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"Faith Unfolded: 'Intentional Atonement'"

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Good morning, Church. We are in our third week of a five-week series on the five principles, sort of the foundational beliefs of the Presbyterian or Reformed tradition. It is an opportunity for us to try to understand what it is that we believe with other Christians throughout the world regardless of tradition but that we make distinct, that seem to set the framework for us as we live together. I want to remind you as well that the Ten Commandment series is in print. All ten of the sermons are available in audio files online, but the printed versions are also put together. We made a hundred and something copies last week and we ran out of those. There are a number of them now that are in the narthex as you go out. You'll see them and they are brightly colored. I had to ask what color it is and I am told they are yellow (laughter). I'm color blind, so I'm not joking (laughter).

The other things is that if you didn't receive an e-mail from me this week and you've been visiting with us and you've turned in your e-mail address, e-mail me at jim@fpcnorfolk.org so that I'll know you didn't get it and we'll make sure we get you added. If you didn't receive an e-mail about our "Growing in this Love Capital Campaign" and our signing of a contract, and hopefully in the very near future starting to move forward with construction and renovation, I put that in a letter form as well and they are available at all of the exits in the racks if you want to pick that up and be able to celebrate with us. It is amazing to see what Christ is doing in our midst now.

For our five-week series, the old classic language was "T-U-L-I-P." We've turned that around a little bit talking about faith. The first week we talked about being part of "Fallen Humanity" and our sinfulness. The second week, last week, we looked at what it was to be "Adopted by God," adopted into His family as the Ephesians passage shared with us. Today we are looking at what we will call "Intentional Atonement." I know it sounds really deep and theological, but it is really relational. We will come to that in a moment. Last week we focused on the Father's love in a sense, and today's focus is on what Christ does, the Son's love, what His grace provides for us.

We are going to look at a passage in Isaiah that is just as powerful as it gets. This passage never ceases to overwhelm me as I look at it. It's the last of the "suffering servant" poems in Isaiah. Scholars are finally coming into agreement that nobody is sure who the original historical character or figure was that was anticipated in this; it seems as if there had to be someone nearby that they thought would be raised up. It is clear that they are reminiscing about the role that Moses played with the people and how he suffered for the people and how he was not given the privilege of entering into the Promised Land, but he was sending the servants in; it's a movement from servant to servant. For our ancestors then definitely by the time of Christ, this passage became one of the foundational, principal passages that talked about what it was to have a Messiah coming and who that Messiah would be and how that Messiah would act and live.

I want you to notice something in this that's so important; we have to keep getting this across over and over and over. Christianity is not for us – it's for us to share. We are called to go out into the world. Today it talks in Isaiah about "being a light to the nations." This has been the foundation of our people, or our ancestors, for thousands of years, to be a light that goes out into the world. It is an amazing thing when you really think about because the Jews, our ancestors, the Hebrews, were never powerful people; in fact they got kicked around an awful lot. They got abused, they got defeated, and when they were on top they weren't on top for long and then they were knocked down again; they never really had it where it just seemed natural that they would become the light to all the nations, that they would become the people that would bring hope to all the world, and yet they believed it.

I always compared the ancient Israelites to Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*. Did you ever see that movie? It's one of the greatest movies of all time; it's a guy's movie I know, but it's still one of the greatest movies of all time. The Israelites are like that. They eat a lot of eggs to prove a point, to kind of show that they can do it. They also get beat up and knocked down and get up and beat up and knocked down and get up and beat up and knocked down and get up again – they just keep getting up and getting up. As time goes on it's the same with the Israelites as *Cool Hand Luke*; they start to earn respect because they are so persistent. They start to be seen by the world as a people who just hang in there. Yeah, they make mistakes. Yeah, they are sinful. Yeah, they've got problems, but they keep hanging in there and they keep hoping and trusting and believing. That's at the heart of our family. That's at the heart of who our ancestors are. It's not about what the world thinks about us and how we are going to conquer, but it's about our belief that ultimately we will be that light to the nations. Then for us, as we see in this passage today, the great mystery is that we become that light as people watch how we deal with suffering.

Listen for the word of our Lord.

Old Testament Reading – Isaiah 53

*Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed*

*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,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

*He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

*Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,*

and by his bruises we are healed.

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

*By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.*

*They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.*

*Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.*

*Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Now in the New Testament, in the Letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews is really a powerful, powerful epistle. It's hard though to take something out of Hebrews; you almost have to start from the beginning and read through. It is very much a theological presentation, but well done, of explaining how it is that Jesus is the Messiah, how He is providing for the forgiveness of our sins, and how he find hope Him. After it does that Hebrews speaks about Him being the light to the nations and calling and drawing the Gentiles in as we would be. We need to understand the underlying principle in here. You'll hear the passage talking about a high priest who goes and makes an offering year after year. What happened with our Hebrew ancestors was that we had a day, still celebrated by the Jews, one of the most holy days for the Jews each year, called *Yom*

Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It was the day where the high priest would go in and he would take two unblemished animals, two sheep or lambs, into the sanctuary into the Holy of Holies. He would offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. They would sacrifice one of the unblemished animals so that our sins would be forgiven. The priest did it on our behalf. Then, the second animal was brought out; it was the original “scapegoat,” the understanding that that animal then was brought out and because our sins were forgiven by the first, that animal was sent out into the wilderness to symbolize who we were as a people and a reminder of our forgiveness and salvation and the grace that comes from that. That was a great thing except that we were forgiven one day but we didn’t usually make it through the day before we messed up again and we had to wait a whole other year to be forgiven. It was something that needed to be offered over and over because it wasn’t the priest’s blood, it wasn’t our sacrifice, it wasn’t a living sacrifice of ours, it was something that we were bringing.

In this passage what you will see is that it is presented that Jesus now is the one sacrifice. He serves as the priest making the sacrifice, but He, instead of taking in an unblemished animal, now sacrifices His own life, so He’s the priest and the sacrifice as He goes into the temple. This temple is not the temple in Jerusalem; it’s the temple in the presence of God, so it’s a one and for all thing. Never again is there a need of a sacrifice. We never ever need to sacrifice anything again because it’s been done for us and then we become sort of the “scapegoat” in a sense. We become free and rather than being let out into the wilderness now, we are led into the family, we are led into community. It’s really powerful when we look at it this way. Let’s see how Hebrews puts it.

New Testament Reading – Hebrews 9:15-28

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.

For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.

For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people,

saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.”

And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.

For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own;

for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment,

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

I think many of you know that Sheryl's father has had a real strong influence on my life for thirty-some years now, as long as I've known him, since I was even in high school. He has wrestled in these last several years with dementia and Alzheimer's. He's been in hospice for a number of months now, and we have been literally waiting daily for a call that he has died. He's no longer able to know who's around. It's time. He's lived a faithful life. In June Sheryl and I and Sheryl's brother Van and Regina met each other in South Carolina to try to plan some things out, to get things ready in preparation for his death. We made an appointment and went to the funeral home. It's a small little town in South Carolina and everybody knows everybody, we grew up with the funeral director's kids. The funeral director's first name is "Tootsie." I guess you have to have something humorous in your life if you are a funeral director, and I guess his name is that. Tootsie is the director.

We got there. It's a hard thing to do. We got there and we were amazed, because every single thing, every detail, everything had been completely done, everything was paid for, every description about the service – where, Sheryl's dad served bravely in World War II in the Navy, whether there was to be flag, where the flag was to be – everything was done. Sheryl's parents had gone in 10-15 years earlier and had prepared everything. Sheryl and her brother said, "Well, we'll have to start writing the obituary and having that ready," and the funeral director said, "No, No. You don't have to do that either." He reached in and he pulled out an obituary that was written. Sheryl's mother and father did them together. It's written in their hand. Everything is there, just the dates are left out and some blanks need to be filled in, who survived who, how long they had been married, how old they were. I've got to tell you it was an amazing gift to our family. It was really an amazing testimony to how much Sheryl's parents love her and her brother that they were able years earlier when things were just bright and rosy and glorious for them to be able to prepare and to make it for them.

Sheryl got a copy of her father's obituary and it stays on the table in our bedroom. It's well done and it's written the way it is supposed to be in the paper. It lists all of the different things he did, things he accomplished in the court, and things he did in the service; it mentions where he came from, all of that. If I wrote it, I wouldn't have written it at all like this. It's well done. It's what the paper wants. It gets the point across I guess about what he accomplished out in the world, but if I wrote it, I would write that well into her 40's he called his daughter "Skip" because he turned the rope to teach her to jump when she was three years old and that name stuck with her. I'd write that he's the only man, the only man on the face of the earth, that has ever called me "James" and gotten away with it, and actually I loved it when he did. I would write that there's never been a man on the face of the earth that had a bigger smile than when he was pushing a grandson in a swing hanging from a rope in a tree. I would write about the decisions that he made that were honorable that kept him from accomplishing certain things that the world might have said were great success because he knew what was right and true in his own life. That's what I would have written. I suppose it's best that he didn't. In fact I suppose that he couldn't. It wasn't in his nature to write about himself in those ways. It was just in his nature to live it.

Pascal says there are two types of men – those who are righteous and see themselves as sinners and those who are sinners and see themselves as righteous. The gift of humility in today's world is an amazing gift and it is something that is to be cherished and honored whenever we see it. I look at the passage in Isaiah today and it seems to me that's very much the same thing. This is not a martyr's speech is it? This is not a speech by the suffering servant himself. This is not a speech that says, "Look at what I'm going to do. Look at what I'm going to accomplish. Look at how things are going to be when I come. Look at what happens when I do this." No, this is actually a next-generation presentation. It's a poem written about the people who are going to receive the benefit of the suffering servant. They are going to be the people that follow what the servant does. It's not a martyr's speech; there's nothing in it about self-centeredness. It's spoken about someone and I suppose that that's the only way true honor or true honors can be communicated is when they are spoken not by someone but about someone.

I look at that when I think about the suffering servant and realize for us as Christians it is so clear that this passage in Isaiah is speaking about the coming of the Messiah. The Jews were waiting for generations and generations. Jesus came and He is the fulfillment of it. It's a powerful thing and I look at Jesus' life. I was thinking about this the other day. I've heard little answers but I've never been satisfied with the answer to this. If you look at the synoptic gospels, you know those first three, John's different, but in the first three Matthew, Mark, and Luke, every time Jesus does something great and people start to get the idea that there's something really great about him, maybe He's the Messiah or maybe He's a witness to it, what does Jesus always do? He says, "Don't tell anybody. Don't let anybody know this is what I did. Don't tell anybody." He says, "It's not time yet for it to be revealed. Don't tell. Don't tell."

I've heard a lot of different theological explanations, but I've never really been satisfied with them. Why wouldn't He let them tell? Why would He not? It came to me as I'm looking at this just this week. He didn't want to tell because He wanted the witness to be His actual suffering itself. If He had talked about "I'm going to let you know this is how bad it is going to be. You know how hard it is to die on a cross. You know what pain it is. I'm going to tell you this is what I'm going to do for you. I'm doing it for you. I'm doing it for you. I'm doing it for you. I'm doing it for you. I'm doing it for you." If He started to do that it wouldn't have its power. Instead what Christ wanted to do is Christ said, "I'm going to let my life be the witness. I'm going to let my life and what you see happen with me in particular in the way I handle suffering for you to be the witness."

Parents, if you sacrifice for your kids, please don't ever tell them. Please, don't ever tell them you sacrificed for them. Let the witness of your life do that. Friends, if you've done things that have helped others, that have been a sacrifice in your life, don't tell them. They know. Let it be a living witness, let your life be the living witness, because that's what it is for us as believers of Christ. That's what we see in our Messiah. It wasn't about Him bragging about it. It wasn't about some martyr's speech. It was about the simple quite witness of who He was, how He lived, who He died for, and then the power of His resurrection.

Today's theme we call "Intentional Atonement." "Atonement" simply means the Day of Atonement going back to the Old Testament and Yom Kippur. It means how we are made one again, how we are at one, literally atonement, "at one ment," how we are made one with God. Not only that we are fallen humanity that we need a Savior, not only that we are adopted by God, but then how is it done? For the Christian it is clear. It is done only one way. It's intentional, but it's unique. There is only one way for us to be made right with God. There's only way for us to claim wholeness in our life and that's by claiming Jesus Christ in His suffering and in His death. It's the only way for us. There's no other way for us to achieve it. It's the power of our witness.

This is what I would say, if we were ever able as the Body of Christ to get this in our heads, we would be such a light to the world. To be able to be a witness as people see how we deal with suffering, how we respond in forgiveness, how we live out our lives in making ourselves at one with each other, we would draw people like iron filings to a magnet. In today's world, I can't believe that really anybody wants to follow a god who says that we are to take other people's lives if they don't become holy like us. In today's world I can't believe that really anybody wants to follow a god who simply says "Just turn inward for enlightenment. Ignore the world; don't acknowledge that it is even there. Just become so centered on yourself that you will become enlightened." I can't believe that. Because what I see in the world is that the world is amazingly relational, and in particular as I look at us as grow forward in the world, in every culture, but particularly in ours here in this nation, how relational we want to be and how we feel that that is something that is being left out for us.

I don't know if you saw this but I think the Associated Press (AP) and MTV did a survey of people between the ages of 13 and 24 on what mattered most to them. I think they did an open-ended survey for 1500 kids, or young people, 13 to 24. They asked them, "What's the most important thing in your life? What do you value most?" Do you know where money was in that? It was like ninth or tenth. Do you know what they valued the most? The number one thing that people between the ages of 13 and 24 in the survey valued the most was time with family. They valued time with family. They asked an open-ended question about heroes. Who are your heroes? Michael Vick wasn't in there I don't think, at that point (laughter). I'm not sure when the survey was taken. Who are your heroes? We start to think about athletes, we think about certain politicians, great leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., all of that. Do you know who the number one hero was on the list? "My mom." Followed closely by "My dad." One and two, my mother and my father are my heroes. This is not a generation that wants to close itself off and go and be by itself and be enlightened as an individual, or to claim their own individual rights. They want to be in a family. They want to honor people. They want to see the people that they are closest to as their heroes. This is not a people who want to go out and follow a god who says, "Go out and kill in my name." These are people who want to come and be in relationship and see their lives make a difference as they work together as a family. It's really an amazing thing.

That's what the prophet Isaiah is saying in this passage. He's saying it over and over, that that's what this God of ours, that's what this suffering servant, that's what this Messiah, that's what this

Christ, that's what this Jesus of ours does. He brings us into relationship. That's what atonement is. It sounds too theological; Presbyterians, we become too good at theology. It's our detriment anymore. It's about relationship. He's pulling us into a loving relationship with Him and He's saying, "I forgave you and I paid the price for you. Nothing can separate me from your love, and your love can never be separated from mine from this time on." That's what this is about. We as the Body of Christ are given an amazing privilege. If you notice in Isaiah as well it's a movement from the servant to the servants. When it ends up it is really talking about who the people that follow him are to be. They're supposed to be like that suffering servant; they're supposed to go out and to be a light to the nations. That's the privilege that we have, not the obligation. It is not an obligation to exit these doors and to go out and be good people and proclaim Jesus Christ and live lives that shape other people. That's not an obligation. That's the privilege of this thing. It's the privilege of it, to have meaning in life. When we do that we become the light to the nations, the light to community, the light to the family, to the workplace, and the light to the bedroom and the boardroom. That's what we become.

In a sense that means that the church will always be what Stephen Covey calls a "transitional generation." This was a really cool thing for me. I don't even know where Covey wrote it, but I read it a number of years ago. He said that it's one thing to be able to go and figure out that your issues are the way you were raised, or the way your parents were, or the way your culture is, or the way your school was. That's an important thing to do, but just recognizing it will never change it. Just knowing that that's my problem will never fix it. What Covey says is that you have to decide that you are going to be a transitional generation, that you will absorb all of that and live your life in such a way that you take it on and it will never go to the next generation. The parents have eaten sour grapes, Ezekiel says, and the children's teeth are set on edge, to be able to absorb that so that the next generation never gets it. If you start to look at your life and your family and you view it that way, and you start to say, "One of the things for me and my life, one of the things for me and how I live, is to be a transitional generation." Not to just say "Well, that's just the way I was raised, or that's just the way my culture says it is," but to take that on. That's what the church will always be until Christ comes again. We'll be that transitional generation, we'll be that people when we live in the flow of the Spirit. We will be that people that are given the privilege of taking it on ourselves, absorbing it, so that the next generation doesn't have to have it. That's the privilege. That's the power of our lives.

When I look at our family of faith that's what strikes me about this congregation. This congregation is not a congregation solely about theology. It's not a congregation that's about Sunday morning and coming and feeling good so that I can go on with the rest of my week and then I can come back and get filled again on Sunday. It's more than that. Lucy Gates and Sarah Fraenzimmer are going to talk in a few moments about the idea that throughout our congregation we want people to be here for what we call "Two Blocks," that they come and not only that they worship, but they go to a Sunday School, or perhaps more significantly in the context of what they are going to talk about, that they go to a Sunday School and then they take some time off from that and they teach a Sunday School. These children want to be in relationship with you. They want your influence of your life.

Two Fridays ago Zach and I, Zach is 14 about to turn 15, went out for one of the greatest nights we've had. We took the ferry over to Portsmouth and we went to see B. B. King. He is the king. B. B. King – we saw him live, really close up there. Do you know how old B. B. King is? He's 81 years old. He wrestles with diabetes. He couldn't walk out without two guys helping to hold him up, literally helping him as he walked up. He came down and he sat in a chair and then he picked up Lucille, and those hands and those ribs - it was just amazing. I'm sitting there and

looking around in my area which was packed; you know B. B. King is 30-some years older than I am, but I was one of the oldest people in my area. It wasn't old folks coming to see the B. B. King that they grew up with; it was a bunch of young folks who see something in him. They realize that he's a hero. They realize that he's a legend and B. B. King played to that and it was amazing to watch that and how that played out. It stuck me, these are people that want to be in relationship. They want to honor older people. They really do. Why do we have it in our heads that they don't? They do. These small children in particular, what an impact we can make for the Kingdom if we are involved in their lives. What a privilege that is to be able to do that.

In this family of faith we are looking at a capital campaign. Huge things are going to happen. We have finally agreed that we can sign the contract once that gets negotiated. For a few years it is going to be dust and all kinds of stuff around here. It's going to be great. It's going to be awesome. We're going to have worship space that will accommodate twice as many here that we are convinced that the Spirit will fill. We are going to have a great gathering hall. Most importantly perhaps we are going to have a nursery for our small children on Sunday that will expand our preschool. It's going to be amazing what happens. The thing that so overwhelms me with it, is that this group that has been meeting every week and Ron Gates has been chairing it; he's an amazing leader. This group has been meeting every week for about two and a half years and every single week they remind themselves, and they remind me and they remind us, that this is not about us and this is not about leaving a legacy so that people will see what we built. This is about building something that is needed to bring people in, people that are coming.

Our Young Singles had a call from a young woman. She is in some transition and she needed to move. She's come to worship with us just a couple of times as I understood it. But, she needed help. She didn't have any help out there; there was nobody out there to help her. She floated the idea that maybe somebody from the Young Singles might help her move. There were dozens of people that showed up on a Saturday. Young people, on a Saturday - they could have gone to the beach, they could have hung out with friends, but they went and they spent the day helping this person move. You know that the thing that is amazing about it is that the vast majority of those people that did it had never even seen this young woman's face until they knocked on her door to help her move.

I sent an e-mail just a couple of days ago to a young woman that's in Iraq. She's in the service. A couple of years ago she was in a horrible auto accident. Her husband died and she was five months pregnant and she lost the baby. She serves in the Army (I think it's in the Army) and she diffuses bombs in Iraq. She was back in Iraq about a month and a half ago and a bomb exploded while she was there. Several of her colleagues, her comrades, died. How do I know her? I know her because of our Young Singles. We have over one hundred Young Singles in our congregation that are involved in ministries in some different form or another, and one of our Young Singles had been encouraging her, with all of the anger that she might have towards God, with all of that separation that she had, with all that had happened in her life, he just kept drawing her in. He got her to come to a couple of parties with the Young Singles, and then he got her to church. Now, you and I don't have responsibility for her, we have the privilege of being able to pray for her, to be able to lift her up and to be in relationship with her. That's what this body is about when we are the Body of Christ. That's when this family is about; that's when we draw people, that's when people come, that's the witness that we are, is to take the forgiveness that we have in Jesus Christ, to take the salvation that we have in Christ, and to use that, to capitalize on that, to mortgage it, whatever term we want to use, and to share it with the world. That's the privilege.

A young Marine Officer, a young man, as soon as he came back he knew his father was dying in the hospital not long ago. He went to see his dad. He went to go into the room; he entered a hospital room and there in the bed was an old man, his eyes barely able to open, not able to talk, tubes everywhere, prepared to die. As this young man walked in the old man reached up and held out his hand. The young man came and took his hand and just sat down next to him, held his hand, just held his hand, held his hand. Hours went by, and finally the monitor showed that the old man finally died. The nurse came in and looked at the young man's name plate on his uniform and she looked at the name of the patient, and she said, "Is this your father?" He said, "No, you sent me to the wrong room." She said, "Why did you stay all this time?" He said, "When I walked in this man put his hand out and I knew that he thought I was his son and I felt like it was the best use of my time just to stay." That's what you and I want most in life isn't it? To be able to use our time so that it makes a difference. I believe it is. I believe that's what we most want in life is to be able to have worth with our time, to use our time in such a way that we know it will make a difference.

How do you do it? We don't do it by talking about ourselves, we don't do it in our own handwriting, we do it by living our lives in such a way that the witness of our life is the witness of one thing - the witness of Jesus Christ, the one God, the one Savior, the one hope not just for us as Christians but the one hope for all the world, a light to the nations. I sat down and I took that obituary written in Sheryl's parents' hand and I sat down for myself and I began to write my own for Sheryl's dad, partly because I wanted to be able in my own way just my own quite spiritual time not to share with anyone even Sheryl, just for me to be able to honor someone who really gave a lot of his life to me, and as I began to write I came to realize that I need to learn to read before I can write. I need witnesses to faith in my life. I need you. I need the witnesses of your faith in my life.

Someone came to see me not long ago, an older member of our congregation. We didn't even talk about it when she was there. I remember when it was one of the darkest moments of my life and she came to my office. She walked in and she said, "Jim, I just want to tell you I love you." She sat down and she began to cry and the two of us sat in that office for about 30 minutes and all we did was cry. Not a word was shared. I will never forget that for the rest of my life. That's what this church is, that's what the Body of Christ is, that's the witness of people's lives and that's what you and I want to be. We want to live our lives in such a way that we become a witness, a light to the nations as well. Let's do it. Let's make the decision. Let's live our lives with Christ in such a way that His atoning power, His grace, now sends us out to have worth and value every moment of our existence.

Thanks be to Him. Amen.