

# Staying Connected

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Preacher: Pastor Jean Edmister

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made, that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

Hello. Hi, welcome to Pendleton Center Church. We are the Menahem. If this is your first time here, be sure to pick up a welcome bag at the connection site or the welcome and information desk.

[ 1 : 16 ] I hope everyone will put their name on the friendship card that is in their bulletin. If you would like to receive the church newsletter or need to update any information, be sure to fill out your address and phone number.

On the back, you can write prayer concerns, blessings, or notes to the staff. Please enjoy the service and have a good day. We do welcome you to Pendleton Center, United Methodist Church this morning.

We just passed around a couple of clipboards. If you get a clipboard, continue to pass it back, please. The first is for Niagara Falls Community Dinner. And we're asking for food donations for that dinner that we offer to the Niagara Falls Community.

And through that dinner, many people are starting to stay and worship God. It's a wonderful ministry. Also, the second one is for Sunday school volunteers. And if you happen to occasionally come on Saturday and are willing to do that, Saturday church school.

Starting in the fall, next week actually, we'll have junior church for kids that are three-year-old through third grade. And then Sunday, so the little ones will be out.

[ 2 : 19 ] And Sunday school will be for all ages, from three years old all the way through adults, from 10-15 to 11-15. And we're looking for some adults willing to teach Sunday school on a rotating basis with that.

So check out the clipboards as they go. Next week also, we're starting off new worship time. So worship will be at 9, so continue as we are. And the later service will be at 11-15.

And again, Sunday school will be at 10-15 to 11-15 in there. And I believe that's it for our announcement. So let us pray. Lord, we thank you for bringing us here together as a community of faith, worshiping and praising you.

We pray that your presence will dwell among us, that we'll experience you in powerful ways, that you'll draw us closer to you and closer to one another, and you'll soften our hearts, lift up our spirits, and help us to praise you.

May everything we say and do in this worship experience exalt your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I'd like to invite you all to stand, if you're able, as we sing together, O Jesus, I have promised.

[ 3 : 24 ] O Jesus, I have promised.

I have promised to serve thee to the end. Be thou forever near me, my master and my friend.

I shall not fear the battle, if thou are by my side. No wonder from the pathway, if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me, the world is ever near. I see the signs that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.

My thoughts are ever hearing, around me and within. O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee, my soul from sin.

[ 4 : 58 ] O let me hear thee speaking, in accents clear and soon. O let me hear thee, my soul from sin. O let me hear thee, my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee, my soul from sin. O let me hear thee, my grace bore find. O let me hear thee, thy timups of sin. O let me hear thee, my soul from sin. O let me hear thee, I have earrings that trevably moo.

To raise in our control Oh, speak and make me listen Thou guardian of my soul Oh, Jesus, thou hast promised To all who follow thee That where thou art in glory Where shall thy servant be And Jesus, I have promised To serve me to the end Oh, give me grace to follow My master and my friend The Lord be with you.

And also with you. Please greet one another with the peace of the Spirit. And I'd like to invite any of the kids to come forward. Any of the kids want to come up? Come on up, guys.

Come on. Come on. Come on. It's okay. Come on. Right up here. Right up here. That's it. Any other kids want to come up?

[ 6 : 40 ] Here they come. Here they come. All right. Come on up. Hmm. I was just thinking about when I was around your age.

And sometimes my family would go to someplace special, like maybe the county fair, and there'd be big crowds of people. But my mom always told me one thing.

Do you know what it might be? Stay with her. Right. Stay with her. Hang on to her hand. And be close to her and stay connected to her.

Why would she do that? So I don't get lost. Have you ever been lost in a big crowd? Yeah. It's kind of scary, isn't it? No? You never have?

Or it's not scary for you? You just never have? Okay. At a store.

[ 7 : 37 ] That can happen in a store, too. But it's important to stay connected with the people that you're with, isn't it? And God wants us to do the same thing. Did you know that? When we go out into the world, we're supposed to still stay connected to God.

And we're supposed to stay connected to the people we love because we know that they'll take care of us and protect us and keep us safe, right? That's an important thing to do. So we stay connected to God through prayer and through reading scripture and by talking with other people who know God.

Those are all important things to do. So when you're out in the world, remember, hang on to God's hand. Hang on to God's hand and keep the people you love close to you, okay? Can you tell me things you're thankful for today?

If you want to share, raise your hand. Family. My family and friends. Food. Okay. Okay.

All right. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you, especially for family and friends and for all the good things that you give to us. Help us to remember to stay connected to you.

[ 8 : 45 ] Help us to remember to tell you thank you for all the good things. Help us to love you with all that we are. In Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Thank you very much for coming up. Thank you.

Concord is a group that is on the ground for disaster relief. And it is, they're already there helping with a hurricane. 100% of what we give to them goes right to disaster relief.

And they are already always one of the first people there. And they are there praying that we just give to help them out because they'll just go and do it. They're not going to wait for us.

So I'm thankful that we have so many dedicated people willing to give in that way and go help. And we have a mission moment to help that today. The thing is in your bulletin to help with Hurricane Harvey disaster relief through UMCOR.

Again, 100% goes to it. So please prayerfully consider giving to that. So I'm thankful for that. What else are you guys thankful for? Come on, you came here today wanting to worship God, right?

[10:17] Which means you've got a thankful moment in your heart, right? Family. What? Christian fellowship. Yeah, what else? Back to school.

What? Well, house is warm and dry. Yeah. The sunflower field. Yeah.

Ooh, got good chills on the way. Yeah. What else? Our pastors. Yes, our pastors. Wonderful. So I hope that throughout our whole worship experience, you will reflect on just how good God is.

And as we reflect on that, let's return our gifts, tithes, and offerings to the Lord. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[11:30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[14:02] Thank you.

Thank you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. I wanted to first of all point out that in your pews, there's cards.

I guess they're white, but mine's green. It's about that size. And it's for the prayer vigil. And it's for the prayer vigil because we know that prayer is powerful. And we have a prayer vigil coming up in our community of faith here.

We'll be doing a 24-hour prayer vigil. So if you're not signed up for that, I'd like to encourage you to do that. If you have something you'd like to have lifted up in prayer, please mark it on that card.

[15:36] And you can place it in one of those wooden boxes on the way out. We have many concerns. And we have many concerns to share with you today. My mom, Sally Acord, had surgery on Monday, and she's doing very well.

So just continue to keep her in prayer. And also, Kim Sosnowski had surgery on Thursday. So anyone who's ever gone through surgery, you know, they always need prayer for swift healing and for pain.

Please pray for Mary Zupo, who's experiencing a lot of pain with sciatic and all sorts of things. She's having a hard time moving. So please pray for Mary Zupo. Also, pray for Michelle Margarucci.

She has an ear infection that has caused her to become deaf. And they have given her medicine, but they're not sure if it's going to work. So please pray that her hearing will be restored.

And also, please pray for Barb Herman. Her husband, Bob Herman, passed away this past Monday, and his funeral was yesterday. So please pray for Barb and her entire family.

[ 16 : 45 ] Do you have any concerns that you'd like to have lifted up today? Sorry, what? Ellie Drake. Yeah, Sally Drake is home, but needs some prayers.

Yes, Sue. Your 34-year-old nephew had a stroke. What's his name? Bart. Please pray for Bart. Anyone else?

Okay. I'm going to add to that all the people who have gone through the hurricane and all the responders. So let's pray. Lord, we come to you this day knowing you are powerful, you are mighty, you are strong, and so often we are not.

Lord, we pray that you'll take away any of our fear, any of our anxiety, any of our struggles and frustrations. We pray for healing and trust.

Help us to lean on you and trust in you to walk in your way. We pray for healing of people. We pray for healing of people's bodies as they recover from surgery or heading into surgery or dealing with any sort of disease.

[ 17 : 55 ] For the young man who has just had a stroke, Lord, we pray that your hand will be upon them and that healing will occur. Lord, we pray for their bodies to be restored and made whole.

We pray, Lord, for people who are struggling in their mind, for their emotions. Take away anxiety and depression. Take away the confusion and any mental illness, Lord.

We place that in your hand. Help us as a community of faith, Lord, to love and care for the people. Give us your wisdom and help us to be filled with your love that we can reach out and care for others, expressing your love and lifting them up.

We pray for those in mourning that they will have your comfort and your peace. Lord, we pray for those who have gone through the hurricane. We pray for people to be safe, to be cared for.

Lord, we pray that you will be with those who are responding, that you will not only bring safety, but for everyone, encouragement. And help them to be the best witness by sharing your love, by caring for others and getting them out of this mess.

[ 19 : 15 ] Lord, help us as a nation to reach out. May your hand be upon that area. May your hand be upon us, Lord.

That others will draw closer to you. We place in your hand, Lord, those that don't know you. Those that we love, that we're desperately wanting to come to you and yet have hardened hearts.

We pray for softened hearts and godly people to witness. We pray for this church that you'll give us your discernment. You'll give us your wisdom.

You'll give us your power and your strength to move forward, to be a beacon of light in this area. And we pray thanks to you for handling all our troubles, for carrying all our woes, for your burden is light.

Thank you, Lord. For it's in your name we pray. Amen. Now let's hear from the word of the Lord.

[ 20 : 43 ] Good morning.

The scripture today is from John, chapter 15, verses 1 through 17. I am the true vine, and my father is a gardener.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

[ 21 : 54 ] If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this. Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.

[ 23 : 01 ] Instead, I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

And so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you. This is my command. Love each other. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for reading for us today. Today we're winding up our sermon series on the United Methodist Beliefs and what John Wesley taught as our founding father.

Next week, Pastor Tom is going to be starting a new sermon series, and it's called The Ultimate Win, God's Game Plan for Life. And this new sermon series will be talking about some practical ways that we can change our lives, change our church, and change the world for God.

But today we're going to talk a little bit more about John Wesley. Pastor Tom's preaching down in Niagara Falls today, which is why I have the opportunity to come and reconnect with all of you today.

[ 24 : 15 ] John Wesley felt it was very important to stay connected to each other as believers, and that's why he formed people into small groups, into classes, so that they could learn together, pray together, fellowship together, serve together, be accountable to one another together.

He knew that it was very important for us to have connections with other Christians in order to keep our faith strong and help it keep growing. Today, of course, we're talking not only about personal connections, but also connections of the church, connections to the church, connections of the church to God.

We're taking up that collection today to help the people in Texas. And if I were just to give what money I had, it wouldn't be enough to do much good at all. But because all of us put in a little bit in this church and in all the other Methodist churches throughout the United States and the world, we're able to do a whole lot more good, aren't we?

Collectively, we can do so much more. And every dollar that we give goes directly to the need because the administrative costs of getting supplies and money and so forth to Texas have already been paid through other resources of our United Methodist Church.

So everything you give will go to the people in need. We have a really wonderful denomination, a wonderful church. This church has built schools and hospitals and all kinds of missions that serve people.

[ 25 : 53 ] We've accomplished great things for God together. Another good thing about our connectional system in the United Methodist Church is you don't have to worry about going out and finding a pastor for your church.

Pastors are recruited and trained and held accountable to others in the system and sent out, appointed by the greater church.

So you don't have to search for your pastor. Have any of you ever been in a church that had to put together a search committee? Yeah, some of you have. Sometimes it can take two or three years to find a pastor, or longer, says one of you, or longer to find a pastor that is a good fit for your church.

So it can be difficult. We are very fortunate that every year you will have a pastor appointed to this church on July 1st. Whether it's us again or some other pastor, you won't go without a pastor.

But being connected is about more than just doing big things together or having good pastors. Being connected is part of God's plan for us.

[ 27 : 00 ] Our reading this morning from the Gospel of John talks about a grapevine. And I have to tell you, I have a lot of grapevines in my yard. This one came from my back porch, actually.

I went out and I yanked it out and brought it along because I wanted to show you what a grapevine looks like. But there are places in my yard where the grapevines have grown up the trees and taken right over.

A couple of years ago, my husband went out by our barn and cleaned away all of the grapevines, cut the trunks at the base. Now they've all grown back again. And they cover up the barn so much you almost can't see it.

It's a good thing we're not using it anymore for any animals. But grapevines can grow wild and take over everything. In the reading from John 15, Jesus is giving his disciples final instructions before he goes to the cross.

And he talks about a grapevine. He tells them to stay connected to him like the branches are connected to a grapevine in order that we might have life and nourishment.

[ 28 : 06 ] We need to stay connected to Jesus, to God, in order to have purpose for our lives. And only by staying connected can we bear fruit for God's kingdom.

In verse 1, Jesus calls himself the vine. He's our source of life. He's the one who transports everything from God to us that we truly need.

It says in verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

Apart from me, we can do nothing? Nothing. Hmm. But it seems strange to me that we're separated from God in the first place.

If we remember back to the beginning of creation in the book of Genesis, what does it say? It says we're created in God's image and that we're very good. Adam and Eve were very closely connected to God.

[ 29 : 07 ] They walked in the garden with him. They heard his voice clearly. They knew God completely. But something happened. Sin came into the world.

It seems when we're born, when we're babies, we have that innocence. We have that reflection of God still within us. We're still connected to God somehow.

But as we grow and we're influenced by the world and everything in the world, that connection begins to get weaker. We come to the age of accountability where we know right from wrong, and too often we choose wrong and we lose our innocence.

We begin to put ourselves at the center of life instead of keeping God in the center of life. And then sin is born in us.

James 3 says it this way. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

[ 30 : 11 ] For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every evil practice. We fail.

We sin. We engage in selfish desires, and we lose our God-given purpose in life. What is our purpose in life? To serve God.

What else? To serve others. To love God. To be in close relationship with God. But when we fall away from God, when we're disconnected, we become like the wild branches of this vine, growing everywhere, strong, having lots of leaves, but choking out the life of other good trees and bearing absolutely no fruit.

But thankfully, God does not leave us in this useless state. Instead, he calls us back to connection with him. Psalm 119 says it this way.

Turn my heart towards your statutes and not towards selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things. Preserve my life according to your word.

[ 31 : 25 ] What happens if we don't repent and turn back to God? In John 15, too, it says that God is the gardener, and he will cut us off if we remain selfish and bear no fruit.

This grapevine might still look pretty good, but it's already dying. If you look at it closely, you'll see the leaves are curling up and withering.

Even though it's in water, it's not staying alive because it's not connected to its root, to its source, to its branch. Jesus told a parable about a fig tree.

I think some of you know this one. It comes from Luke 13. A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but didn't find any.

So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, for three years now, I've been coming back to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down. Why should it use up the soil?

[ 32 : 24 ] Seems harsh. But a tree or a vine that looks good but doesn't bear fruit, that it's supposed to, is good for nothing except to be burned up. And in the same way, if we're not with God, if we're not bearing fruit for him, why should we be allowed to waste his precious resources?

Without God, we can lose power, and we can even lose life itself. So how do we get reconnected? How do we get connected back to God when we're all sinners?

First of all, we have to recognize our need. That's the very first step. You have to know the bad news before you can know the good news. And then we have to turn back to God in repentance.

Acts 3.19 says this, God really does long to restore us, to bring us back to vibrant life once again.

And when we repent and our sins are forgiven, we are reconnected to God. Jesus calls God the gardener, the vine dresser, and God is the one who prunes us so that we can be more fruitful.

[ 33 : 41 ] I don't like the idea of pruning, do you? It sounds painful. You may have heard when the scripture was read earlier, in verse 3, where Jesus tells his disciples, they're already clean because of the word he has spoken to them.

And I have to tell you, when you look at the Greek, the word used in the scripture for pruning is the same word that's used for cleansing. So pruning and cleansing are the same thing.

God cleans out the dead branches in our lives and he prunes us or he cuts us back in just the right spot so that we can grow and bear more and more good fruit.

Have you ever watched a vine dresser prune a vine? They know exactly the right spot to make the cut, even of a live branch, so that that vine will grow large and luscious bunches of grapes.

They clean out or prune anything that will get in the way of that abundance. And God does that to us. The result of the pruning that God does in our lives is that we're blessed.

[ 34 : 52 ] We're given joy. We're blessed with the right kind of relationships, the kind of relationships that express agape love, that sacrificial love where we're willing to give up things in order to promote the welfare of someone else.

Genuine love does mean that we will have to sacrifice. And in the reading from John 15, we're told greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends.

But God doesn't want us just to be obedient, sacrificial servants. What he really wants is to be friends, to be in loving relationship with him and with each other.

Now, looking back at my relationship with my parents, I can see how when I was a little child, I had to obey everything they said exactly, or I'd get myself in trouble.

I had to hang on to their hand at the fair, or I would certainly get lost. I had to listen closely and do exactly what they said. And sometimes they had to be a little harsh with me in order to make sure I was really listening.

[ 36 : 04 ] But as I grew and as I became an adult, that relationship changed. We became more like friends, more like partners, as I became an adult and became responsible for myself, and as I was doing things the right way.

And it's the same in our faith life. At first, we're like little children that need to know the rules and need to know exactly how to live. But as we grow in our relationship with God, as we get closer and closer to God, it's more like a partnership, more like a friendship, because our hearts begin to desire the things that God's heart desires as well.

Isn't it much better when we can be in a caring relationship with one another? It should be the same in the church. We're supposed to connect to God and connect to each other through the church.

Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches of that vine. And we're supposed to grow up and be in partnership with God and one another. Ephesians 4 says it this way, Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching, and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

[ 37 : 46 ] You know, the grapevines in my yard grow and twist together. Have you ever seen that, where the trunks grow together? And they get stronger and stronger in their mutual support.



They're all connected still to that one source of life. And we're supposed to stay connected to Christ as our source of life, as our head, as our source of wisdom.

The church is the place where we do this, where we live out that faith, where we grow and become more closely linked to one another so that we can grow in strength. We need to stay connected to each other as the church in order to find God's joy and purpose in our lives.

It's equally essential for the church itself to stay connected to God. What happens if the church itself becomes so self-centered that it loses sight of the calling that God has given to us?

Every church is one of the branches of the vine of Jesus, and if a church doesn't bear fruit, God will cut that church off too. A church can be a wild and worthless vine, or it can be a cultivated and pruned and fruitful vine.

[ 38 : 58 ] In John 15, verse 17, Jesus says, This is my command, love each other. That sounds pretty simple, but it can be hard, can't it? Jesus isn't just talking about a feeling of love.

The word love here is used as a verb, as an action word. Love each other. In other words, act lovingly even when you may not feel like it.

Feelings are easy. They just sort of happen. They come and they go. But actions can be a lot harder. Actions are what really show the loyalty and the commitment and the sacrificial love that we're supposed to have as Christians.

Jesus tells us to go out and do the loving thing even when our natural feelings aren't there, even when we don't feel like it.

What do you think the fruit is that we're supposed to grow as Christians here in the church? Any ideas? What are we supposed to grow?

[ 40 : 06 ] Yes. Grapes? Well, we could grow grapes here, couldn't we? And what could we use those grapes for? Wine?

Grape juice? To feed hungry people maybe? To eat ourselves? That's a good thing. Grapes are a good thing. What else are we supposed to grow here in the church? Love. Okay.

How about more Christians? Didn't Jesus give the command in Matthew 28, go out and make disciples in my name? So those are a couple of things.

And I think we're also supposed to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You know what those are. Haven't you heard those before? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We always save that one for last because it's the hardest one. Our lives and our churches should be bearing these fruit. If we don't see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control within the church, where else are we going to see it?

[ 41 : 16 ] We're not going to see it out in the world. We have to model that, don't we? But again, what happens to us when we don't do what we're supposed to do as the church?

The prophet Isaiah tells us this. Israel was God's chosen people, and they abandoned God and got themselves in very deep trouble.

They ended up in exile. The church is supposed to be God's chosen people. Now we've been grafted in to God's family by the mercy and the grace of Jesus Christ. What happens if we don't bear the fruit he wants us to bear as a church?

If we grow like a wild grapevine, self-focused, self-serving, looking like we're doing lots of good things but not bearing fruit, God will cut us off too.

Jesus warned of this in his words to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2. Yet I hold this against you.

- [ 42 : 30 ] You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you've fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

If we fall away from connection with God as a church, if we fail to bear the fruit he desires, we need to repent and turn back to him.

We need to do those things that made us excited to be Christians when we first learned about the love of Jesus Christ. We all want the blessings of God for ourselves and for our church, don't we?

I'm not just talking about more members or more money or bigger buildings. I'm talking about that fruit that lasts, that fruit that gives us true blessing, the fruit that only God can give.

John said in chapter 15, verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you would go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.

- [ 43 : 45 ] God wants us to stay so connected to him that whatever we ask for will be the same as what he wills, and that way he can give it to us.

But we are not individuals who can just ask for whatever we want for ourselves. We are connected and must sometimes sacrifice ourselves for the good of the whole body, the church.

It's easy to be selfish. I can be selfish every time if I try. These wild grapevines, they grow fast and they look luxurious, but they don't bear a single edible grape.

Maybe a few tiny little green ones that the birds might take, but nothing that you and I would find nourishing or tasty. But a cultivated and pruned vine will grow slower and not have a lot of leaves, but it will bear the most wonderful fruit, fruit that lasts.

You've seen some of the news coverage coming from Texas. Have you seen the way some folks have sacrificed for their neighbors in trouble? I mean, we're going to send a monetary donation, and I believe we're going to be filling up some flood cleaning buckets, right, Kidget?

- [ 45 : 03 ] And we're going to get those ready to send down to the folks to help them with cleaning up. And we're offering our prayers, certainly, every day. These are really important things to do that we can do to help. But what if we were just a little bit closer, or what if we had the means to travel down there?

Would we get into our boats and go and rescue people off of rooftops? Would we pluck helpless animals out of the rising floodwaters and take them to higher ground?

Would we open up our church doors and allow people to come in and stay who had been displaced? Would we even open up our own homes and give the homeless a place to go to?

Love requires effort and sacrifice. So what are we willing to do for love's sake, for God's sake? What are we willing to do? You know, maybe we don't always love as much as we should or in the way that we should.

Maybe we haven't stayed as closely connected to God as we should have, both as individuals and as the church. We may feel as though God has already cut us off and that we're withering up and dying like the grapevine.

- [ 46 : 13 ] But you know, it's never, never too late to return to God. Romans 11 tells us, Consider therefore the kindness and the sternness of God, sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness.

Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. So even a branch that's been cut off can be grafted back in.

God is an expert at bringing people and churches back to life again. All that we need to do is to repent of our past mistakes, our selfishness, our inaction, our failure to show love, and God will bring us new life and spiritual fruit that lasts.

Like John Wesley, we need to believe that we need to draw closer to one another and closer to God, and then God will bless us with everlasting fruit.

Amen. Amen. Draw me close to you You never let me go I lay it all down again Do you hear you say that I'm your friend?

[ 48 : 04 ] You are my desire You are my desire No one else will do Cause nothing else could take your place To feel the warmth of your embrace Help me find a way Bring me back to you You're my love You're all I've ever needed You're all my want Help me know you are near

You're all I want You're all I've ever been You're all I want Help me know you are me Help me know you are me We gather here Praising God and knowing God is holy And in the process recognizing that we are not And so we gather as a community of faith To offer a prayer of confession Will you pray with me?

Lord, I am a sinner I need your grace I've not always shown love For you or for others Set me on the right path Forgive me of my sins Help me to be a witness And fill me with your love In Jesus' name we pray Amen Lord, I need you Oh, I need you Let's pray for you Lord, I come I confess Bowing in I find my rest

Without you I fall apart You're the one That guides my heart Lord, I need you Lord, I need you I need you Every hour I need you I need you My one I need you My one My righteousness Oh God How I need you I need you A sin runs deep Your grace is far Where grace is far Where grace is far Is where you are Where you are Lord, I am free

Holiness Holiness Is Christ in me Lord, I need you Lord, I need you Lord, I need you Lord, I need you Oh, I need you Every hour I need you My one My one My one My one My one My one My one My one My one My one My one My one Oh God How I need you So teach my song To rise to you When temptation Comes my way When I cannot stand I'll fall on you Jesus, you're my hope And stay Lord, I need you

[ 53 : 06 ] Oh, I need you Every hour I need you My one Defense My righteousness Oh God, how I need you My one defense My righteousness Oh God, how I need you God responded to our need by offering his son on the cross dying for our sins even while we were sinners and so I can proclaim this day in the name of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven Glory to God, Amen Please be seated Grace is something that is offered freely to everyone so if you are longing to be in relationship with God today repenting of our sins we've already done that you are welcome at the table the Lord be with you lift up your hearts let us give thanks to the Lord our God it is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you

Father Almighty creator of heaven and earth you formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life when we turned away and our love failed your love remained steadfast you delivered us from captivity made covenant to be our sovereign God and spoke to us through the prophets and so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn holy, holy, holy Lord God of power and might heaven and earth are full of your glory Hosanna in the highest blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest holy are you and blessed is your son Jesus Christ your spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people he healed the sick fed the hungry and ate with sinners by the baptism of his suffering death and resurrection you gave birth to your church delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit when the Lord Jesus ascended he promised to be with us always in the power of your word and Holy Spirit on the night in which he gave himself up for us he took the bread he gave thanks to you Father Almighty and he broke the bread and he said this is my body broken for you given for you eat of this often remembering me and when the supper was over he took the cup and he gave thanks to you and he said this is the blood of the new covenant poured out for you poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins drink of this often remembering me and so in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith

Christ has died Christ is risen Christ will come again pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood by your spirit make us one with Christ one with each other and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet through your son Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in your holy church all honor and glory is yours Almighty Father now and forever Amen now let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us saying our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever

Amen will those who are serving please come forward Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 60 : 19 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 62 : 49 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 65 : 18 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.