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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Mark 10:46-52

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you this day that we celebrate the cross. I don't know if we can use those words celebrate and cross at the same time but you have brought us victory and we are free indeed through the cross. And so we pray this morning as we are focused on you and your life, that you would give us the ability by the power of your Holy Spirit to make this of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is that day that we celebrate Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus as you know on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for one last Passover supper. It's recorded 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 he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked the disciples to eat the bread, drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis, and this is what we call "the Lord's table." And we celebrate the Lord's table by first meditating on what it is Christ did for us on the cross and by examining ourselves, that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out the areas that he's convicting us of sin and then by confessing our sins and 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."*

And so we are following the life of Christ, we're following in the gospel of Mark and we're up to the story of blind Bartimaeus. If you recall Jesus is on the final stretch of his public ministry, he's entering Jericho which is a town just outside of Jerusalem and he's headed to Jerusalem to be crucified on our behalf.

And so we pick up the story at *Mark 10:46-52*, and it says: *And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his*

disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Well you know Bartimaeus, he's crying out so loud that the crowds themselves are rebuking him; they're telling him to be silent. But Bartimaeus is no fool. I mean, even though he was blind, he could tell that there was a great deal going on in this crowd that's passing him by. He could sense the energy in that crowd as it centered around someone as he saw as maybe helping him find the key to sight. When he heard that it was Jesus he shouted out, "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Jesus hears his call and he calls him back. And the crowd now turns its attention to blind Bartimaeus telling him that the Master has now called him forward. So Jesus asked him what he wants and Bartimaeus responds, "That I might

see." It says: *And Jesus said to him, "Go Your Way; Your Faith Has Made You Well."*

Well it turns out this is not Jesus' first brush with a blind man. If you remember back just two chapters, Jesus has had a similar confrontation with a blind man who he heals by first spitting on his eyes and then placing his hands on them. We'll call this blind man number two. Let me just refresh your memory. This is *Mark 8:22*. It says: *And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*

Okay. That's blind man number two. John's gospel describes a third encounter with a different blind man. We'll call him blind man number three, and this is found in *John 9*. It says: *As he passed by -- that's Jesus -- he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be*

displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Well the blindness that Jesus is dealing with here in each of these cases, it's physical; but it's also symbolic of something that afflicts every single son or daughter of Adam and that is congenital spiritual blindness. Every one of us is born spiritually blind due to the son of Adam. Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden took away our ability to see spiritual things clearly. And for as long as Adam and Eve fellowshiped with God in the garden before the fall, they both enjoyed a type of 20/20 spiritual vision that let him see, let them understand exactly what they were put on earth for, and that's the glory of God.

I mean all of creation was designed to reflect God's character and his attributes, his glory. And far greater than the mountains and the seas and the stars and the creatures that God had created was this one creature who he had created without sin in the very image of God. Well that was Adam and Eve. And when Adam ate that

forbidden fruit, he sinned, he lost his perfection and he forever altered his relationship with God. And where before there was unbroken fellowship there was now this vast distance between a perfect God and his no longer perfect creation.

Part of the consequence of that imperfection is this blindness and it's a blindness that each of us is born with. It's a blindness that Jesus announced that he was coming to address. Think about this, this is Jesus's very first declaration, his first public ministry, he's announcing to his congregation in Nazareth what his intentions are, and he says: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind."*

See, blindness was this disease that we are all afflicted with, the disease that Jesus had come to heal us of. And in each case Jesus healed in response to a cry for help. And that cry came from three sources: It came either from the man himself like Bartimaeus who cried out about his blindness or it was the man's friends who brought blind man number two to Jesus, or it was Jesus himself who saw blind man number three in all likelihood begging by the side of the road and immediately set about restoring his sight. But in each case there was clearly a cry for help.

Now in Bartimaeus' case that cry, it came from within. *Mark 10* says: *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he -- that's Bartimaeus -- began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* Bartimaeus knew he was in desperate shape and he responded to what he knew, and it was so loud and so persistent that the crowd resented it.

In blind man number two's case, the cry for help, it came from without. It actually came from the friends that surrounded him. Again *Mark 8* says: *And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.* Well blind man number three, the cry for help comes directly from above. *John 9* says: *As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth.* So in this case it's Jesus himself who directly recognizes this man's need.

So we have three different sources: We have from within, from without and from above, these three different directions, and from these directions a need was presented and God responded. And again Bartimaeus, he represents a cry for help that comes from within, from something inside, something that God has written directly on the hearts of all men.

Scripture tells us in *Romans 2*: *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. If God had never come down to Mount Sinai, if he had never issued the Ten Commandments there would still have been a law written on the hearts of every human who's ever been born. Well before God came to Mount Sinai man knew that it was wrong to lie and to steal and to kill because God had written that on their hearts. And God still speaks to mankind from the heart, from within.*

Blind man number two represents the cry for help that comes from without, where the blind man's friends recognized how deeply he needed help and then brought him to a willing Christ. Most of the time we recognize our blindness and our need because others have been willing to show us that need. A cry for help comes from those imploring us to see what we can't see. And God tells us in *2 Corinthians*: *We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. It's our job to convince people that the status quo is not only unacceptable, it's something that ultimately spiritually will kill them. And it's not too strong a word to say that our task is to implore people to be reconciled to God.*

Now blind man number three, he represents the cry for help that's coming from above. As God himself moves in the life of his sheep to see how desperately they need the gospel we see Jesus reaching out to this man. *Mark 10* says: *And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."* So sometimes God takes direct action, he speaks directly into the life of the sheep that he's calling. And we see that from the still small voice that spoke to the prophet Elijah to a bolt of lightning that literally knocks Paul off his horse. We see that God is not averse to doing whatever it takes to get our attention.

As you go to take the bread this morning, I want you to consider the grace of God as he addresses many of our calls for help from the blindness that surrounds us. Grab ahold of your elements and just think about the blindness that surrounds us from within, from without and from above.

As you're contemplating this I want to read to you *1 Corinthians 11*. 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 I say this every month and I am absolutely committed to repeating it, that communion is an incredibly serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. So again, I plead with you if you are not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you have not by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or your sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then don't participate; just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution; get right with God first.

But as I say each month, on the other hand don't make the mistake of thinking you have to be spotlessly perfect. The enemy loves that mistake as well. We say a child of the King doesn't mean that you never fail, it doesn't mean that you never sin, it means that you recognize that the salvation that you have been given has been given as a gift. And understand that there's no one that's capable of earning this -- quote -- "by being good." So we repeat Dane Ortlund's quote, 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." But it also

means that when we fail, we are aware of the fact that we've sinned because we now have God's Spirit living inside us, it is God's Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin. And so we grieve knowing that we have a Father who longs to forgive us and heal 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 again being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are sinless, it means that when we sin, we recognize we've got an advocate, we've got somebody up in heaven itself speaking on our behalf. 1 *John 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 own Jesus' righteousness, we own that foreign righteousness, it belongs to us by faith, so because we own that, we are free to eat from this table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and died the death we all deserved to die in our place just so that we could be worthy of this.

And so as we are about to approach it, just ask God for the ability to truly perceive, to truly understand this blindness that belonged

to us at the start and the blindness that's now surrounding us.

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.

Well we've been looking at physical blindness as a metaphor for spiritual blindness, the spiritual blindness that we inherit as a congenital condition. You've got to understand, this is something that every single one of us is born with. And to make matters worse, the prince of this world, the devil himself is actively working to keep this world in a state of perpetual blindness. This is what God says. He says this in *2 Corinthians 4:4*. He says: *The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* And we know Jesus came into this world -- quote -- *"to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind."* We also know that in each case of physical blindness, a cry for help went up and it went up from within, from without and from above and that God heard and God healed.

But there's two other types of spiritual blindness that for all intents and purposes, they have no cure whatsoever. They have no cure not because God is not willing but simply because there's no cry for help, there's no call for help because there's no sense whatsoever in these folks that they're blind. So this type of blindness is by far the most deadly form there is.

And Jesus spoke about that blindness when he was dealing with blind man number three. You see, after Jesus had healed this man, he was then set upon by the Pharisees. And again, they were furious because Jesus had healed somebody on the Sabbath and so they were determined to make sure that this spectacular miracle had no lasting effect whatsoever. But just like blind Bartimaeus, they did not realize who they were dealing with. You see, this man's blindness gave him the perfect opportunity to point people to the Savior, which is just what he did. But it also showcased this attitude of certitude in the Pharisees that precluded any acknowledgment of spiritual blindness at all, and that's what was so truly deadly.

And so we pick up the story after it's become common knowledge that this man who everyone has known for years is blind is now fully sighted. This is *John 9:18*. It says: *The Jews did not believe this about him -- that he was blind and received sight -- until*

they summoned the parents of the one who had received his sight. They asked them, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" "We know this is our son and that he was born blind," his parents answered. "But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he's of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jews, since the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him as Messiah, he would be banned from the synagogue.

Now we have to understand to be banned from the synagogue is to be banned from every single aspect of Jewish life. I mean it's to be cut off socially, economically and spiritually, so terrifying a prospect that the blind man's own parents are willing to throw him under the bus rather than be subjected to that kind of punishment. The one who truly had no fear whatsoever in this was in fact the blind man.

Again, let me read. It says: *So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner!" Speaking of Jesus. He answered, "Whether or not He's a sinner, I don't know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!" Then they asked him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" "I already told you," he*

said, "and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't want to become His disciples too, do you?"

This is nothing less than a biting satirical rebuke from a man the Pharisees considered to be lower than pond scum. I mean this guy's not only fearless, he's making them look like absolute buffoons, and so they're outraged. They ridiculed him: "You're that man's disciple, but we're Moses' disciples. We know that God has spoken to Moses. But this man -- we don't know where He's from!" "This is an amazing thing," the man told them. "You don't know where He is from, yet He opened my eyes!"

You see, the blind man knew who he was talking to and he knew that there would be dire consequences and yet he continues to boldly speak the truth. He says: "We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him. Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He wouldn't be able to do anything." His logic is absolutely compelling but again, logic is not what turns souls to Christ. It just drove them deeper and deeper into their blindness and rage. "You were born entirely in sin," they replied, "and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

So his brutal honesty cost the blind man socially and economically but spiritually it literally saved his soul because Jesus seeks him out. It says: *When Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, He found him and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is He, Sir, that I may believe in Him?" he asked. Jesus answered, "You have seen Him; in fact, He is the One speaking with you." "I believe, Lord!" he said, and he worshiped Him.*

Well the Pharisees on the other hand, they just doubled down on their insistence that they had this perfect 20/20 spiritual vision and it was to those individuals that Jesus laid out one of the most frightening judgments he's ever laid out. It says: *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."*

You see, there's a spiritual principle that applies here. I mean we looked at three different cases of folks dealing with physical blindness and each case all it took was their recognition of their own blindness to have Jesus offer them a cure. We look at the reaction of the Pharisees and we see a very stark difference. It's a refusal to recognize or acknowledge the possibility of their own

spiritual blindness. And it's that refusal that spreads like a spiritual disease in the soul of those who refuse the light, who prefer the darkness. And it's all summed up in those four incredulous words that the Pharisees offer up to Jesus: "*Are we also blind?*" Yes, indeed; you are blind. In fact you were so blind you don't even perceive what you can't see.

Sad to say it but the disease in the Pharisees has become the disease of our culture. I mean have you ever wondered why the gospel seems so out of reach to so many people these days? Have you ever wondered how it is that people believe things that now defy even common logic? I think it's far more than coincidental and I think there's a principle at work here.

You know, Jesus once told a parable about talents that were given out five to one, two to another and one to a third. And at the end of the story we learn that the party that received one talent refused to put it to work and instead he buried it in the field because he claimed the master was a hard task master. The five talent servant and the two talent servant at the end, they both get equally rewarded because they faithfully put to work the gifts that they were given. But the one talent servant, the one who refused to use the gift that he was given, he was cast into outer darkness. And the story details God's expectation of how we are to use the

gifts that he's given to us. And Jesus in telling the story, he states a principle that applies equally to this idea of spiritual blindness. Listen carefully to what he says. He says: *"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

I call this the principle of negative equity. And what God is saying here is that if you refuse what he's given to you to perceive the kingdom, whether it be individuals or insight or an understanding or the ability to see itself, if you refuse that, then not only do not gain the kingdom but you lose the ability to even perceive the kingdom. And what God is saying here is that the ability to see, the ability to perceive on a spiritual level is fluid. And the more times you are willing to see what is right in front of your eyes, the more insight, wisdom and ability you will receive, the more spiritual insight you will be given. However, the more you refuse to see what's right in front of your eyes, the more your capacity to see is going to be diminished.

Let me repeat what Jesus said: *"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* The Pharisees' refusal to see what was right in front of their eyes caused them to lose the very capacity to see. And every time they refused to see they

diminished their sight capacity accordingly. Understand, that same principle applies to our culture and to our country.

For the last fifty or sixty years we have systematically been shutting God out of our public square, of our schools, of our culture, out of creation itself and even out of our churches. If refusing to see causes us to lose the ability to see then it begins to make sense that we're in a culture that is falling, free falling its inability to see not just the truth but to see simple childlike logic. Men can have babies? Boys can be girls? Girls can be boys simply by drugs and surgery? I mean clearly the ability to see reality in our culture has been greatly diminished.

And in addition to that principle of acquired spiritual blindness, we have the ongoing work of the prince of this world who is actively blinding the eyes of unbelievers. And then we add to this a third level, something that we find particularly appropriate to this day and age, something that God said in *2 Thessalonians 2*.

Listen to what he said. He said: *The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the*

truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

See, the final phase of that negative equity that results from refusing to see what is right in front of your eyes is a strong delusion that takes the place of the truth that you've been rejecting. I think it should come as no surprise to most of us that we're living in an era once described by G. K. Chesterton as a time when -- quote -- "A man had to believe something that no normal man would believe." Lynn Vincent writing in *World Magazine* just this week describes these times by saying -- quote -- "Killing unborn babies is healthcare. Child mutilation promotes mental health. Helping people commit suicide is compassionate, so is euthanizing the sick and disabled. These and other equally insane positions once propounded mainly by activists and edgy academics are now mainstream. Tens of millions are living in a miasma of lies, a spiritual matrix."

See, that word blind, that word perfectly describes our spiritual state when Jesus came to rescue each of us. I mean *Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind."*

The blind man of John 9, he had a physical handicap. Ours is as far more deadly because ours is spiritual. We live in a gospel

saturated culture that has no idea what the real gospel is. I mean your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues, they still think that the Christian way to heaven is by doing good works and being nice. They're convinced that as long as their good deeds outmatch their bad deeds and they're willing to give a nod to cultural aspects of Christianity, then they should be safe and secure and on their way to heaven when they die. They are spiritually as blind as the Pharisees were. And like the Pharisees they really have no interest or desire in being given the ability to see. And that is the challenge that we who have been given the gift of sight have to deal with.

You see, it's really no different today than it was 2,000 years ago and the gospel remains the same. I mean the gospel is that God and man were separated by the sin of Adam, it made it impossible for an imperfect man to fellowship with a perfect God and it was resolved by God himself becoming one of us, living a perfect life and then offering that life up on the cross so that we by faith could place our trust in that sacrifice and thereby inherit Christ's righteousness as our own. And so once again, just like Adam was originally, we too can be capable of fellowship with God in heaven.

It's a very simple story because it's a very simple gospel but the task is not simple at all. You see, we who have been given sight

have been called to offer that sight to those who are blind, and it's only by the grace of God that it's going to make any sense. But it's no different today than it was back in Jesus' day. The gospel begins to make sense only when by God's grace we are willing to cry out, whether it's from without or within or above. We have to recognize our blindness, a blindness that precluded us understanding that what divides people in God's eyes, it's not who's good and who's bad. It's not that at all. It's who is blind and who can see.

The vast majority of people are blind to the fact that in God's economy there's no such thing as good and bad but only those who know they are bad and those who don't. Those who know they are bad, they cling to Jesus, knowing that he alone is the source of their righteousness. Those who don't know that they're bad are those who think their lives or their obedience or their religious behavior is what makes them worthy enough for heaven. They are in Jesus's eyes blind to their own blindness. And it only gets worse. What little light they have Jesus says is going to be taken away. Jesus says those who do see will become blind.

And we are all of us the picture of these blind men. Every single one of us suffered from a congenital spiritual blindness, and at some point in our spiritual lives, there was a cry for help that

came from within, without or above. It was a plea for God's grace because we cried out in our weakness, we received the sight that Jesus alone can give.

We also face that exact same challenge that blind Bartimaeus faced. You see, the more he cried out, the more he cried out in his blindness, what happened? The more he was told shut up, the more he was told to be silent. The more that you are willing to help others recognize their blindness, the more you are going to be told to be silent. See, the gospel is formerly blind people telling presently blind people where they can find sight, but most will choose to remain blind.

As you pray, as you meditate, consider asking God for the privilege of pointing out that blindness that our culture is steeped in. Ask him for the grace to be able to have the courage, like the blind man had, to speak up even in the face of fierce opposition, to speak up even when you know it's going to be costly. Ask God for the grace to be willing to pay that price and for the wisdom to be able to speak out that willingness as well as the blind man did.

Take a moment to take the cup. *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." Take, and drink.

I want to shift gears a little bit for this part. This is the heart, hands and feet part. This is the part where we try to understand some kind of way that we can put into practical application what it means to remember Christ and his sacrifice. And I want to open up this brief section with a fairly lengthy scripture that I want to read. I think you'll get where I'm going when I read it.

This is *1 Corinthians 12:14-28*. It says: *For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the*

body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

I want to relate this to Andy, you know, because I was thinking about Andy and I was thinking about bodies, I was thinking about body parts and the first thing that I thought of, Andy is a hand and he's a foot because if you ever needed to have somebody lend a hand physically, if you ever needed something done, Andy's the kind of person you would call up and instantly, his instant response, "Andy, can you do this? Can you do that?" "Yeah, sure." That's Andy.

But Andy's also an ear. I don't know if you know this but one huge blessing for me as a pastor is to have a congregant who actually listens and listens intently. And this happens frequently. Andy can quote statements from my messages that I have long forgotten because he makes it his business to listen and to listen intently.

But Andy's also a tongue. I mean it was a real blessing last spring to see Andy take over the adult Sunday school for a while. And you can tell that he put his heart and his soul into putting out every single lesson, that he studied hard and he studied long.

And one verse from the scripture has become all too real, I think, to all of us but especially to Darcey and the kids and that is verse 26: *If one member suffers, all suffer together.* And I think all of us feel united one thing, we feel united in the pain we feel for Andy and Darcey and Philip and Michael and Sarah and Hannah. I've said before, I'll say it again, we all feel gut-punched. Of course we don't feel to the extent that Andy is feeling but I believe spiritually we are entering into that kind of place where we feel as a body of Christ when one member is suffering.

And I tell you, I think there's -- it turns out there's lots of people in this body that are suffering. There's a lot of pain going around, a lot for everyone economically and every other way. But I see this as God calling us to another level as kind of a wake-up call to us as the body of Christ. Like I said, there's a lot of other folks in this body that need strength and help and care. And so I think we need to step it up, we need to step it up prayer wise, we need to step it up giving wise, we need to step it up body part wise. And what I mean by that is we all need to

think, okay, what am I? Am I a hand? Am I an eye? Am I a heart, a foot, whatever. God's going to be calling each of us to different tasks, different parts of what the body is supposed to be doing.

And in fact, you know, one of the things that we just got this past week, you know, we came to the VBS and if you came to the closing ceremony you saw hundreds of boxes of cereal up in the front here. You know, there's a lot of people just outside those doors who are not even getting enough to eat because they can't afford to. And God is calling on us to step it up, to go from a different level of simply saying, yeah, I'll say a prayer and I'll show up and sing some songs and have a nice conversation and go home and be done with it. God's saying, no, no, no, there's a lot more to the body than simply that. It's finding out what part am I? What body part am I in this and how can I make that body part work for this whole body. That's what I think God is calling on us to do.

But I want to share with you this morning, Steve had a testimony of just what happened with all of those boxes of cereal. It was hundreds of boxes of cereal that was here. Steve, why don't you share with us.

STEVE SUMNICK: Well, as you all know we had a great week of VBS

and we want to praise God for that. And each year our VBS picks a mission to support where the kids come in with all their loose change and any money they can find on the floor or under the couch cushion, they just bring it all in and we wrap it up and send it out to support a mission.

This year's VBS we took a lot of time to get a lot of encouragement from our missionaries overseas to teach our kids that God wants to use them to be missionaries right now, right here. You don't have to wait to be's certain age, God could use you right now, right here.

And so in that light the mission that we chose to support was the Drew United Methodist Food Pantry that's run by Al and Patti Gessner. And so the kids would bring in their offering every day and it would be counted up and the team would go out to Shop Rite and buy boxes of cereal and all throughout the week we're watching boxes get higher and higher and these big stacks of boxes. And I thought, you know, when the VBS was over, they collected more than like 260 boxes of cereal. Yeah, they raised just under \$700 and 260 boxes of cereal.

So the food pantry runs on Saturday mornings. So we bagged it up on Friday night. And, you know, I put it in the back of our large

truck and I'm driving it over, and I thought, oh, we're going to be a blessing, we're going to really be a blessing to these people. And what I didn't realize on my way over was the super blessing that we would get in return, and it's something I want to share with all of you today.

So I pulled up to the food pantry and I'm telling you, like we have a big truck, this thing was packed with cereal boxes and they were all bagged up but it was just mound, a big mound of cereal boxes. And Al comes out of the food pantry and as I'm approaching him, like tears welled up in his eyes. And I was looking at him, I'm like, you know it's just cereal, you know, and he's like, he's like, Steve, let me tell a story. And he said the demand at the food pantry has been great these last few months. People in our community are on a fixed income. As the price of food continues to soar, there's just more and more people that need help. And so they're servicing up to forty families every weekend. And he said it keeps growing.

And they said last week we went to prepare for the upcoming Saturday and we didn't have any food and we went to call and put in an order at the local food bank, and they wouldn't let us put the order in and he said because someone in the church forgot to pay the bill, so they wouldn't let us order any food. So last minute

we scraped up whatever money we could find, whatever money we had, we went down to Save-A-Lot, we bought everything that we could possibly buy. And the line, there was 49 families lined up and they said the food went fast. And he said we were on the verge of having to turn people away which is something we've never had to do. Never. We were out of food and we're at that place, like, what do you do? And he goes, "Steve, I said a prayer. I said a prayer." And he said, "as soon as I was done praying, a truck, that size" -- pointing at my truck -- "pulled up with over a thousand dollars worth of groceries." A thousand dollars worth of groceries. Right at that last minute. It's like, you know, you read about those things about the orphanage and things like that, but it's, you know, a thousand dollars. And he said we were, you know, just at the right time God provided a thousand dollars worth of groceries. And he says, "Now come inside the pantry and look at our cereal section." So I went in there and I said -- I'm looking around like, "There's nothing here, Al," and he's like, "That's right. I just packed the last bag, the last box of cereal, and now I have a truckload."

So God is so good, and you know, the lesson in all this is really it's by giving that you receive. You know, you hear these things, you put yourself out there to help other people, and when you're in your lack, God shows up in powerful ways. So thanks for listening.

Thanks for letting me share.

Okay. let's pray, folks.

Father, again, I just thank you for the body of Christ, I thank you for the fact that you are willing to use broken vessels like us to be able to bring glory to you, and that's not an easy thing. And so I pray this morning, Lord, that each and every one of us would examine what role you have for us, what part of the body we are and I just, I pray that we'd all be seeking ways that we can maximize what it is that God has for us at this time, whether we're a hand or a foot or an eye or an ear, I pray that you would give us the heart and the desire and the passion to be the body of Christ. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.