

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

December 13, 2020

The Father's Love
John 15:7-17
Pastor Paul Jackson

[song: "Jesus Messiah"]

Michelle Jensen:

Good morning. We are glad that you have joined us today, whether you are here in the worship center or joining us online. It is a great day to worship together. As we move through this season of advent in celebrating Christ's birth, there are a couple of opportunities we want to make you aware of.

First of all, Colleen Adent is going to be having a live stream Christmas concert. On Wednesday, December 23rd, we will virtually get to go into her living room and hear her play an hour's worth of Christmas music. That will be the 23rd at 7:00 P.M. And you can access that through her YouTube channel, which you can see the [link](#); we'll also have that on the [website](#). And if you want to request a song during that time, you can use the YouTube chat feature to do that in the middle of the concert and interact with her that way. So, it will be a great evening of music.

And secondly, on Christmas Eve we will be gathering virtually for our Christmas Eve candlelight service. We invite you to usher in Christmas with Scripture and music and a Christmas devotional from Pastor Paul. That will be available online from 1:00 P.M. on, on Christmas Eve, and you can go to it by going to the website at Glenwoodcc.org/live. And, in the foyer, make sure that you grab your candles and

your little wax guards, and you can take those home so you can participate in that service.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we are thankful that we can call You "Father." Through faith in Jesus Christ, You have adopted us as Your children, and we have received Your lavish grace. In this season of advent, we are especially mindful of Your love for us. As we interact with our family and friends and strangers, help us to share and show Your love. Let our words and actions reflect our love and obedience to You and the way in which You have called us to live. This morning, as we spend time in worship and in Your word, we are thankful for those who have prepared to lead us. Soften our hearts to receive what You have for us today. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Ben Cunningham:

Well, good morning. One of the ways we're going to worship together this morning is through reflecting on Scripture.

In John 15:1-6, Jesus gives an illustration which really defines the nature of His relationship with His disciples. He says that He is the vine, and we are the branches, so by abiding in Him and being carefully pruned by the Father, we fulfill our purpose, which is to bear fruit in that illustration. But what does it mean to really abide in Him? Jesus continues His thought in verse 7, and explaining this. This is a part of a passage that's going to be preached this morning. And here's what verse 7 says. It says, *"If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you."*

So, this morning, we're going to slow down and take time to reflect and digest the words of Scripture, so that His word might abide in us. I'm going to read portions of I John 4, and we would simply ask you to silently reflect and abide in the word of

God. Silently respond with praise or prayer or confession or gratitude, or however God would have you respond to His word. I'm going to be reading a few verses at a time, and then we're going to leave a time of silence. And silence might not be totally comfortable for us, but it might be welcome during advent season because of all the rush of life. So, let's just be quiet before the Lord, and let's reflect and worship by hearing Scripture.

I John 4:7-8 and 11-12. *"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; but if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."*

Let's reflect.

I John 4:9-10. *"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

I John 4:13-16. *"By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testified that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him, and He in God. We have come to know and believe the love which God has for us."*

I John 4:19-21. *"We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."*

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your boundless love and for the decision to embody love in the first advent of Jesus Christ. Your love has been transferred to the undeserving. We admit our weakness in loving others and our resistance to abiding in the Vine. Stir in us a desire this morning to be used for the transfer of heavenly love. We long to be with You and look forward to Your soon return. Come, Thou long-expected Jesus.

[music: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"]

Pastor Paul:

Thank you, Alex. Thank you, Colleen. Good morning!

We're in an advent sermon series called "The Father's Gift," and our heavenly Father is the Giver of every good gift. And last week, if you were here, we saw that the Father has given to us the gift of peace - peace not as the world gives, but peace as only God can give. And God also promises to His followers, His Spirit, and His Spirit will take up residence within the life of the person who confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. So now, as followers of Christ, we have the Spirit of God within; we have the peace that God offers as a gift to us.

And this morning, we want to talk about another gift that our Father gives. And it's modeled, it's patterned, by the way that the Father relates to the Son and the way the Son of God, Jesus Christ, relates to us. The pattern is this: as the Father loves the Son, so the Son loves us, so that we can love others like we are loved by the Son. God's love for us is not earned by us, but it is evidenced in us and in our relationships. God's love is a gracious and wonderful gift, and it catalyzes in us the same gracious generosity that God gives to us through His love.

And that's what we find in John 15, these well known words, very famous words of Jesus in His farewell discourse as He's preparing His followers for life on earth as He ascends to heaven. He's telling them all of these strategic necessities as to what it looks like to really live for Christ in a broken and bankrupt world like this one.

These words are really famous words. They're well known. But they're not as easily experienced, and they are not as easily understood. Some of the words that Jesus shares in John 15 are so mysterious that we will not, we cannot understand them until we're in the presence of God and His Son Jesus Christ in a day yet future. One day we'll understand the full significance of this mystery, that we are in Christ and He is in us. The Spirit of God is in us; the Word is in us. Until then, we trust these words and we step into experience them. But if you're like me, there's a tension between some of what Jesus says about how to really live and what my life is sometimes really like.

In the beginning of the Gospel of John, Jesus is declared as "Word." His is God; He is Word. And as Word, He speaks as God and for the Father. He discloses to us who we are; He reveals who He is; He tells us all that God wants us to know about a life of love and obedience to Him. Jesus is presented in the Gospel of John as Word, and then throughout the Gospel, He self-describes. He self-describes with words that God described first to Himself to Moses. The burning bush, Moses asks, "You want me to go back and tell the people what? And who sent me?" And God says, "Tell them the I AM sent you." That's what Jesus describes as to who He is, again and again. He says, "*I am.*" "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" He says. "*I am the water of life.*" "*I am the bread of life.*"

I am the resurrection and the life." And now, in John 15-- open your Bibles-- John 15. He, for the last time in the Gospel of John, He says twice here "*I am.*"

"*I am*" what? Verse 1, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*" In the Old Testament, Israel was described as God's vine, God's vineyard. Usually, when Israel was described as God's vineyard, it was in the context of their flagrant disobedience and disregard of God, their elevation of themselves to do what they

want to get what they want, and to defy God. And so, now you have this long history of disobedience to God in this vine, this vineyard. And now you have the true vine. And the true vine is God the Son Himself who is without sin, without fault, without flaw, who died our death, raised to life to share life with us. And He says, "*I am the true vine.*" And then He identifies the Father. He says the Father is the vinedresser.

I've done a number of weddings in vineyards. And sometimes I've done a wedding at the harvest season. And really-- it's extraordinary, the artistry and the intentional effort and hard work that goes into producing a bountiful crop of grapes. And vineyards are just--they're beautiful in their alignment and the rows and the way that the needless branches are clipped, and they're gone. You can't see them; you can just see these grape vines that are laden with these grapes. And so this would have been a very familiar image to the followers of Jesus.

And so, He uses this as a metaphor or as a word-picture. He says, "*I am the vine, and the Father is the vinedresser.*" So, He's the one who tends the vineyard. And He actively cares for and does that which will produce the most fruit in the vineyard. And the vinedresser takes two actions in verse 2. And it says this, "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*" So the branches that are not producing grapes, He takes away. He removes them. They are removed from the vine. And in verse 6, we see what happens to them. They are thrown into a rubbish heap where they die and prove that they're already dead wood, becoming what they've been all along, not connected to the vine, not responding to the vitality and the pulse and to the heartbeat of God in and through His Son Jesus Christ, but instead resisting and unplugging from the vine and trying to plug into to anything and everything other than Jesus Christ. They are cut away. The second action of the vine dresser is to prune, to clip, those vines that have born fruit. And the purpose is so that they will increase their harvest, so that the bounty, the fruit, will increase, so that it will bear more fruit.

And God the Father takes both actions today in our world. He clips out those vines that aren't bearing fruit; and He nourishes, tends, clips, and cares for those vines that are fruit-bearing so that they will become even more of what God envisioned when He created us in the first palace. So that we will be people who bear fruit again. And again in this chapter, we see that idea repeated. That this is our purpose. We are created in Christ to bear fruit. That's why we live. That's why we have breath.

And in verse 3, He tells us that God is already at work in us, what God has done in part, and what God has given to us that is so essential to us bearing fruit. Verse 3, *"You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."* So, in a sense, they are already pure; they are already in Christ; they are already followers of Jesus Christ. And it's His word that He has given to them that is central to what it looks like to abide or to plug in to who Jesus is. So, He's already begun His work; He's already spoken truth to them; He's preparing them for a life on earth without Him; He's giving us and giving them everything we need without complaint or without excuse to bear fruit in the way that He intends.

Verses 4 and 5 are absolutely key to real life. In verse 4, He says, *"Abide in me, and I in you."* That's the mystery. What does that look like? What does that mean? Some of your Bibles translate, *"Remain in me."* That's a choice we make. We make a choice to turn to Him, to confess Him, to listen to Him, to obey Him through His strength. *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me."* Simply put. A branch can only bear fruit when that branch is plugged into the vital pulse of the God of the Bible, in and through His Son Jesus Christ. *"I,"* He says in verse 5, *"am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."* So we are to remain in Christ. And when we don't abide or remain in Christ, we can't fulfill the purposes of Christ, try as hard as we might.

God tells husbands in Ephesians 5, "*Love your wives as Christ loves the church.*" Apart from Christ, guys, you can't love your wife as Christ loves the church. It is in and through Christ that we fulfill the purposes of Christ in all of our painful elements and characteristics of humanity. When you and I truly abide in Christ, we can fulfill God's purposes, because Jesus nourishes us and strengthens us to live for Him in a broken world. And that living for Him, trusting Him, brings fruit.

What is this fruit that He produces? Well, the Bible is full of for-instances of fruit. But in John 15 alone, we find that a part of that fruit that He produces in us is this unbreakable union with Jesus. This intimate connection with Him that results in a loyalty to Jesus, a following that perseveres in Christ, a growing and maturing character and a conformity with Jesus, an increasing dependence and obedience to Jesus, a heart response to God's heart. Simply put, His fruit is Christ, the risen Christ, shares His life with the follower of Jesus Christ. That's why the word for us is to abide, to remain, to plug our heart into His, to so trust Him and love Him that He catalyzes this obedience in our life.

What does it look like for us to abide in Christ? Well verses 7-17 explain the metaphor. They explain the vineyard metaphor. Jesus is the vine; Father is the vinedresser; we are the branches; and He tends His vineyard. And so He explains what it looks like to abide in Christ. There are four truths or characteristics that tell us what it looks like to abide in Christ.

The first one is in verses 7 and 8. And that is that our prayer bears fruit by folding into God's purposes. I hope as I read verse 7 that you feel that same tension that I feel. I think, rightly understood, every follower of Christ is going to feel this tension. Verse 7, "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. Put that way, that's not my experience. That's not how Jesus puts in, but put that way-- ask whatever you want, and you get it-- that's not my experience. There are some times that I pray and I implore; I ask God to work, and He works in ways that I can see, and I think God answered my prayer-- thank You, God. But there are

other times I ask, and if God answers, I can't see it, or if He answers, it doesn't match my desires and my expectations.

The first part of verse 7 is essential to effective prayer. See that word "if"? "*If you abide in me*"? And then you see the little word "and". And what? "*And My words abide in you,*" so that parked within our heart is an awareness and an aliveness through the Spirit of God to the word of God, that we are vitally connected with Jesus, that we're nourished in His person and His ways, that His word bathes and purifies; it convicts; it reveals; it encourages; it's life giving; it reveals to us the will of God.

And the purpose of effective prayer in verse 7 is laid out in verse 8. And so it looks like this: when you and I abide in Christ and His word abides in us, our desires are conformed to His desires, so that when we pray, we are truly pressing in to His words, to His will, and to His way, and we have totally released the request; we have totally yielded the heart to who He is, what He wills, and what He wants. Verse 8, when we pray in this way, and God shows up, God is glorified by His disciples. Verse 8, "*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*" That's amazing to me. That we, in our brokenness, in our we're-not-yet-like-Jesus moments in life, we got a lot of growing up to do in life-- that we are glorifying God.

And we glorify God when we bear fruit, so that when there is any good thing that God does in you, in me, He gets the credit; He gets the glory, because it's God who recreates broken humanity into His image. That's what God does. He saves us. He forgives us from our sin. But He also transforms us to become more like His Son Jesus Christ, so that the more we're like Christ, the more we love like Christ, live like Christ, the more we are kind and generous and forgiving and like Christ; the more we are, the more glory is given to God, because it is God and God alone who can recreate broken, fallen humanity into the image of His Son Jesus Christ. It's Jesus Christ who purifies our broken and tattered souls, who mends our soul, tends

us, remakes us who remain in Him for our own good and for His glory. God alone can recreate us so that we bear fruit for Him for our good, for His glory.

What does it look like to abide in Him? Secondly, we are loved by Jesus in the same way the Father loves the Son. Verse 9, "*Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.*" How can a verse say more than that? Almost every phrase. "*Just as.*" Now we have our pattern, and the pattern begins with this: the Father has loved the Son. At His baptism, what did the voice from heaven say of Jesus? "*This is the Son I love. Listen to Him.*" Again and again, it is said that the Father loves the Son.

Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, as hard as it is to get around what He says next, we can get around "the Father loves Jesus." Of course. We have God the Father. We have God the Son. We have the eternal Triune God. Jesus is eminently lovable. He lived the life we should have lived; He died our death; He's raised to life; He's without sin. He is lovable. We don't look at ourselves-- or rightly, sometimes, as we look at ourselves, we're not that lovable. But here it says the pattern is just as the Father loves the lovable Son, the lovable Son loves us in the same way, so that you are loved by Jesus the Son with the same love the Father loves the Son.

Why is that? Well, it's not because of us. It's because the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is a love that comes from within us. It's a love that first comes from within the heart of the Father. And that love from the heart of the Father that is given to the Son, that love comes from the Son to us by His choice. From within Him, not because of us. It is a love that is gracious; it is a love that we don't deserve. It is a love that He gives to us-- you could say it this way-- *in spite* of us. So that when we feel unloved, as a follower of Jesus, that's a lie. That's not true. When we feel like we don't deserve the love of Jesus, that's the truth. We don't. So that Jesus Christ, from within Himself, He loves us in the same way that the Father loves us. To bear fruit requires we believe this truth statement made by Jesus, that we are loved by Christ, and that we trust in His love.

When we truly believe and embrace that, it triggers within us a heart response that began in the heart of the Father, then through the heart of the Son, and then to us, so that by God's grace we realize that we're not who we once were or would have been outside of Jesus, and that by God's grace because of Jesus, we're not yet who we will be, so that we are loved in a way that that love becomes a pattern. The fruitful life is evidence that we're followers of Jesus Christ, that we're responding to who He is, that we trust Him, that we abide, remain, believe in Him.

Thirdly, what does it look like to abide? We respond to the love of Jesus with loving obedience to Him. Verses 10 and 11. Verse 10, only the beginning here, *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."* We abide in Jesus when we obey Jesus. It's not that His love is earned, but that His love gives life so that we can live for Him and obey Him. It's this: that because He loves us, and we've confessed our faith in Him, there's a natural connect between loving Jesus and obeying Jesus, even though obedience can be gut-wrenching. Jesus says, just as He obeyed the Father out of love for the Father.

Well, we know the story. We know all that He did in obedience out of love for the Father. We know about the forty days in the desert, and the beyond belief anything-we've-ever-experienced or will-experience temptation and testing by the evil one himself, in which He said "yes" to the Father and He obeyed the Father. We saw in Gethsemane, how He approached the cross, and as He approached the cross He was on his face in prayer, and He said *"If possible, let this cup pass from me."* But then He models for us what He teaches here. *"Not my will but yours."* That's effective prayer. *"Your will."*

And so, as He goes to the cross and He endures the shame, so we find in Hebrews 5:15 that Jesus learned obedience in the things that He suffered. Well, how can that be? How can we have God the Son who learned? Did he not *know* about obedience? Of course He did! But now, as fully human and fully God, He

experiences our humanity in a way that even God never had. And in that experience of suffering, He learned obedience because He loved the Father. And He shows us how to obey in the midst of suffering. That's why we're told in Hebrews 12:1-2 that He's the "*author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy before Him endured the cross.*" So, the joy was on the other side. It's a joy that He anticipated. It's a joy that is down a road, after I have obeyed to the fullest in the way that the Father has instructed me to obey. So, He endured the suffering. And so that's our opportunity, and that's our example. We're not home with Christ. We're not there yet. This is life. This is our humanity. This is our world. We're on our way back to the Father. We're not there yet. When we're there, we'll experience this joy that is set before us. He's going to say more about that in the next verse. But in verse 10, He says, "*If you abide in my love, keep my Father's commandments, and abide in His love.*" So that you and I know what it looks like to obey the Father, to obey the Son, because we love the Son as we are loved by Him.

And the result of that loving action of obedience is that joy that He talks about in verse 11. "*These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*" Our fullest joy is the someday, not-yet joy. Our fullest experience of joy is yet future to us. When we stand in the presence of our glorified Savior Jesus Christ, that is eschatological joy. That is, when we are before Him, we will experience a joy that we never have to that intensity or that degree.

But verse 11, it includes a right-now joy. It includes a right-now joy that is sometimes not our experience. Sometimes, that right-now joy is not our experience because we're not truly aligned with the will and the intent of Jesus to the point of loving obedience in response to Him. Not always. Sometimes there is human sadness that comes from other sources. Sometimes the sadness is the sin of another. Sometimes it's the way we're wired. But sometimes it's because we are not in loving obedience to the Father. So one man has written, "No one is more miserable than the Christian who, for a time, hedges in his obedience. He does not love sin enough to enjoy its pleasure, and he does not love Christ enough to relish

holiness." Loving obedience to Jesus catalyzes the joy that Jesus then gives to us. It's His joy, and He shares His joy with us.

What does it look like to abide in Christ? Fourth, when we love one another as we are loved by God. John 15:12-17. And if you look at verse 12 and then you look at verse 17, you see it's a wrap; they're bookends; it's like a package, that is, we see what love looks like and that we are commanded to love. And that we're commanded. Now we have this vertical love relationship: the Father, the Son, Son loving us, we loving the Father, loving obedience to the Son. So that's vertical. And now it goes sideways in a good way; it goes horizontal. So, now it's the person seated next to you, or the person with whom you're in a meaningful or rightful relationship, or any relationship for that matter. There is a way in which we can love for the good, for the best of the other person. So that we are to love one another as we are loved by God. Verse 12. *"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."* He commands us to do what He models for us. He is loved. He is love. He will be tenaciously persistent in loving us and doing that which is best for us. This is the pattern of love: the Father loves the Son, the Son loves us, and now, as we are loved, we love others.

Jesus is amazingly lovable. He is lovable in ways that give life to dead things. He's lovable in life-giving ways. He is deserving of the Father's love. But the love that He gives to us is greater than deserving love. The love that He shares with us is from within Him. He lives within us. His word lives and works in us.

And if you were here last week, His Spirit lives and works in the heart of the person who confesses Christ. Go to the other page, just the opposite page, John 14:16-17, in which Jesus says, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."* That's effective prayer. The Son asks the Father do to the will of the Father. And the will of the Father is to give them another Helper who would help them to stay loyal in their loving obedience to God as Jesus ascends to heaven. So the promises of the Helper in verse 17, that is, *"the Spirit of truth,*

whom the world cannot receive, because they do not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

So that's God's action. He sends His Spirit to abide in you so that you and I have God the Spirit in us. That's why we can keep the command of Jesus, because now our love for others, it comes from God the Spirit within us. That we would so love because we are loved. God gave His Spirit, so that now the Spirit of God, giving us understanding of the truth of God and the Word of God, so now we can love just like we are loved, even when people might prove to be in the moment unlovable.

As Jesus so loved, He gave His life, and as He gave His life, we can love by giving of ourselves. That famous verse, verse 13, *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."* In the ultimate sense, Jesus did that. In the literal sense, He lay down His life for us. But when Jesus talks about laying down our life for our friends, He's not limiting it to just be willing to die for somebody that we love. In some ways, I think it's harder to live in love than to love by dying. To live and to love the other for the true best and good of the other, even though we may not be motivated to by any other reason than that we are loved by God in and through His Son Jesus Christ. So that's what a friend, a true friend, does.

And then He tells us what this love looks like. First, He says, *"You are My friends if you do what I command you."* And we go "Time out. Wait a minute; this feels really conditional." *"You are My friends"*? Well, true friendship is inspired by sacrificial love. And this friendship that Jesus gives to us, when He uses this big word "if," it doesn't mean that it's conditional. Loving obedience to Jesus doesn't make you His friend; it characterizes true friendship. So that our loving obedience to Jesus who calls us friends, it's not heartless; it's not roped; it's not mechanical; but it's a relational response to His friendship.

God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the ultimate Friend, so that we're no longer a slave, responsible for begrudging obedience, but we have the free will to have a life-giving heart response to the heart of Jesus Christ. So, we see in verse 15, *"No longer do I*

call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." So, as our Friend, He lays down His life for us. As our Friend, He models to us what true friendship looks like, that we would relationally respond in loving obedience to who He is. And, as our true Friend, He has disclosed to us all that we need to know and experience of the Father, so that it is through this Friend, the true Friend, that we can rightfully know the Father.

Verse 16 is extraordinary in every sense. *"You did not choose Me; I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."* He chose us; we chose Him. That's the mystery. We are His friends if we're followers of Christ, because He initiated with us. He chose us. We chose Him when we confess our faith in Jesus Christ. And He chose us for a purpose. He gave us an appointment, an assignment that we would bear fruit for Him. And the fruit that He does in that new creation, new life fruit, never dies. It remains. It is eternal. It is the new creation work of God in us and through us that lasts. And that new creation work, it's tethered, it's connected to this intimate prayer where we enter into the presence of the Father through the person of Jesus, asking in the name of Jesus for God to be glorified in us through His work as we bear fruit for Him as He recreates us and transforms us increasingly into the image of His Son Jesus Christ.

And then His work is wrapped up in verse 17 with His command, *"This I command you, that you love one another."* Jesus Christ compels us to do exactly what He has done for us. He compels us to love others just like He loves us.

In His name, let's go to the Father.

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us who You are, the way to know You through Your Son who is truth and life. Thank You for so loving the Son and loving us that You gave Your only begotten Son, that through His life and death and resurrection, we can share His life. Thank You, Jesus, for loving the Father to the

point of obedience, and showing us how to do it and to make it possible to lovingly obey You. Thank You that we have Your Spirit within us. Thank You for Your word which reveals and is so clear as to who You are and what it looks like to love and to obey in the moment. Give us strength today to give all of who we are to You in anticipation of that day when we will truly be at home with You. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Brandon Dickson:

As we enter into this time of reflection and response, I want to leave you with the words to this hymn, or the song that we're going to play. "Truly, He taught us to love one another. His law is love, and His gospel is peace." Please join us as we worship.

[music: "O Holy Night"]

Ben Cunningham:

Well, as we close our service this morning here, what Paul says in II Thessalonians 3:5. "*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God into the steadfastness of Christ.*" And may that love transfer to thousands of others this week as we interact with a world desperate in need of Christ's love. Have a great week. Go in peace.