

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**March 1, 2020**

**Communion Sunday**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, once again, we just thank you and praise you for the gift of the cross, the gift of your Son. Lord, this is the day, this is the time when we remember the cross. And so I pray especially for your grace, for your wisdom, for your Holy Spirit's presence, I pray that you would give us the ability to understand and just go into some depth as to what it is you've given to us in the cross. Lord, we're going to be opening up your book. We pray for your Holy Spirit to accompany us, to guide us through this process and to give us the ability to worship you even more. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again it's the first Sunday of the month. This is the Sunday that we celebrate, remember Jesus Christ and the cross. And on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper. We have this recorded in *Matthew 26*, which says: *Now as we 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." So Jesus took the bread and he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he encouraged the disciples to do the same, to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He then asked them to repeat the remembrance on a regular basis and this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month by doing four things, by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, that means asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins and by then 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, we are in the book of Mark looking at the life of Christ and I said last month that Jesus as servant is at war with the kingdom of darkness. And to read Mark's gospel is really to see this conflict unfold. Most of the time it was with the Pharisees but sometimes it was directly with the devil and his demons themselves.

And we saw that when raw power failed to move Jesus in the slightest, the enemy simply switched strategies. Fame became the enemy's MO. If intimidation wouldn't stop Jesus, then making him a celebrity would at least in some way slow him down, so he thought. That's exactly what Jesus was up against.

And so we get to the start of Mark's gospel and Jesus is still gathering his disciples and already the tension is starting to build between him and the Pharisees. If you recall he's teaching in the synagogue and he's confronted by a demon-possessed man and he forces the demons out of that man and that catches the attention of the Pharisees who hear the people saying in *Mark 1:27*: *"What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."* And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. Jesus immediately begins healing and the response is actually overwhelming, so much so that he has to leave the area to preach in an adjoining town. There he's confronted by a man with an advanced case of leprosy and he touches and heals the man, and he tells the man to stay silent but the man does exactly the opposite. He broadcasts everywhere the mighty work that Christ has done in his life. Christ's fame spreads so far and so fast that when he goes to return home, he gets to his home base and he can't even get near it because it's surrounded by people who are seeking healing.

We next have this famous incident where four friends drop a man down, a paralytic, through a hole that they've made in the roof. And Jesus speaks to the man and he tells him something that deeply offends the religious leaders. He tells the man first of all that his sins are forgiven. The scribes hear this and they are beside themselves. *Mark 2:6* says: *Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he said to the paralytic -- "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."* And the paralytic does just that. I mean as you can well imagine, every time Jesus heals, his fame spreads. And the crowds grow larger and larger and at this point the Pharisees are starting to clearly see Jesus as an ever growing threat.

Jesus begins choosing his disciples, and he selects a hated tax collector named Levi further alienating the Pharisees. And then he goes to a party that's hosted by Levi. The Pharisees want to know, Jesus, why in the world are you sitting with sinners? Jesus

rebukes them, telling them, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* You know one thing is really obvious here, that is Jesus is very comfortable addressing the Pharisees as God in the flesh. I mean he's openly healing people of their sin, he rebukes the religious leaders, he tells them in as many words that they're the ones who are sick and they don't even know it. And so next the Pharisees try to stir up some controversy by getting John's disciples to ask why they fast and Jesus' disciples don't. And they follow that up with a question about why Jesus allows his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, which of course they consider to be a violation of their Sabbath rules. Well, Jesus just flattens them by saying, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."* And again Jesus has no problem telling these leaders that in essence, hey, I'm the boss of the Sabbath because after all, I'm God. I mean just imagine how they received that information. I mean just think for a minute how much conflict Jesus is involved in right from the start.

You go back to the very beginning of the book of Mark and you have Jesus submitting to being baptized by his cousin John the Baptist and then he enters into his first conflict. The Holy Spirit sends him out into the desert to meet the most terrifying adversary there

is in the entire universe and that is Satan himself. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he successfully deals with the ruler of this world using God's word as his weapon of choice. Three separate times he's confronted by the devil and three separate times he says, "it is written," "it is written," "it is written."

He then goes back and begins his public ministry in the synagogue where he's confronted with conflict number two. A horde of minor demons have possessed a congregant. They recognize Jesus and Jesus recognizes them and he casts them out. And then he begins healing and he attracts a crowd that is so large he has to leave town and there he finds a leper begging for healing who becomes conflict number three. He can't keep his mouth shut and crowds become a huge problem. He heals a paralytic who's lowered down from the roof and brings on conflict number four, incurring the wrath of the religious leaders for telling him that his primary problem is not paralysis, it's sin, and that he, Jesus, is willing to deal with both paralysis and sin, something alone that God could do. That's followed by a fifth conflict, this time with John the Baptist's followers over fasting and then yet another confrontation with the Pharisees over his disciples breaking the Sabbath law and now he's confronted once again with the very same religious leaders aching to revisit the Sabbath laws so that they can trap him in a violation.

Chapter three opens up with yet another confrontation. This is his eighth, this time it's with the Pharisees, and this is *Mark 3*. It says this: *Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.*

Well, this is what we would call a set up. I mean it's Sabbath day and Jesus one again has gone to the temple, to the synagogue to teach and there he encounters this man with a withered hand and he's clearly planted there by the Pharisees in order to trip Jesus up. And we know that because the text says that they are watching Jesus to see whether or not he's going to heal him on the Sabbath. I mean they really have no idea just who it is they're dealing with. Every single time the Pharisees doubled down, Jesus just triples down in response. And so he knows that they are watching him, and so he very publicly tells the man to step forward and then the scripture says something that may give us pause. You see, Jesus has seized the moment, he's made it now into a very public exercise. Verse 3 says: *He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.* Actually that's not all that Jesus said to the Pharisees. You see, Jesus had the habit of making the Pharisees look foolish simply by showing them their hypocrisy. Matthew's gospel adds some additional words that Jesus had shared with the

Pharisees. This is *Matthew 12:10*, he's speaking of the same story, he says: *A man was there with a withered hand and they ask him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" -- so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."* So Jesus goes to the familiar world that all of them including the Pharisees live in, and they all know exactly what they would have done if a sheep had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath. They know they don't have a leg to stand on. And once again Jesus has succeeded in making them look petty and foolish but this time he doesn't stop there. Verse 5 says: *And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."* *He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.* Now you have to understand this man is front and center at the synagogue, I mean, he's been put there. He's this test case that the Pharisees are going to use, everybody's watching him. Everybody is clearly looking right at his hand. They can't help but to see it grow into a perfectly normal hand before their very eyes. The Pharisees are completely unimpressed. One thing that is striking about the religious leaders' reaction to Jesus is their apparent immunity from the miraculous. Many is a time I've heard people say, "Well, you know, if God did a miracle in my life, I'd believe." Well, the



Pharisees are living proof of the fallacy of that kind of thinking. I mean so far they have seen demons exorcised, they have seen lepers healed, they'd seen a paralytic so severely crippled that he has to be lowered down from the roof, take up his bed and walk, and the net effects of those miracles is hardened hearts and a determination to double down on their attempts to oppose Jesus. And this time the Pharisees want to make a public show of it. Well, Jesus is only too happy to accommodate them in their efforts and once again they come off looking petty and foolish. I mean there's no doubt they've witnessed a profound miracle. I mean after all they're the ones who set this whole confrontation up. So what can they do when Jesus performs a spectacular miracle right in front of their noses? Well, we learn in verse 6, it says: *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

You know it's hard to really fathom the hardness of man's heart, but while we're doing that, we have to realize that that includes my heart as well. I mean I look at these Pharisees and I marvel at the grace of God because without his grace, I'm right there in the middle, I'm with the Pharisees and the Herodians and I'm trying to figure out how I can destroy this Jesus. I mean I know a little bit about the hardness of heart because I spent a number of years as a flat out atheist, a bitter one at that. And I was reminded of

that just a few weeks ago when we were at this get-together in Florida with Janice's siblings who of course have known me since I've married her and that's over 47 years. And they were sitting around and one of the things that they were remembering was some of the ways I used to mock Christianity when I was an atheist. They would say remember when you used to say, and it was blah, blah, blah, you fill in the blanks. It wasn't pretty. But it just struck me how awful I was and how blessed I am by the grace of God to be offering blessing now instead of cursings. So I just wonder if you've ever considered how blessed you are to be sitting here this morning. We often say there's a thousand other places you could be but you're here, and you're here because of the grace of God. You're here because he's given you the ability to get stuff that the rest of the world outside that door doesn't get at all. So take some time this morning as the elders begin distributing the bread to consider the blessing you've that been given.

Also we need to consider the warning that God gives. It's in 1 *Corinthians 11:28-32*. It 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.*

And again I just repeat the warning that communion is extremely serious and entering into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. And I plead with you, if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you have not by faith trusted in Christ as your savior or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice of your presence here before the altar, then just don't participate. I mean no one's going to think that this is weird or strange or odd. In fact they may think you wise. But on the other hand, we say this each time, you can make the mistake of thinking the exact opposite way, that you have to be spotlessly perfect in order to receive communion, and the devil loves that just as well. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're perfect, it doesn't mean that you have to be flawless, it doesn't mean that you never fail, it means that you recognize that the salvation that you have been given is a gift. It's something that no one has ever gotten because they were earning it or they were capable of it or they were good enough. We repeat each month this Dane Ortlund quote. It 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." We also have to understand that when we do fail, we understand that we are failing. Why? Because we have the Spirit of Christ within us. It

is God's Holy Spirit inside us that convicts us of sin. And so we grieve because we are God's children and we know we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. And 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 you are flawless, that you are without sin, it means that you understand that you are a sinner but that you have an advocate in heaven, someone speaking on your 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 we say it's because we have the righteousness of Christ and not our own righteousness that we are now free to eat from the table. And so if you love your Lord, do not deny yourself the privilege that Christ purchased for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then died the death that we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven, so that we could reflect on the blessings that we've received. Take a moment to reflect on those.

*1 Corinthians 11:23* says: *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.

I want to focus in on something the scripture says about Jesus' reaction to the Pharisees setting up the man with a withered hand. This is again verse 5. It says: *He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.* I mean the scripture says that Jesus was angry. You know it's almost jarring to think of Jesus as being angry, I mean, it doesn't fit well with the idea that most people have about Jesus. I mean Jesus is gentle, Jesus is loving, he is forgiving, but Jesus is angry? You see the Pharisees had managed to do something that was actually quite rare. They managed to get Jesus angry. And here's how they did it. They did it by simultaneously denying both aspects of the gospel that Jesus represented and that's Jesus as servant and Jesus as truth itself. You see Jesus came as a servant to truth. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* When he said that he was saying more than simply I'm speaking -- he's saying more than he was saying when he said I am speaking about the truth or I'm preaching the truth or I'm actually teaching the truth. He meant far more than all of those things. What he meant to say was that he was the truth. Jesus' commitment was 100 percent to preaching the truth of the gospel. And that all of us

are sons and daughters of Adam and that all of us are born flawed and that all of us cannot stand before a holy God because we're all convicted of. Sin, and that God himself became a man and that he lived out a perfect life and then he went to the cross to offer that perfect life up as a substitute for your life and my life. And that by faith in his sacrifice we now can stand before God perfect because we have his righteousness and not ours. And because we have his righteousness, we are now worthy to fellowship with God in heaven. Jesus' commitment was 100 percent to preaching the truth of that gospel, but it was also 100 percent to living out that truth through servanthood. I mean Christ's ultimate service was the cross. But before that ultimate act, he devoted his entire life to preaching and teaching and healing and serving, saying: *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* I mean this confrontation in the synagogue was just one of the straws that broke the camel's back. It was the sixth confrontation that Jesus had had with the Pharisees themselves in a very short time. I mean there was the conflict over choosing the tax collector named Levi, the conflict over his eating with sinners, the conflict over healing a paralytic's sin then healing his body, the conflict over fasting, the conflict over harvesting grains on the Sabbath, the conflict over healing a man on the Sabbath. And in each instance Jesus had managed to make the Pharisees look weak and petty and silly, and he

did it without even trying.

So now the Pharisees, they're armed for bear. They are determined to use this man with a shriveled hand as a means to even the score. You see the Pharisees actually managed to find two completely different ways to provoke God's anger. By setting up a confrontation over healing on the Sabbath, they managed to deny both the truth of who Jesus was, that he was the way, the truth, and the life, and, and the truth of what Jesus did, by attempting to deny him the ability to heal for the sake of their own traditions. Jesus said that he was the truth itself and that he had come to serve and the Pharisees managed to attempt to deny them both. Both of those represent who Jesus is, that is doctrine and service. See, it's not only what you know about God that matters, it's how you put that truth into action that matters as well. And in this instance we see the anger of Jesus because the Pharisees had managed to suppress both the truth of who Jesus was -- that's the doctrine part -- and the truth of what Jesus came to do -- that's the service part. They refused to believe the miracles and they sought to refuse Jesus the ability to heal a man with a withered hand. And so in one fell swoop they denied both the doctrine and the service that Jesus represented. I mean this bifurcation is emblematic of the church today. And "bifurcate," it's just a big fancy word that means to split. We have split the

church. And the church has been split into two distinct branches, both of which are missing something essential. We have split over service and doctrine. There are those who I would call truth deniers who say that service is all that matters. And they revel in that service ignoring or suppressing the truth of scripture when it comes to doctrinal issues such as sin or salvation. Issues like abortion or biblical sexuality, they take a back seat to service. I mean they really don't mind if you're pro choice or if you actually mock marriage as long as you are someone who is feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and believe me, they have scripture that they can point to.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want us to take a look at *Matthew 25* and you will see God's absolute commitment to service as being a critical part of the gospel. This is *Matthew 25*. It says: *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you*



welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison or visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" That is a powerful argument for service. But then you have the other side. I would call the other side the servant deniers. These are the folks who have the doctrine down but feel that that's all that's necessary. They have little or no compunction or drive to see service as a vital part of their gospel. See, God insists that mere belief is not faith. And if your faith is nothing but a private belief about who God is, then your faith is dead according to James 2:17. See these folks were on the "Good Samaritan" side of the bifurcated church.

Just to refresh our memories, this is the story that Jesus told about that. This is Luke 10. It says: And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and

*with all your strength and with all your mind -- that's the doctrine part -- and your neighbor as yourself." That's the service part. And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."*

Now if you remember the story of the Good Samaritan, we know Jesus is talking about meeting a desperate need to serve a man who's been robbed and beaten and wounded and he's lying on the side of the

road. And who are these people in the story who cross the street in order to not get near this beaten and obviously needy person? It was the truth holders, it was the doctrine police, it was the servant deniers. It was the priests and the Levites who didn't want to become ceremonially unclean by touching this poor person. See, they had the truth. As far as they were concerned, that's all that mattered. So here we are today in the church that is divided, where people either serve without truth or embrace the truth without service, and that's what angers Jesus. We see in this instance the Pharisees manage to suppress both truth and service.

We spent a lot of time recently looking at the wrath of God in our back to basic study in Romans, and we saw there that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. Well, this was a case of the Pharisees in unrighteousness suppressing the truth of who Jesus was, which they clearly knew because they saw the miracles that he did, and at the same time suppressing the truth of what Jesus did by trying to deny Jesus the ability to serve the man with a withered hand by saying you can't do that on a Sabbath. Not only did they deny the truth but they denied the ability to serve. Thus Jesus was angry at that hardness of heart. These were the real and genuine Pharisees that Jesus grew angry at and condemned. *Mark 3 says: And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that*

they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. This last statement really is an amazing statement. You see, you couldn't be more diametrically opposed in your philosophy and outlook than the Pharisees and the Herodians. See the Pharisees were the super spiritual guardians of their interpretation of the law, and the Herodians were followers of Herod and Herod was a Jewish sell out to Rome who didn't have a spiritual bone in his body. I mean these two groups typically detested one another. But there was someone that they detested even more. That was Jesus. I mean there's an old saying that says the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Well the Pharisees and the Herodians were both enemies of Jesus and therefore for the sake of eliminating him, they became friends, and Jesus called them out.

Well as you take the cup, I'd like us to take a little bit of time this morning to see if God is calling us out this morning. And I would like us to consider our own relationship to truth and to service and to take a moment to ask God to examine, am I a service

person who thinks too little of truth? Or maybe I'm a truth person who thinks too little of service. Or maybe I'm perfectly balanced, in which case my problem is I'm kidding myself. Ask God to show you your heart in this.

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.*

This is the part that we call heads, hands and feet, where we try to come up with a practical understanding of what it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. And just a brief kind of thoughts about us as a church. We are known as a church to have the doctrinal part down pretty well. That's kind of our reputation. So I think our temptation as a church is to embrace the doctrinal side sometimes at the expense of the service side. I mean I always said that there are things that we can learn from the liberal church about service. There's things that they do far better than we do. It was the liberal churches here in Port that established the warming station, which was clearly answering a biblical mandate. And we were involved with them peripherally. We got involved in just helping to fund it a little bit, but what drove us away from the warming station was their insistence that service was

the most important thing, period. One of the rules that they enacted was that you could not share the gospel with the people that you were serving, so that kind of caused us to back away from that whole enterprise, because in our view, the gospel isn't service or truth, it is service and truth. One time we considered partnering with a group, I think their name was called "Faith in Action" and these were folks who were committed to helping the needy and the poor and just helping in general, whether it was driving older folks to doctor appointments or taking a meal to somebody, they were doing in general wonderful service things and we seriously considered partnering with them. They got in touch with us about joining our efforts. So we began to explore the nature of their operation, and we discovered that they were interested just in the action part of faith. We found out that they had a rule, it was very similar to the warming station and that is you could not proselytize. You see in their view it didn't matter whether you were Christian or Jewish or Buddhist, they were going to give you an opportunity to share whatever faith you believed in and they didn't want to get into the petty details like which God you were putting your faith in. Obviously we decided that we couldn't go forward with them.

But you see the problem that we have? It's usually either or. It's either you have doctrine or you have service, but very seldom

do you have both. And that's one of the reasons why I'm looking forward to the meeting that we're going to be having here next week at 6:00 o'clock, the Tri-States mission group. And the reason why I'm looking forward to that is they believe absolutely in truth and in doctrine. I know because I sat down with Joe Felice who was really kind of the energy behind us and we talked at length about these very issues and he is on the exact same page. He knows the importance of truth and the importance of service, and he has an idea about this area. I kind of characterized his idea as the difference between Ace Hardware and Wal-Mart. And just to explain, Grace Community is a huge enterprise, it's the Wal-Mart in our area. They have all kinds of resources, they can do all kinds of things. And God bless them, they're doing wonderful things and we bless them and thank them for what they're doing, but they're an entity unto themselves. The Ace Hardware approach is -- you know Ace Hardware, they take a bunch of little mom and pop hardware stores, they kind of all band together to try to get some collective things done that they couldn't do individually. Well, Joe is trying to do kind of an Ace Hardware type of approach to all of the little churches and to see if we cannot collectively do some things service wise that we might not want to undertake on our own, hence the meeting of the Tri-States Mission Group. And it's been a couple of months now they've been meeting and they're still trying to cast a vision of where they're going to go, but we're meeting

here next Sunday at 6:00 o'clock. And I would just love to see this place packed with people who just want to say, Lord, what can we do service wise? How can we impact this community in a meaningful way? That's really what the idea is, that's really what the idea behind this meeting is. And so I encourage you to come out next Sunday at 6:00 o'clock. You know James says faith without works is dead. We want an opportunity to prove that the faith in this church is alive and well. Let's pray.

*Father, we just again thank you for who you are, we thank you for what you have done. We thank you for the incredible way that you handled the conflicts that were ever present everywhere you went. And Lord, I am taken back when I read that you were angry, that you actually -- the Pharisees actually got you to the place where you were angry over the hardness of their heart, where they could deny not only the doctrinal issue of the truth that you were but the service issue of what you had attempted to do. Lord, we want to have both of those operating at full capacity. We want to be doctrinally correct but we want to be serving as well. So we pray you would give us the grace, the strength, the insight and the wisdom to do just that, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*