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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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The Triumphal Entry

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, again, we just thank you for this day, we thank you that it represents a time when we set apart the time to focus on you, on the cross, on what it is that you've done for us on that cross. Again, we just pray this morning in a special way that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit guiding us and directing us through this process where we can actually commune with you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as I've just mentioned, this is that day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for one final Passover meal. It's recorded in *Matthew 26*, which 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 bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood, then asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to remember and repeat that remembrance of his sacrifice, to do that on a regular basis. We call it "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month here and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, and that means asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas where 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."*

So we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark. At this point Jesus is on the final stretch of his public ministry. His crucifixion is merely days away and he's leaving Jericho which is a small town outside of Jerusalem where he's just healed blind Bartimaeus, and now he's headed to Jerusalem to be crucified on our behalf.

Jesus has told the disciples, he told them only one chapter ago in

Mark 10 saying: "See we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

Jesus reduces an astounding blasphemy down to four simple outrageous acts. He says God himself is going to be mocked, spit on, flogged and executed. Just try to imagine what is weighing on Jesus' mind at this point. I mean he's marching his disciples inexorably toward Jerusalem where he knows his execution awaits. And his disciples, they're so clueless that they're engaged in battles over who's going to be the biggest big shot when Jesus' new kingdom is launched. They think it's going to be political. They think that at long last Jesus is going to obviously and finally give the chosen people the respect and the power that they deserve. They really have no idea what Jesus knows precisely. There will be no political uprising. What's going to take place next will be the culmination of a spiritual battle that started thousands of years previously and it would give everyone the impression of a complete and total political and physical defeat. God himself is going to be mocked, spit on, flogged and executed. And these same disciples, they're going to be terrified, they're going to be scattered thinking that all is lost.

We pick up the story at *Mark 11:1-7*. It says: *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this,' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.*

Now just imagine you're one of the disciples. Just imagine what's going through their head. They're wondering how in the world is Jesus going to be able to pull this off. You have to understand what communication was like at that time. Virtually everything was word of mouth, i mean, there's no phones, there's no texts, there's no Facebook, there's no email. So entering into this town, how in the world is Jesus to ever know that in front of these houses there would be a colt that no one had ever ridden on? And why such a bizarre request? I mean if you are looking for a way to triumphantly enter into a town, it would always be by virtue of a stallion, preferably the biggest, badest, nastiest stallion you

could find. That's the way conquering generals always did it before. Stallions, they represent conquest, they represent power; donkeys represent service, servitude. Nobody but nobody rides into town triumphantly on a donkey and certainly not on the colt or a foal of a donkey, meaning a young donkey, in this case a donkey so young it's never even been ridden before.

I mean, if the disciples were really thinking it through, they might have remembered a prediction that the prophet Zechariah had made some 500 years before about a time long in the future when God himself would actually do battle with Satan. And the place where that final battle was going to take place was Jerusalem, the very city that Jesus was about to enter. God said some five centuries before this very day that the King himself would be riding into town on the foal of a donkey. He said it through the prophet Zechariah. This is *Zechariah 9*. He said: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Well, Matthew's gospel records the same incident with a donkey but he adds a very important detail. This is *Matthew 21*. He says: *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go*

into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.

Folks compare these scriptures, they compare the scripture of Mark and Matthew's account, they claim, okay, here's our contradiction in the Bible. I mean Mark says simply the disciples found a colt, but Matthew says they found two donkeys, a donkey and its colt. Well, if anything, this is a confirmation instead of a contradiction. Jesus had added that one more detail in Matthew's gospel that points out that by telling the two disciples you're going to find a donkey tied and her colt, that he's assuring us that that colt was just what Zechariah had prophesied, the foal or offspring of that donkey and that the both of them were there together. And Mark's gospel also states what should be obvious, I mean, if you're a stranger in a town and you just walk up to an animal or animals that are parked outside and you start untying it and walking off with it, I mean, what do you think is going to

happen? That's why Jesus says, *"If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"*

I just want you to understand Jesus' knowledge of the time and the situation is absolute, I mean, not only does he know that the selected colt of a donkey's going to be there waiting, he also knows exactly what the disciples need to say in order to secure the animal. And Luke's gospel observes in *Luke 19*, it says: *So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it."*

You see, sometimes or actually many times you hear the crucifixion, it's always presented as this tragic tale of a crowd that suddenly turns on Jesus as if he was some kind of a victim, but nothing could be farther from the truth. You see, every single aspect of this final battle between God and Satan was orchestrated, it was planned including God's use of the free will of fallen, evil men in order to accomplish what he wanted to accomplish.

Think back to Peter's sermon in Acts. You recall how Peter referred to this whole situation, his reference to that exact aspect of Jesus' crucifixion, I mean, from the moment that that

colt was called out to the moment that Jesus gave up his spirit, everything, every single detail was precisely planned ahead of time.

Think back to that sermon. Peter is addressing this huge crowd shortly after Jesus had ascended into heaven. This is what he says. He says: *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."*

And later when Peter and John are released from prison for healing a man, the disciples, they're all gathered together to pray and among the things they prayed to the Lord was this statement in Acts 4:27. He says: *"For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."*

So the definite plan predestined by the foreknowledge of God was to use wicked men acting out of their own free will to accomplish a

far greater will, and that was God's will that Jesus should meet and defeat Satan at the cross. And to do that required that every single aspect of the crucifixion be thought out ahead of time from a detail as prosaic as a donkey through the appearance of Jesus outside of Jerusalem at exactly the appropriate time.

The other thing that this points out is that Jesus had others besides the disciples who were committed to him and his kingdom. I mean, if somebody's untying your donkey and its colt and they tell you they're doing so because the Master has use of it and that he'll return it, you better believe that those people believed that because they're on our side as well. You see, God uses both good and evil that men do in order to accomplish his will.

Moving further, in verse 7 it says: *And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

What Mark is referring to here is actually there are two very separate crowds here. There's one crowd -- quote -- "and those who went before," that crowd had come from a dinner that Simon the

leper had had in order to celebrate Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead. The other crowd referred to as "those who followed," that was a different crowd. That was a crowd from a completely separate place who was flowing into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. So these two crowds, they actually merged as Jesus is entering into Jerusalem making for one huge crowd all celebrating Jesus.

See, the crowd that left from Simon, the dinner at Simon the leper's house, that was a crowd that heard all about the miracle that Jesus had done in raising up Lazarus. We learn in John's gospel, he tells us all about, he says: *The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.* The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they had heard he had done this sign. So as they meet and mingle with the other crowd, the crowd that is piling into Jerusalem to celebrate The Passover, well their enthusiasm for Jesus, it infects the entire crowd. Jesus also knew that the crowd's reaction was going to stir up the passions of his enemy to a fever pitch which would set the stage for his arrest.

John further adds in the next verse, he says: *So the Pharisees*

said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." Luke's gospel fills out the picture more completely, pointing out once again how enraging the crowd response to Jesus was to his enemies. Luke 19:36 says: And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near -- already on the way down the Mount of Olives -- the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

You know, the crowd, they're shouting out that this king who was coming into town there, he's coming to bring of all things peace in heaven and glory on earth. So you wonder how many of those shouting out even knew that there was an absence of peace in heaven? How many of them even guessed that God's perfect wrath was settled on all of humanity?

We think of wrath, we think wrath as some kind of character flaw instead of an expression of God's infinite love. Just think for a second. As a parent, what would you feel towards someone who you knew was trying to harm your child? Of course there would be wrath. Now is that wrath a character flaw or is that an expression of your love?

You have to understand, sin is the ultimate harm inflicted on God's children. So a God of perfect love would have nothing but perfect wrath for those and that which would inflict that harm. And then you add to that this world's response to God simply coming to this earth to save it from sin and you picture a perfect God's response to a world that starts out trying to kill Jesus through Herod and then spends the next 30 years seeking to portray him either as a demon-possessed illegitimate son or as a false teacher serving up lies and deception.

David in *Psalm 69* summed up exactly what Jesus was facing. This was David's words attributable to Jesus. He says: *More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.* And we know Jesus himself said in *John 15:25*: *"They hated me without a cause."*

Well now Jesus' public ministry is coming to its appointed end; the ultimate battle is now at hand. The pharisees are furious, they're super angry that Jesus is now being worshiped by the crowd. *Luke 19:39* says: *And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."* You have to understand Jesus is not

speaking hyperbolically here. He is the creator and King of the universe. He's the one who dwells in unapproachable light whose presence caused the prophet Isaiah to say: *"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."*

We know that Isaiah was the holiest man of his generation yet in the presence of this king, he instantly recognizes how unclean he is. In the presence of God all inanimate life including the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle on the hills, as well as the trees themselves, they recognize and glorify this King. In addition, the hills, the seas, and the stars, all these inanimate objects, they all sing out worship in their own way. I mean, at the presence of God we are told the mountains themselves begin to tremble.

So Jesus, he's just speaking simple truth to those who see him as a peasant interloper worthy of nothing. They have no idea that the whole universe already worships the one who appears to them as simply human. They can't fathom that God himself has left heaven itself to offer up his perfect life as payment in full to all those who will put their faith in him. And they're offended, they are offended that this Jesus doesn't rebuke the crowd for claiming he's

a king worthy of glory. Jesus is actually telling those Pharisees that the universe itself at the exact moment when its real king is marching in to meet the enemy at the cross that this universe is so intent on recognizing what is really taking place. And so determined to shout out his glory that if the humans refuse, even the rocks are going to start shouting.

As you go to take the bread this morning, just try to imagine the glory of Jesus, a glory so great that rocks are poised to give voice to it, and prepare your heart to break bread with him.

1 Corinthians 11:28 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.

I repeat this warning every single month and I just point out the fact how serious communion is, and again, I warn that entering into communion in an unworthy manner is literally to court disaster. And so I plead with you, if you haven't trusted in Christ as your savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother and

sister before you bring the sacrifice of your own self, your own body to this altar, then don't bother with the elements, just pass them by. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

And I also point out on the other hand you can make the mistake of thinking that I have to be spotlessly perfect in order to participate, and the enemy loves that mistake as well. I mean it's all about attitude. It's all about the attitude, the way that you take communion. God punished the people who took the communion with a terrible attitude as if it was rote, just something to go through. You understand that what matters for us is that we are a child and children of the King, but that doesn't mean that we don't sin and that we don't ever fail. It means that we recognize that the salvation that we have is a gift given by God himself.

And I repeat this quote from Dane Ortlund every month. 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." But it also means that when we fail, we are aware of that for a unique reason, because God's Holy Spirit now lives inside us, and it's that spirit that convicts us of sin. And so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us of that sin, a Father who says, *"If we confess our*

sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So again, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're sinless and spotless, it means that you understand that you now have an advocate, someone speaking on your behalf in heaven itself. John 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 that's our key, because we have righteousness before God -- but it's not ours, it's his -- we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, so we are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege he purchased for you at the cost of his own life. He lived the life we were supposed to live and died the death we all deserved to die in our place so we could be right here, right now at this table. So before we participate, just ask God for the ability to truly perceive, to truly understand the enormity of his sacrifice.

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 you to consider the statement that the crowd made as Jesus is entering into Jerusalem. The crowd shouts out: "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" I suggest to you the crowd has really no idea what it is shouting. This is the same crowd that's going to turn on Jesus shortly, and Jesus knows that. But for now, God has them shouting out his glory. And I've said before, God uses the free wills of men to express his wills through. And I don't know how God does that but I've seen ample evidence of his will being expressed by the free will choices of human beings.

Right after Jesus had done probably his most spectacular miracle, right after he has raised Lazarus up from the dead, there was an immediate reaction among the people who saw his power and recognized that power as coming directly from God and those who saw his power and recognized him as their ultimate threat. And their response to someone literally raising somebody from the dead is, "We've got to kill this man." That's the essence of evil men. That's the essence of evil men seeking evil ends and yet still God spoke clearly and plainly through them.

If you remember, the Pharisees were panicked at seeing this

miracle, so they went to the high priest who was a thoroughly evil man and he made this incredible prediction. This is *John 11:45*. It says: *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."* But one of them, *Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."* He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

Caiaphas is about as evil a man as you can find. And he seemed to be freely stating what his deepest desire is, and yet he perfectly mouths God's will by saying -- quote -- *"It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."* He couldn't have said it any better. Caiaphas wanted nothing more than to wipe Jesus from the face of the earth, and yet God uses this profound evil for good. To prophesy exactly what

Jesus would be doing with the evil that surrounded him, he would die just like Caiaphas prophesied so that the whole nation would not perish, and that nation is us. So God takes a profoundly evil man and he turns him into an unwitting prophet of the most profound good that has ever existed. Kind of sounds like Romans 8:28, doesn't it? It says: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

So now, if God can make one who's arguably one of the most evil men who ever lived -- that would be Caiaphas -- if God could make him and his evil into something that works for good, do you still think he can't do that for you? I mean, just look at the cross itself. Could there be anything more inherently evil than the idea of taking the King and creator of the universe, the one honored and glorified by all and every part of this universe who has lived among you flawlessly, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick and even raising the dead, take that God, that very God in the flesh, then strip him naked, spit in his face, mock him as a false king, flog him until the flesh is torn from his body and then nail him to a cross. And while he's hanging there on that cross, mock him; dare him if he's truly God to come down from that cross and prove it to us. Could there be a more evil deed done anywhere in the history of the universe?

Well, the fact that God was able to work that ultimate evil for infinite good is the reason why the crowds were cheering even though I don't think they had any idea what they were cheering for. I mean, the actual fact was they were cheering so that the rest of the universe, both animate and inanimate, wouldn't explode in praise and honor before the time God had for it to do so. I mean Jesus said as much. Think of what he said. It says: And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, *"Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."* But He answered and said to them, *"I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."* That's astounding.

You see, we on earth, we see through a glass darkly. We have this tiny, truncated vision of who Jesus truly is and what he actually did for us. I think of a description that God gives us that virtually everybody knows, it's probably the most popular scripture in the entire Bible but it's a description that grows the more we understand what it is Jesus did, and it's *John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* You see what is interesting about that scripture, what is critical about that scripture is this tiny little two-letter word that actually in the Greek is five letters, it's the Greek word "houto," it's the word that we translate as the conjunction "so." And in

Greek it basically serves the same way that it's translated. It means "in this way." For God in this way loved the world. For God so loved the world. And what is interesting about that English word "so" is how those two little letters can grow the more you understand just what it is he did and how much he had to love us to do it.

I think back when I first learned about the cross as a little child, I mean, it was kind of a -- it was a formula, I mean, "God so loved the world," period. We're sinners, God went to the cross and somehow magically paid for it and it was simple enough, just trusting God and your sins are paid for. But the more that I understood the holiness of God, the more that word "so," it began to grow. God so loved the world that he stepped into it despite the uncleanness and lack of holiness that marked it out clearly as enemy territory. And the more that I understood God's perfection, the more that little word so began to grow. God so loved the world that he stepped into a place that had no concept whatsoever of perfection, a world where everyone thought that goodness was being just a little bit better than the next guy as opposed to being transcendentally flawless. The more I understood God's compassion, again the more that little word "so" began to grow.

God so loved this world that he left heaven itself not for a

palace, not for a place of honor and glory but for a feeding trough in a barn as a son of peasants. He so loved this world that he wanted to identify with the least of us and he so wanted to identify with the least of us that Isaiah tells us that the creator of all things including every single person who's ever walked the face of this earth, he deliberately chose a body in order to be part of that process that no one would ever look at twice. *Isaiah 53*, we read it this morning: *For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*

There's so many of these things that you can do this endlessly. The final one for this morning is finally, God so loved the world that he willingly and purposely walked into the very city where he knew that this world he created would mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him.

I want to focus in on just one tiny aspect of that, one of the most appalling aspects of the crucifixion that people seldom even refer to because it's so appalling. It's to flesh out literally what it meant for God to be mocked. It points to the fact that in all likelihood Jesus was crucified naked, something your mind doesn't even want to go to. But we know that the soldiers, we knew they

cast lots for his garments including his undergarment. We also know the whole point of crucifixion was not just physical torment but abject humiliation and shame. So the cross was never a moment when folks cared about your personal modesty; in fact, that was something to exploit.

So the first thing that Jesus said people would do to him is mock him, and the ultimate humiliation of that day as it is today is to be stripped naked, to be stripped by creatures that you could vaporize in a second. I don't know how much lower you can go on the scale human degradation than to imagine the King of all glory nailed to a cross while stripped naked. How big does that word "so" have to be to encompass all of that?

So as we go to take the cup, I ask, just meditate on *John 3:16*:
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,"
and try to comprehend the depth of that love.

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."*

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet. It's the part

where we try to have some kind of practical application for what it means to remember Christ. I just want to focus in on one thing this morning. I have a very dear neighbor in my immediate neighborhood, loves Jesus. She's a Christian for many, many years. She's been a Christian for as long as I've known her, but as far as I know she has not stepped physically into a church for the last 25 or 30 years. Her church is *TBN*. It's on there all the time. Every time you go over, the TV's on, she watches Christian television all of the time. And I know for a fact she was deeply hurt at one time many, many years ago and she left and she never went back. I know people who used to go to this church who are still outspoken Christians because I see stuff that they post on Facebook but I also know they haven't darkened the door of a church in years.

One of the statistics has been touted over and over again is called "the unchurched of America." And what they're saying is more and more people are simply abandoning church itself; they are becoming Christian lone rangers. Here's why I believe that is so incredibly unwise. Number one, it's in direct disobedience to a command of God. This is what God said in *Hebrews 10:24*: *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day*

approaching.

So you might say, well, why does that matter? Now we have all kinds of electronic means of connecting. Why does that make a big difference? Well, this is what I think church is supposed to be and I've said this many, many times. Jesus, he gathers together people from all ethnicities, all nationalities, all socioeconomic groups, he gathers them all and he kind of puts them in a salt shaker and he shakes them all up and then he turns it upside down and he dumps it into a neighborhood like this neighborhood, and he says, "Now show everybody there how you love one another."

Okay. Any church that does that is going to find a group of people who have to struggle through learning not just how to love people who are loveable -- that's incredibly easy -- if you remember Jesus, he was not impressed in the least by that. He said even pagans love people who are loveable. It's the tough love that matters. And part of that process that we've seen this over and over again in our own little church, that process of actually struggling to do that, that's where faith goes from theory to practice. That's when it becomes real. That's an incredibly important part of kind of merging together with folks that you might not have any other point of agreement with other than Christ, but what else do you need? Iron sharpens iron. They need to be

together.

But there's another reason why it's incredibly important to be a part of a church body. Steve Weingartner and I went to visit Doug at St. Luke's in Newburgh. We had the privilege of anointing him there. He's facing the potential amputation of his foot if his infection doesn't heal. And he was incredibly thankful and wanted to tell us -- we've been helping out his family in different ways, and he wanted to tell us how much he appreciated it. One of the things that I was trying to get him to understand is that we were simply there representing Jesus Christ. This was Christ physically ministering to him through us, that Christ had given us the blessing and privilege of actually representing him that way.

But what I really wanted Doug and Melissa to understand and to sense the physical presence of Jesus in their struggle in the very same way that Darcey and Philip and Michael and Sarah and Hannah are all understanding and sensing that physical presence that can only happen through the church. We represent the hands and the feet and the heart of Jesus. And if you're not part of a church, you're not really part of that process. And that's why I wanted to point out how incredibly important it is to be physically part of a church.

And I certainly understand that there's sickness and distance. We got folks who listen to us every week in Arizona. I don't expect them to be here. But there's all kinds of other factors that make doing that well-nigh impossible. And I also know I'm preaching to the choir, the folks that I'm preaching to, you're here already. But if those factors don't apply to you, understand, you need to be here physically. You need to be part of Jesus' hands, heart and feet. So let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the privilege that you've given to us to actually represent you on earth. We are the flesh that actually represents your heart, your hands, your feet, as we reach out to those who are in need, as we interact with one another. And so Father, I pray that you would speak to those who are watching us via YouTube or some other way and are capable of being part physically of this body, I pray you would convict them. We need them, we need their presence, we need their gifts, we need them to be part of us. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.