kind of expanding the horror of what has taken place in the Roach family and saying I will get blessing even out of this. And if we have the ability to expand our vision and see these folks where we might not have seen them before, that will be part of that blessing. And so I'm asking you first and foremost to pray, to find out what you can do in terms of meals, how you can participate in that, what you can do in terms of money, how you can contribute, and what you can do in terms of accommodation, that is pray for us as we go forward seeking what God would have us do and pray for this design company that's going to come and pray that we would have the wisdom to do what is pleasing to Him. Let's pray.

Father, I just again, I am just so moved by the Roach family and by the obvious grace that they are receiving. I just -- it's -- you would think that there would be a time of great depression and a

time of great hurt and I'm sure there's going to be times like that but just -- we stand amazed to see what your grace does, we see this young man who is looking forward, not backwards and just saying by the grace of God I can do anything. And we want to be part of that, Lord, we are your hands, your feet, your eyes, your arms, your legs, we are every part of who you are and we want to be that to the family. So I pray for each and every one of us that we would be coming before you in prayer asking what role do I have in this. Give us the wisdom, give us the guidance, give us the desire to do your will in a way that brings honor and glory to you and honors the example that you gave us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.