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Who Are My Mother and My Brothers?

Mark 3:31-35

Prayer: *Father, I just thank you for communion, I thank you for your Son, I thank you for the gift that you've given to us of your Son and for this time that we can set aside to remember that gift. Father, I just pray this morning as we again open up your book and look particularly with regard to what you've done in the sacrifice of your Son that we might have your grace, your power, and your Holy Spirit's presence. I pray that it would be of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again this is the first Sunday of the month, this is the Sunday that we set aside to remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died met with his disciples and for the last time celebrated a Passover supper with them that's recounted in *Matthew 26*. 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." So Jesus took the bread and the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat that remembrance on a regular basis and this is what we call "the Lord's table," and we do it once a month. Some churches do it every week, some churches do it twice a year. We do it by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas within us where he's convicting 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 we are still early on in the gospel of Mark and I want to pick up where we ended last time, that was a month ago. Jesus was facing three different lines of battle, he has demons on one side, he's already defeated them in the desert, but his minions are still attacking him in the synagogue. He's got religious leaders plotting to kill him on the other side. They're furious that he's healed the man with the shriveled hand on the Sabbath, and right in

the middle he has this band of men who he will spend the next three years discipling who are at this point as raw and as vulnerable as they will ever be. Jesus is in the midst of this battle, having been with these disciples probably three or four weeks and already his fame has spread to the point where everywhere he goes, crowds are crushing him constantly, people are being healed, demons are being expelled, everywhere around Jesus is chaos and crowds. Now to top it off he gets this endorsement from his family and friends in *Mark 3:21*. It says: *And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."*

Well it's one thing to have demons attack you, it's another thing to have the religious leaders attack you while you're still assembling the team you're going to disciple, but it's another thing entirely to have the very ones that you know and love reject the very mission that you've undertaken. These were the people that Jesus grew up with. These were the ones who knew him from a child. Jesus's own household had sheep within it who never heard his voice or at least not until after he had gone to the cross. I mean we know James, his physical brother, didn't believe at first. So now here is Jesus's own family and they're adding to the chaos and disappointment and the Pharisees now consider this the perfect time to state that Jesus is capable of casting out demons only because he's empowered by Beelzebul, the chief demon. Well this is

the final straw as far as these religious leaders is concerned and Jesus explains to them what we spoke about last time. He explains to them what the unpardonable sin is. Well then Jesus goes back into the house and he begins to gather around himself his followers and he continues to teach. And so we have pick up this morning joining him as he's sitting teaching among those of his followers. This is *Mark 3:31*. It says: *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

So what do we make of this? I mean like any other incident that contains many different witnesses, the story is going to change depending on which witness you ask. So this morning I want to address the story from many different positions of those who might have witnessed it. And the first person I want to address is someone who's in the crowd, someone who's unaware of anything other than the fact that this powerful teacher has been interrupted in his teaching. There's obviously huge crowds that are surrounding him and these people outside are clearly trying to get his attention. And they sent a message through the crowd, you know,

telephone operator style, it's going person to person. You can see it kind of rippling through the crowd and finally somebody interrupts Jesus to tell him in verse 32: *"Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you."* Jesus instantly uses the interruption as a teaching tool. And he says in verse 33: *"Who are my mother and my brothers?"* Well, this Jesus appears to this person to be rude, I mean, to his own family. I mean it seems like he's willing to embarrass his own mother and brother and sisters by denying their relationship with him all for the point of making a point. Verse 34, it says: *Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"* And in case you're wondering what his intent was, he goes on to make a distinction between those who are merely connected by blood and those who are connected by obedience. Verse 35 he says: *"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

So our first person sees Jesus essentially as rude. Now our second person could be someone who fits Christ's description of a brother or sister by faith, someone committed to following Jesus, someone committed to doing his will. Now he or she might see Jesus' family as rude and demanding, acting as if they're entitled to his immediate attention regardless of the circumstances simply because they're family. Now a third person would be the family members themselves, some of whom may have believed, as I said, some of whom

who may have not, and the best possible assumption is that they feared for his health, they feared for his safety with all of the crowds and the demands that are being met on him. I mean, it's entirely possible that they wanted nothing more than to get him away from those demands that were being made on him.

Well the fourth person would be us, somebody reading their Bible 2,000 years later trying to figure out just what was it that Jesus was getting at? I mean was he being rude or impatient, dismissive, or was he actually trying to say something that God had been saying many, many times before? You see in the end the only position that truly matters is the position of the author of that statement and that is God himself. So the question is what was Jesus trying to communicate to the group that he was speaking to when he was interrupted? Was he trying to put his family down? Or was he literally redefining what the term "family" means, according to Jesus.

Well, Jesus has certainly given us lots of information in his word as to what it was he was getting at and it starts at the most basic level. It starts with something that God said to Moses centuries before when he gave him the ten commandments. He started out by saying this in *Exodus 20*. God said: "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall*

have no other gods before me." Now God was not just saying that you should not have any carved idols or statues or altars before him, he was saying out loud what Jesus was alluding to as he taught, and that is that he demands the highest spot in the pantheon of our loved ones. How do you know that? Well, Jesus was once asked which of all the commandments was the most important? This was his answer in *Mark 12*. He said: *"The most important one,"* answered Jesus, *"is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no commandment greater than these."* So it's Jesus who is telling us the most important commandment there is is to love God more than anything. In fact anything that comes between your love for God and you is what God considers an idol.

Way back we did a study in the book of Jonah. And Jonah, as you may recall, was the prophet that God sent to Nineveh to warn them that he was about to destroy the city for their wickedness. And Nineveh was not only just a wicked city, they were mortal enemies of Israel and Jonah heard God's command and then he took off in the exact opposite direction and he wound up spending some time inside the belly of a great fish. And then reluctantly he found himself warning the Ninevites that they had forty days to get their act

together or God was going to utterly destroy them. And perhaps in the greatest miracle in the Old Testament, the entire city of Nineveh, every man, every woman, every child, the king including his court, they all repent in dust and ashes. They all beg God for his mercy and forgiveness. And if you recall, Jonah is absolutely destroyed by this. And the reason why is because Jonah had become an idol worshiper. You see, Jonah had an idol. His idol was national Israel. He wanted nothing more than to see Nineveh ground into dust as one of Israel's major enemies. And the mission God gave him required him to shatter his idol by giving Israel's enemy a blessing he was convinced they never deserved, and he couldn't bring himself to do it. His love for Israel made his hatred for Israel's enemies something that stood between him and God. Now his love for Israel was a good thing but it quickly became an idol. And it was Jonah who said in *Jonah 2*: *"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."*

You see it's a funny thing about idols, I mean we still think of them as ancient symbols of religious rebellion, like something out of a museum. But idols are very much a part of our 21st century culture. I once heard a lecture about idols that was given to pastors by Tim Keller. He made some amazing observations about idols today and he basically said that nothing has changed at all since the days when Paul walked through the Areopagus pointing out

that idols have no power. Keller said we sophisticated 21st century folks, we laugh at the idea that idols could control areas like they used to in ancient Greece and Rome but that's exactly what they still do here in the United States today. And he pointed out that that the Agorrah was the cultural marketplace where thoughts and ideas were disseminated. He said that we have an Agorrah as well and our Agorrahs are no different, they just have different names. Our Agorrahs are Hollywood and Harvard and the *New York Times*. They said we no longer bow down our bodies to these things, now we bow down our souls. You see the ancients had Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty who ruled one entire area. They also had Athena who was the goddess of reason who ruled yet another area; and Artemis, the Goddess of success and prosperity who ruled yet another. Every area was dominated by a particular idol. Keller points out we are no different at all today. He pointed out that Boston with Harvard and MIT and all of its great medical facilities is basically an area dominated by Athena, the goddess of reason. It's a place where intellectual brilliance is the dominating idol. New York, on the other hand, with its financial centers, with its Wall Street is dominated by Artemis, the goddess of success. LA and Hollywood are still dominated by the goddess Aphrodite because what still matters there is physical appearance. It's been 2,000 years since Paul identified idol worship as the controlling influence in the culture and it's really no different

today. And in his lecture about these idols, Keller made a very bold statement. He said this, he's speaking to pastors, he says: "If your congregation doesn't come to grips with the idols they worship, you, as a pastor, will never be able to get through to them." He said, "You're going to be just adding layer upon layer of spiritual information without really affecting people's lives." And I thought of that scripture that describes the danger of coming to the gospel for information rather than transformation. It's 2 Timothy 3:7 and it describes this dangerous mindset as -- quote -- *always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth*. See, the truth about our own individual idols is not the kind of truth that you kind of gin up for Bible jeopardy and it's not something that's just good to know. It's something that's absolutely critical to know. It's more like biblical CPR or self-defense. These are vital truths that we have to learn if we ever hope to make any progress with our spiritual eyes because Jonah's words are absolute truth. Again he says: *Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs*.

Well Keller went on to write a book about what he was lecturing on and he called the book *Counterfeit Gods*, and in it he gave a list of what could easily become our contemporary idols. We think of idols as primitive little gods who bleed away our loyalty to Christ, but that's really, that's really only half right. More

often than not it's not primitive little gods that steal away our hearts because not many of us are tempted to fall down at the feet of carved images or golden calves. See for Christians, it's good and noble things that are pushed to an ignoble end that can spiritually destroy us. Keller's list of potential idols includes this, it says: Family, children, career, money, achievement, acclaim, social standing, romantic relationships, competence, skill, beauty, political and social causes, religious activity. Dr. Keller also does a great job of pointing out different ways of discerning what an idol is, and this is what he says, kind of sum it all up. He says: "Idolatry is anything in your life that is so central to your life that you can't have a life if you lose it." I have that, I have value. If I lose that, I have no life. He says: "When you look to some created thing to give you only what God can give you, that is idolatry."

Now to bring back this to our discussion about what Jesus was getting to as he was interrupted, notice what tops Keller's list. Very top of his list is family and children. Now I think it's hard to fathom why Jesus would go after something that seems so sacrosanct as the family. I mean we live in a culture today that constantly attacks the idea of the biblical notion of family. You know instead our culture says that we should be emulating and imitating the modern family, the non nuclear family, the family

made up of assorted parts that's cobbled together any way you'd like. So it's also easy to see in this culture where believers might feel like they're under attack from all sides. I mean here's the culture, it's attacking the biblical family of husband and wife and children and now here I am saying that Jesus is sort of attacking it from the other side by essentially dismissing his own family. But that's not what Jesus is teaching. Jesus suggests that we can turn love of family from a good thing into an idol by placing its value above that of God. I mean think of Jonah. Jonah took a good thing, his life as a prophet in Israel, and he made it into an ultimate thing that morphed into an idol. Jonah had made his identification with Israel into that idol and what Jesus is saying to us today in the 21st century is that it's just as easy to take family, which is under attack, and turn it into an idol as well. Consider Jesus' words: *"Who are my mother and my brothers?"* he asked. *Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

And so consider this morning, what is my attitude towards my family and ask yourself the very same question that Jesus asked: *"Who are my mother and my brothers?"* Consider also God's warning about taking communion. *1 Corinthians 11* 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 as I say each month, communion is extremely serious business and do not enter into it in an unworthy manner. It is literally to court disaster to do so. And I beg you, even at home, if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to the altar, then just do not participate, err on the side of caution and get right with God first. And again as I say each time, don't also make the similar mistake of thinking that you have to be spotless and perfect in order to receive communion. The devil loves that mistake as well. Because being a child of God doesn't mean that you're sinless, it doesn't mean that you're spotless, it doesn't mean that you never fail, it does mean that you recognize that the salvation you have is a gift that you've never earned by being good. And again I quote Dane Ortlund who 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." So again we just -- just to understand what it is for us as believers that when

we fail, the reason why we are aware of the fact that we failed is because God's Spirit is inside of us convicting us, making us grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us. And so we know in *1 John 1:9* he says: *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 believer doesn't mean you're sinless. It means we understand that if we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father who speaks 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.* The whole point is because we have Jesus' righteousness that now belongs to us because we by faith have put our faith in his sacrifice on the cross, now we own Jesus' righteousness as our own, so now we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, if you have made that transaction where by faith he has become your savior, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. Again, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven, so that we could receive the greatest gift ever given, the gift of Christ himself.

And what you want us to meditate on for a moment is do we value Christ above all? Just take a moment to think on that. And as

you're thinking, you'll see that we've passed out these new safe, if you want to call it that, communion packets, that consist of a wafer on the top and underneath is a -- is the cup and again this is not my idea of an ideal communion, in fact I can't even open mine. There you go. This is what COVID-19 has done to us, unfortunately. This symbolically is the bread. This is the flesh of Jesus Christ symbolically. *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.

Let me just repeat our text this morning. Again this is *Mark 3:31-35*. It says: *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

I want to go back to the statement that Jesus made about the most important commandment. And again he said in *Mark 12*: *"Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and*

with all of your mind and with all of your strength." And communion Sunday is a great time to ask ourselves how do we stack up to this extremely basic commandment, the one that Jesus said was of utmost importance? Do you love God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength? And if that question has never even been a passing thought that you've ever had, then maybe you need to seriously question whether or not you have a relationship with Jesus Christ. I ask myself all of the time, am I loving God enough? I mean is my heart, soul, mind, and strength fully committed to seeing him as first and foremost in my life? I mean we tend to view God as loving us and there's certainly lots of scripture to back that up, but here we have God and Jesus himself insisting that the baseline of a relationship with him is the desire to love God more highly than anything else. And Jesus didn't mince words when he described fleshing out what it means to put God number one. Here's where Jesus is 180 degrees out of phase with present day evangelism. So often today the gospel is presented as what God wants to do for us. How God is going to make our lives finally work at last. But you know Jesus constantly reverses the flow of that idea. He was constantly telling those around him negative things about the cost, the cost of entering into his kingdom. This is what he said in *Luke 14*, he said: *"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to*

complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

I mean he also says quite clearly that the vast majority of people are not prepared to make that sacrifice. He says in Matthew 7:

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." And he describes those who are genuine followers of his as being so committed to Christ that their love for anything else seems like hatred, hatred in comparison. And again he didn't mince words at all in the way he put it. In Luke 14 it says: Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters -- yes, even their own life -- such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Again we're looking here as to what is it that Jesus actually meant to convey to the crowds that were following him here. Well, the one thing we can say for sure is the first thing he communicated is that following Jesus is never, never the easy path. And again, he was way out of phase with the way modern evangelism treats the gospel, gently inviting people to accept Jesus' free gift of salvation. Well Jesus invites us not to accept a free gift with no strings attached but to whole-heartedly give up one kingdom for another, another kingdom that is freely given but extremely costly to accept. And understand something, Jesus is certainly not asking people to hate their parents and their siblings. It's a manner of speaking. I mean hating your parents and siblings would go directly against other commandments. *Exodus 20* says: *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.* *1 Timothy 5:8* says: *Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* What Jesus is describing as an identifying hallmark of those who genuinely are his followers is a love that is so great towards God that nothing, not siblings, not parents, not even your own life could possibly get in the way. And it's a description that only makes sense to those who have been given a new heart and a new spirit as a gift by God. I mean anybody else is going to look at Jesus' words as impossibly demanding. I mean this new heart that

God gives us cannot and will not ever be at peace with the world and oftentimes with members of our own families who are still firmly entrenched in this world. And hence Jesus states clearly right from the start that whole-heartedly accepting Christ as Savior sometimes will come as a cost of your family. Again *Matthew 10:34*: *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."* Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Think about those words of Jesus and ask yourself, do I value my family more than my relationship with Jesus? I mean is losing your family for the sake of Christ unthinkable to you? I mean it wasn't to his followers. In Jesus' time and culture, choosing to follow him was extraordinarily costly. I mean it's not nearly as costly for us in our country, in our culture. I mean we live in a culture that is highly tolerant of moving from one faith tradition to another, but you have to understand that's not the case in the rest of the world. Just last week the British newspaper *The Sun* published a story entitled: "Horror Attack. Evil Dad Sets Fire To

Own Daughter, 24, After Overhearing Her Talk About Converting From Islam to Christianity." This is May 29th, literally a week ago. Quote -- "A young woman has been recovering in a Ugandan hospital after her Muslim father allegedly burned her for converting to Christianity, it's been reported. After a friend witnessed to her, she said: 'She explained to me about Christ and the way of salvation, and I got convinced and accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. As she was sharing Christ with me, I was so overjoyed, and my father heard my joy and woke up, came from his bedroom furiously, and started beating me up with blows, slaps and kicks.' Miss Kyomuhendo claimed her dad shouted at her aunt that she had converted to Christianity and he was going to kill her."

Well, closer to home ABC News reported this: "Christian teen flees home, says she fears honor killing by Muslim father. Rifqa Bary says she fled her Ohio home fearing an honor killing. An Ohio teenager who secretly converted from Islam to Christianity has fled to Florida because she claims her father threatened her with an 'honor killing' for abandoning her Muslim upbringing."

Now it's doubtful that any of us are ever going to face that kind of overt persecution but it's not at all doubtful that genuine faith in Christ above all else can cause great conflicts in an otherwise healthy family. When you become a born again member of

the kingdom of God, you are no longer an integral part of this world. You become a stranger to this world, a mere temporary resident. Listen to what Peter said in *1 Peter 2*. He said: *Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you.* And make no mistake about it, this world deeply resents anyone who refuses to play by its rules. I mean Jesus said in *John 15*: *"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you."* I mean Jesus couldn't be more clear and compelling than that. And Paul told Timothy in *2 Timothy*: *In fact, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* You see the bottom line is that being in the world but not of the world is the hallmark of every genuine believer in Christ and the first ones who are going to really sense and understand that is going to be your family. Some family members will accept it and move on, others will intensely resent it. I mean I know, it's been my own experience and it's taken me many, many years to figure out how to navigate having blood relatives who literally hate the gospel that I love. And it's still a work in progress and sometimes it gets awkward and ugly. The danger is that in many subtle ways we are tempted to place our families ahead of God because our culture tends to idolize family and we may even

think that God approves of this. I mean surely God doesn't want me to alienate my family. Well again, we have to go back to the commandment that guides our commitment, the commitment that Jesus said was the most important one: Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength. And that love should dictate who you truly regard as family. See the question is not is blood thicker than water, the question is is Spirit thicker than blood? Is the family of God your true family? Well, to Jesus that wasn't even a question. Again: *Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

As we take the cup, we ask who is my real eternal family? Ask yourself, have I been guilty of idolizing family itself? Ask God for the grace to make first things first. *1 Corinthians 11:25* 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 part that we call heart, hands and feet. And during the week a number of people asked if I was going to comment on events that had taken place these last few weeks and I thought long and hard about what I was going to say, I even had prepared some words, but then I got a phone call from my sister Patty. I have a sister who lives in Scottsdale, Arizona who religiously watches us on You Tube. She's been watching every single week. Shout out to Patty and Tom in Scottsdale. But she was telling me last week how much she enjoyed Steve's message and she was talking about the story that he told. And if you recall, Steve's message told the story he was dating Vanessa and he wanted to celebrate their one-month anniversary, and so at 2:00 o'clock in the morning he goes into their backyard and he sees the light on in Vanessa's room, and so he throws a pebble at the window. No response. And he waits. He throws a bigger pebble at the window, and he waits, and again, no response. Then he throws a tennis ball and he waits and there's no response. And then finally he gets a ladder and he climbs up the ladder and he knocks on the window, scampers back down the ladder and he waits, and there's no response. And so he said he finally gave up and he said, I'm just going to go around to the front of the house, I'm going to knock on the door, I'm going to give her the flowers and then sing to her. And as he's rounding the corner, a police cruiser pulls up in front of the house, and he said -- the cop gets out of the cruiser and he says, "Wait right

here, sir, I'll check the back." I just want to say that's exactly what a good cop is doing, he's responding, he's doing the right thing. But Steve said he had to explain himself, "No, I think I'm the one that you're looking for. I think I'm the one that really is the source of all this." And my sister said something that absolutely stopped me in my tracks. What she said was, "I wonder what the cop's response would have been if Steve was a black man." I just want us to think about that for a second, because that's what our black brothers and sisters deal with all of the time. That's part of their history.

My sister also sent me a copy of Kevin DeYoung's prayer that he prayed to his church. It's a long prayer but it's a worthy prayer. It says exactly what I wanted to say. I've added a few words to it just as it applies to us, so I'm going to read Kevin DeYoung's prayer. He opens up by saying:

O great God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who created all things, the God above all gods, the God who was, and is, and is to come, the God who never changes, the God who never slumbers nor sleeps, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

We are in the midst of a global pandemic. More than one hundred

thousand lives lost in this country alone. We hear of new cases, new hospitalizations, new deaths every day. Lord have mercy.

In the last three months, 40 million Americans have entered the ranks of the unemployed. Many who still have a job are scared. Others are anxious, depressed. Lord have mercy.

As states reopen, some cities and neighborhoods, even some families and churches, are sniping at each other over masks or no masks, reopen quickly or reopen slowly, Covid is worse than you think or this has been a massive over-reaction. Lord have mercy.

As Christians, we have grieved to be separated from the people we love and care for. We have been forced to give up meeting together for a time. So much about ministry seems harder, more uncertain, less fulfilling. We don't fully know when normal will return, or what normal will look like, or what to do in the meantime. Lord have mercy.

On Monday, a white police officer in Minneapolis put his knee on the neck of George Floyd for eight minutes, murdering a black man made in the image of God, while three other officers did nothing to stop the injustice. Lord have mercy.

The anger and fear and pain felt in the black community isn't prompted by this one incident alone. It comes out of the legacy of slavery, and Jim Crow, and too many times where power and force were used against them in ways that are evil and unjust. Lord have mercy.

Every time we witness another tragedy like this we know it makes the difficult and honorable job of law enforcement almost impossible. Many police officers -- risking their lives to serve and protect -- will suffer unfairly because of the actions done a thousand miles away, actions they condemn, actions outside their control. Lord have mercy.

And now we see dozens and dozens of our great cities are torn apart by senseless destruction and violence. Businesses have been burnt down. Grocery stores destroyed. Neighborhoods ruined. Lives threatened or lost. Lord have mercy.

You have our attention. O God, give us ears to hear. What do you want to say to us in your word? What should we do? What needs to change? How can we help? Let us do as our own catechism instructs us and obey the sixth commandment by preserving the life of ourselves and others, by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and

practices which tend to the unjust taking away of the life of any. Let our lives be marked by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior. Let us forbear with others and demonstrate a readiness to be reconciled, and a patient enduring and forgiving of injuries. Let us comfort the distressed and protect and defend the innocent.

We pray for justice for the murder of George Floyd. We pray for those living in utter chaos and darkness in Minneapolis and St. Paul, or facing the loss of property or loss of life in Atlanta, Portland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Louisville, for facing rising tensions in Oakland, San Jose, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, Washington D.C., New York City, and here in Charlotte. We pray for repentance for those who sinned against George Floyd, those who have responded in sin, and those of us -- perhaps all of us -- who have harbored sin in our hearts toward those who seem to be on the other side, part of the other team, those who vote for the other party.

We pray for whatever necessary reforms might give hope and healing and dignity and the feeling of safety for our black brothers and sisters, especially here in our church. We pray for bravery and safety, and fortitude for our law enforcement officers: For Seth,

for Eric, for Tom, for Scotty, and for Ray and for all others particularly those who will be in Middletown this afternoon.

We pray for our political, religious and civic leaders. May they be humble, honest, measured, principled, open to good ideas wherever they come from, self-sacrificing, disciplined, courageous, and compassionate. Where we have such leaders may we listen to them and follow them. Where our leaders do not exhibit these qualities, help them to change and repent. We seek the peace of our city and all the cities of this great country.

We weep. We lament. We mourn. But not as those who have no hope. May gospel beauty rise from these smoldering, literal ashes. May truth triumph over lies and grace conquer lawlessness. May your people be one as you, O father, and your Son are one. May the church -- the body of Christ, the bride of Christ -- rise up as an example of love and with a message of salvation for a weary and war-torn world. Give us grace to serve you, O God, and, if necessary, grace to suffer for what is right. Give us the peace and health and safety we do not deserve. Give us the reformation and revival we need. Lord have mercy. Amen.