Missionary Faithfulness

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0:00] Well, good afternoon to all of you. This is a great Sunday to be together.

It's a day in the church calendar that Christians call Palm Sunday, and that's why we received palm friends coming in and why the service is a little different. But this is the first Sunday in what we call Holy Week.
It's the week that leads up to Easter. And Palm Sunday is the day that we remember and celebrate something called the triumphal entry. When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the back of a colt to a great procession, people lined the streets and threw their garments and branches of palm on the ground as he came.
And this was really a kingly procession. And the reason it's significant is because Jesus is formally announcing his kingship, that he came not just to save the world, but as the rightful king over everything.
And so in light of that truth, we've been reflecting actually for the last several weeks on how do we respond to the fact that Jesus is king of everything? How do we then live?
[1:12] And what does that mean for our church? So we've been exploring what we feel we are called to be and to do here in the city these last few weeks, and we've been using this statement to summarize our calling as a church.

As a church, we seek the flourishing of Washington, D.C. We believe that's why Jesus came. His ultimate vision is to see the world returned to a flourishing state.
So we seek that in D.C. by building gospel-centered communities that practice three things, generous hospitality, spiritual formation, and missionary faithfulness. And last couple of weeks, we looked at those first two core values, and this week we come to our final value, a core value that we hope infuses everything we do as a community, and that is missionary faithfulness.
So that's what we're going to be talking about for just a little while right now. But first, I just want to unpack the phrase missionary faithfulness, because I realize that that might not be immediately accessible. When we say the word missionary in our culture, many times we imagine missionaries as a being a family that we bring up on stage, and we talk about how they're going to move to some distant part of the world and evangelize the people there.
Or we think of the short-term summer missions trips that some people go on for a week or two here or there. And those are certainly things that fall within the category of missionary.
[2:38] But when we talk about missionary faithfulness, we're talking about something much bigger than that. See, a core belief in our community is that every single Christian is a full-time missionary.

That by virtue of the fact that you are a Christian, you are a full-time missionary, for those of you who are Christians. And the reason is because God is a missionary God. And so to belong to and to follow a God like that makes you a missionary.
And then when we talk about faithfulness, we mean simply the way we live out our faith. So missionary faithfulness means living out our faith on a day-to-day basis as though we were full-time missionaries.
And so the passage that we're going to look at that tells us more about this comes from this wonderful place in 1 Peter 2. The passage that we read is verses 4 through 12. Just as a disclaimer, we're not going to be able to even touch all of the great things that are happening in this passage.
We're just going to lightly look at a few things and really focus on this theme of trying to understand what missionary faithfulness is. But one of the things that you're going to see that I've seen over this past couple of weeks of studying this passage is that missionary faithfulness and the kind of faith in

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life that we're called to really calls us to move against some of our cultural norms.
[3:55] And so we'll see what that means because we'll see that missionary faithfulness means having a faith that is marked by three distinguishing characteristics. First of all, it's a communal faith. Second of all, it's an integrated faith.

And thirdly, it's a public faith. So it's communal, it's integrated, and it's public. So let's pray as we get started. Our Father, we do recognize that you are a missionary God, that you're the ultimate missionary.
That all of this that we do here is a response to the fact that you have come, that you set your Son on the great mission to restore us in the world. So we pray that all that we do and all that we say and all that strikes our hearts would be a reflection and a response to that great truth, Lord.
We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, a missionary faithfulness means having a communal faith. Now why is that worth talking about?
Well, in our culture, I think you could make the argument that we perhaps live in the most individualistic culture ever to have existed in history.
[5:02] That we are highly individualistic. And because we live in a culture like that, it trickles into the way we think about faith. There's a high emphasis on one's personal faith.

There's a high emphasis on our personal experience of the divine. And that's all well and good, but the problem is when the Bible talks about belief and faith, the assumption is, in the Old and New Testament, the assumption is that the audience, believers, are part of a local community of flesh and blood fellow believers.
And that that community is an interdependent community, like a human body has interdependent parts. And if you'll notice in 1 Peter 2, verse 5, here's the image that Peter uses.
You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house or as a temple. So he's saying you need to think of yourselves and recognize that when you come to faith in Jesus, Jesus is the cornerstone.
And so obviously you become connected to the cornerstone, the main, the first stone that you lay of a building. But not only do you become connected to Jesus, but you automatically become connected to all of the other stones in the wall.
[6:26] You become joined with them into one thing, one entity. You are living stones. And this metaphor is powerful because it tells us something very important about the nature of faith.

Think about what stones in a stone wall do. Have you ever tried to build a stone wall? Some of you, I think, probably have. And you have to lay the stones carefully because the stones support each other, right?
There are stones on the bottom and they support the stones that rest on top of them. And then the stones to either side support the stones in the middle. And then each stone in the middle actually supports stones that rest on them.
And so all around the stone, it is either being supported or supporting other stones. And in the same way, this is saying you need Christians in your life to support you in your faith and in your life of following Jesus.
You absolutely need other people. You need them immediately available and involved in your daily life. And the reason is very practical. It's because it is extremely hard to hold beliefs and to live those beliefs out when you're surrounded by people who don't share those beliefs.
[7:44] It is extremely difficult because every culture has ways of deciding and filtering between things that sound reasonable and things that sound crazy or outlandish.

And these filters, you can think of them in different ways. The sociologist Peter Berger calls them plausibility structures, right? And your plausibility structure, that's the filter that when you hear truth claims, you either immediately say, yeah, that's probably true.
Or you say, that sounds crazy. Who would believe that? The way you make that decision is based on your plausibility structure. And they change from culture to culture and they change over time.
So the point is this. Many of our beliefs and many of the assumptions we make about what sounds reasonable or credible, those are actually handed to us by culture.
They're handed to us. They trickle into our subconsciousness. Right? The things about which we say, well, all reasonable people believe that. Everybody knows this.
[8:51] Or, you know, everyone thinks that's crazy. Right? Those assumptions that there isn't everyone out there. That all of those other people, this is what they think.

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That's our plausibility structure. Right? And the thing is, is that you begin to realize as you reflect on it, a lot of our sense of the truthfulness of various things is not necessarily based on evidence.
It's based on consensus. Well, everybody thinks this, therefore it must be true. Everybody rejects this, therefore it must be false. It's consensus, not evidence. So one example of this is if you lived in the 1800s.
If you lived in the 1800s, everybody knew that the thing that made you sick, the cause of disease was bad air. Everybody knows that.
It's bad air. Rotting organic matter. If it smells bad, everybody knows that makes you sick. Right?
So then someone like Louis Pasteur comes along and begins to reject those plausibility structures and those norms and begins to look at the evidence and says, no, actually, I think that sickness is caused by germs.
[9:58] And even though he had the evidence that he could point to to say, I think this is what's happening, people ridiculed him and they mocked him and they criticized him. Why?

Because everybody knows it's bad air. Your idea of little creatures that come into your body and make you sick, that's insane. Nobody believes that. Right? Not evidence.
Consensus. Right? And so the hard truth that we have to swallow is we love to think that we are so original. I love to think that my thoughts are so authentically mine.
But the truth is, we're all lemmings. We're lemmings. We're hardwired to follow the crowd. And it's incredibly hard.
And it takes an enormous force of will to push against the consensus opinion. Right? I've even seen this. This may sound like a ridiculous example.
[10:55] But I've seen this trying to pick out a baby name. You know, we have a blessing. We have a daughter due in mid-August. And so one of the things that we need to do as parents is to try to figure out her name.

And so we've been batting around different names. And it never fails. I told Laura, you know, I really like this name. I think this is a name that I would really consider. And she Googles it and says, yeah, that's like in the top five most popular names of 2017.
I said, okay, well, okay. Well, if we want something a little more, you know, what about this one? Oh, that's in the top ten, you know. And I said, okay. Well, what about this one? I really like this one. That's actually the most popular name in 2017.
Now, how does that happen? It's not like I went to a seminar or got a brochure that said, here are the names for 2017 that you should be thinking about. Nobody told me this. It just sinks in.
Right? How does that happen? I don't know. It's this weird kind of osmosis. But it sinks in. It's coming from somewhere. Right?
[11:58] And so if that kind of thing happens with baby names, then imagine what is seeping in when it comes to questions like, the nature of the divine, human identity, human purpose, right?

The meaning of all of this, the nature of reality, right? We are not the neutral, authentic thinkers we think we are. We are constantly being influenced by the consensus opinion.
And the hard fact of our culture, and especially living in D.C., is that for those of us who are Christians, we live in a culture where the consensus opinion is that Christianity falls somewhere between irrelevant and insane.
People who actually believe in it. And so to be a Christian here is to be like Louis Pasteur. We say, I know that most of the people I live and work around think that this is insane.
But when I look at the evidence of the resurrection, I actually think that this happened. I actually think that Jesus did rise. And if he did rise from death, then that means that he is who he said he was.
[13:06] That he is from God. That he did come to atone for my sin. That he can reconcile me to the God who made me. That he actually offers me hope and the world hope that can't be found anywhere else.

And all of that is true. But in order to believe it, I have to push against the prevailing plausibility structures every day of my life.
So the point is this. The first point is, your faith cannot survive alone. It won't last. You'll become a marginal, nominal Christian.
But to truly live out your faith, you need other people. You're not meant to be the wall. You're a stone in the wall. And just like stones in a wall, sometimes you need people to stand on.

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What do I mean by that? Well, sometimes you struggle. We all struggle with aspects of our faith. And we look at this and we say, I don't know if I can believe that right now. We go through hard things.
[14:09] Right? Especially hard things like death and suffering. Right? Either you're facing the reality of death or you lose somebody that you love and you say, I don't know if I can believe in all of this right now.

There are other people who can believe it for you. For a time. Right? You can stand on the faith of others and say, well, that person believes it and that person believes it and that person believes it. And I trust them. And even though for right now I'm not, I can't get there. I'm going to rely on their faith. Right? You let them support you. You need people to either side of you.
To speak truth into your life. To remind you of what is real. And then eventually all Christians need to play the role of supporting the faith of others. Holding others up. When they're struggling.
When they're full of doubt. New Christians as they're getting their feet under them. Right? We're stones in a wall. We need each other. This is the first aspect of missionary faithfulness. It can't be an individualistic faith.
[15:08] It has to be communal. Right? God didn't entrust his entire mission to you as an individual. He entrusted it to the church. If we try to go it alone as lone wolf Christians, we'll be exhausted and depleted.

We're called to do it together. So that's the first point. The next aspect of missionary faithfulness beyond the communal nature of it is that it is an integrated faith.
It's an integrated faith. And again, you'll see the pull against the cultural norm. By integrated, I mean that our faith must permeate every facet of our lives.
And this, like the last point, this does not come naturally. Because I think most of us, including me, tend to want to compartmentalize our faith.
And I think our culture encourages this. You know, we live in a culture that moves at a breakneck pace. And we have all of these different spheres of people that we have to relate to.
[16:08] And I think many of us get really good, myself included, at knowing what mode we need to be in. And so you shift into this mode, and this mode, and this mode, and this mode. And whether it's work, or these friends, or those friends, or college friends, or church friends, or friends, neighbors, family.

All of the different roles that we play, we have a mode to fit it. And I think that for many of us, if we're honest, we have a Christian mode. And we can flip the switch on, and we can flip it off.
And we can flip the other switch on, and we can flip it off. And we get really good, actually so good, that we don't even notice that we're doing it. It just comes naturally to shift into Christian mode.
And I think that this creates an enormous amount of contradiction and dissonance. And yet, for many of us, it's not even something that we experience on a conscious level.
It's helpful to hear from people who have really experienced this in themselves and seen it. My wife is right now reading a book called Killers of the Dream by a woman named Lillian Smith.
[17:06] This is an extraordinarily self-aware woman who lived in the mid-20th century, growing up in the incredibly racist culture of the Deep South. And she writes a very honest, she started writing this in 1949, a very honest account of what it was like to grow up as a Christian with this kind of dissonance.

So I just want to let you hear an excerpt from this. I learned it is possible to be a Christian and a white Southerner simultaneously.
To be a gentle woman and an arrogant, callous creature in the same moment. To pray at night and ride a Jim Crow car the next morning and to feel comfortable in doing both.
I learned to believe in freedom, to glow when the word democracy was used, and to practice slavery from morning till night. I learned it the way all of my Southern people learn it, by closing door after door until one's mind and heart and conscience are blocked off from each other and from reality.
Incredibly self-aware. What's she saying? I learned from a very early age to compartmentalize. My Christian faith, I put it in this room and it's all nice and neat and tidy and this is the Christian room.
[18:29] And then I close the door and I lock it. And then I come over here and all of my assumptions about human beings and relationships and race and class, I put all of that in here and I close that door and I lock it.

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And that way they don't ever have to talk to each other. Right? And it made me wonder as I read this excerpt and I've thought about this in my own life, what are the other ways that I compartmentalize?
What are the other doors that I close in my life? Right? You know, I don't know where you live, but most people I know have kind of a room of shame.
You know, like most of your house looks good or most of your apartment. And then there's kind of one corner or one closet or one room. And that's just, you don't know what to, and you just keep the door locked. Right? So maybe you have that.
Right? But there are other kinds of rooms. Right? So for some of us, you know, we have our faith here and we lock the door and this is our Sunday, Wednesday room. You know? And then over here we have, this is where our finances go.
[19:29] And over here, right, this is where our relationship with our family goes. And over here, this is where all of our thoughts about ourselves and our sexuality go. And right here, this is where my way of parenting and raising my kids goes.

And we have all of these rooms and we keep all of the doors locked. And we just make sure that nobody interacts with anybody else. Right? That it's all kept nice and neat and separate.
And that's compartmentalization. And I think as a result of living that way, what that means is that we never really develop a sense of identity.
Right? We don't really have a sense of an integrated self. We just feel as though we are fragmented, partial selves. But I want you to notice that in 1 Peter 2, the focus is not on what we do as Christians.
The clear focus in this passage is on who we are. It says in verse 9, The gospel is first and foremost a declaration.
[20:47] Not about what we need to do, but about who we are. The gospel says this is who you are. Why is Peter writing this? Because he knows that we forget again and again and again.

And we need to be reminded, here is the story that gives your life meaning and orientation and purpose and direction. Here is your story. You were created to be queens and kings.
Right? To cultivate and to create out of God's good and perfect world. You rebelled. You turned against that life.
And you said you wanted to be your own God. But God loved you so much that he was willing to give up the things that were most precious to him. And chiefly his son to come and to rescue us. To give his life for us. And what that means is that we are restored back to that original role. And we become a part of what God is doing in this world. Bringing restoration and renewal.
[21:45] And he is saying that is who you are. And the way he talks about that is saying that we were brought from darkness into God's marvelous light. And when it talks about that it means all of us.

Right? If the light comes in it has to come all the way in. He's saying no corner, no room can remain dark. The light is a floodlight, and it's meant to flood every room. Every door comes open. Everything gets exposed. So the gospel is all or none. It either is something that we reject, or it comes in and completely redefines us.
But there's no in-between. An in-between is simply a functional rejection. To paraphrase Richard Foster, he says, superficiality is the curse of our age.
People who just float along the surface. Dilettantes and dabblers. People who never really, and he says, here's what the world needs.
[22:44] The world does not need more intelligent people. The world does not need more successful people. The world does not need more wealthy people. The world does not need more influential people.

The world does not need more gifted people. What the world needs is people with depth. People who are integrated deeply, fundamentally.
The faith has come in. It's entered into every room. It's pulled everything out. It's restructured and renovated the self from the inside out. The world needs people who are deeply grounded in their identity in the gospel, right?
People who are permeated with faith all the way through. When you live in a compartmentalized world and you simply live life as a person with depth and holistic integrity, you will, by definition, be radically countercultural.

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Just in the way you live. Just in the way you live. Right? So it would be worth your time reflecting on your own heart, on your own doors. Which ones are open and which ones are closed and locked?
[23:52] Which ones did you lock and throw away the key? You know, I don't know what that is for you. It could be the way you think about your money. It could be the way you think about your job. It could be the way you think about marriage or singleness or dating.

It could be any of those things. It could be bitterness. It could be a person or a situation where you say, I don't care what happens, I will never forgive that person. It could be any of those things.
I don't know what it is for you. I know what it is for me. I'm not going to tell you. We'll have a beer sometime, I'll tell you. But we all have those rooms.
And then imagine what it would be like to invite God into those places, in those spaces. Right? To allow God to shine that light.
To call that part of you out. You know, there's an old word, an old phrase, quorum Deo. The idea is to live all of life before the face of God.
[24:52] Quorum Deo. And this is what integrity means. This is what an integrated faith looks like. Living all of your life before the face of God. Wherever you are, whoever you're with, whatever you're doing, you're living before the face of God.

Quorum Deo. So this is missionary faithfulness. It means having a communal faith, doing it together, not alone. And it means having an integrated faith, deeply integrating faith into every aspect of our lives.
And then the last thing it means is having a public faith. A public faith. Just as we live in a culture that encourages individualism, and just as we live in a culture that encourages compartmentalization, so I believe we also live in a culture that says faith is a private affair and that you should keep it to yourself.
Right? The consensus is you can do what you want and believe what you want on your own time and in your own home, but when it comes to the public square, when it comes to our jobs or issues like economics or immigration or schooling or various social issues, you need to keep your faith to yourself.
It has no business being brought into such conversations. The problem with that way of thinking is that it's impossible to do that.
[26:06] It's impossible to separate these issues from faith assumptions. Because what are we talking about when we're talking about faith? Well, we're talking about beliefs about the most fundamental questions of our lives.

The nature of the divine. Human purpose. Human identity. Right? Human nature. Human nature. The nature of reality and our ability to perceive it.
None of these things are things we can ultimately prove. They are faith assumptions. But how do you make decisions about something like education or immigration without drawing from those places?
I don't know how you do it. So you cannot separate. We all have faith assumptions, and we must draw on those in these kinds of issues and conversations.
So when we talk about having a public faith, we don't necessarily mean holding a street corner sign, you know, a sandwich board, handing out tracts, preaching on a...
[27:09] Now, I actually know a good friend of mine is a street corner preacher. And the reason he does it is because he came to faith listening to somebody else preach on a street corner. And so if that is your calling, then more power to you.

But that's not necessarily what we mean. What we mean when we talk about having a public faith is what Peter's talking about here, that we're called to live lives that, as he says, proclaim God's excellence.
Proclaim God's excellence. Now, if you're kind of a person that hears that and says, okay, that's another thing I have to do. I have to go out and start proclaiming God's excellence.
And you sort of put that on your list. I just want to make clear, I actually don't think that this is something that we need to add to our to-do list. I think it's something that we do naturally. In other words, you are already proclaiming the excellence of whatever it is you love most.
Whatever we love, we naturally proclaim the excellence of that thing. So we proclaim that which we love. So the question is, are we living lives that orient us toward God and toward love of God, such that we are then proclaiming his excellence?

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[28:21] Right? And we hear the word proclaim as something that we declare. We think about that as being a verbal thing. But Peter actually means that more is something we display through the way we live our daily lives.

And you know that because the rest of 1 Peter, I mean, just to summarize it, the rest of 1 Peter really applies this. Here's how to proclaim God's excellence in these various spheres of your life. So he says, here's how, or we need to proclaim God's excellence in the way we handle desire. Don't allow the good things that we enjoy to become ultimate things.
Right? That proclaims God's excellence. He says, we proclaim God's excellence in the way we respond to people who slander us. We proclaim God's excellence in the way we interact with human governments and institutions.
We proclaim his excellence through the way we approach our jobs, through the way we treat our spouses and children, the way we handle and respond to suffering. All of these things are ways, opportunities to proclaim God's excellence.
[29:24] Because the fact is, the Christian life, when it is publicly lived out, is inherently provocative. It inherently provokes questions only the gospel can answer.

And that's what we're getting at. So let's just draw all this together. What does this mean for us in Advent? Well, we want to be a church that cultivates missionary faithfulness in all of our lives. And this means something very simple and maybe distinctive about our church. We believe that ministry programs are important, and sometimes they're very necessary. So there are certain issues that we really care about, like adoption and foster care, like refugee care, like homelessness. Right? These are issues where we recognize that we need programs. But our primary ministry, the primary ministry, is you.
Is you simply living your life. Right? So when people ask me, well, what are the ministries that, you know, I've started coming to this church, and what are the ministries that you guys are involved in? I love to say, well, what are you doing?
[30:36] What are you up to right now? Tell me about your job. Help me understand what you do and where you work and what that's like. That's your ministry. Tell me about that.

Right? So our primary ministry is our people. The only reason that we need priests, the only reason that we need priests, is because all of you are priests.
And we need to set certain people aside simply for the task of supporting and enabling and equipping everybody else to be the priests that they're called to be.
This is what Peter is saying. He says, you need to understand that you are a royal priesthood. You're a royal priesthood. So you may work in banking or finance or communications or PR. You may work at home and care for kids and raise kids. You may teach. You may work at a coffee shop. You may work in the arts. You do all kinds of things. But all of those vocations are inherently priestly vocations.
[31:36] You're all priests. What does a priest do? Well, a priest is someone in the Old Testament who stands at the intersection of the heavens and the earth.

And they offer sacrifices of praise to God. That's what a priest is. And that's what it means to be a royal priesthood here and now. You may not have an altar like this, but you have a desk. You have a laptop. You have a tablet. You have a phone, work phone, right? You have the tools of your trade. And I would just humbly suggest, it may sound ridiculous to you, but those are your altars.
Those are the places, in other words, where you offer sacrifices of praise. By virtue of the fact that you know the Lord Jesus Christ and that because of that, God is present in you, every moment of your life is lived at the intersection of the heavens and the earth.
You occupy that middle space. You are the joining of both. They have come together in you and in your life. You're a royal priest. Abraham Kuyper says, Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand in agriculture, in commerce, in an industry, or his mind in the world of art and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of his God.
[33:08] He is employed in the service of his God. He has strictly to obey his God. And above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.

And listen, we glorify God simply by doing the things that he has for us to do and doing them well. That's what Dorothy Sayers says. She says, The only Christian job is a job well done.

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Right? So this is our third and final value. Missionary faithfulness. Living lives that are communal and having a faith that is communal instead of individualistic.
A faith that is deeply integrated rather than compartmentalized. And finally, a faith that is public. Where we see our jobs and our vocations as God's way of using us in his mission.
Where we are public and open about our faith simply in the way we live our daily lives. And there's a great story that comes from, Tim Keller tells this story about a woman who talked to him about how she came to faith.
[34:18] And she says, you know, I made a huge mistake in my job. And I thought I was going to get fired. And then my boss took the hit for me. And it bothered me.

And so I went to my boss and I said, Why did you take the fall? That was clearly my mistake. Why did you do that? And he wouldn't answer. And it continued to nag at her. So she comes back and asks him again and again and again.
And finally he says, okay, you want to know? And she says, yeah. And he says, well, I'm a Christian. And I believe that God has taken the fall for me. And so I believe that because of that, because of the fact that God has taken the fall for much worse things that I've done against him. That this is the way I'm supposed to be in my life with people like you. That I'm called to be this way. To love this way. And she said that event began to open her heart.
And that was the catalyst that led to her coming to faith. Now that man did not have an evangelistic strategy. He was simply having a public faith. He was integrating and openly practicing his faith.
[35:26] Not in a hit you over the head kind of way. But in a deeply resonant way. It was a reflection of who he was and the story that had come to define him. And of course we can do this with confidence.

We can commit ourselves to missionary faithfulness. Not because of our inherent faithfulness. It's not because we're any more faithful than anyone else. But because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.
Who has not sent us out on mission alone. But rather promises that through the Holy Spirit. Whom we heard about in John chapter 16. That he will be with us.
Until he comes once again to make all things new. Let's pray. Heavenly Father in light of that promise. In light of that hope. We pray that you would kindle in us and inspire us.
With this calling that we have. To be a royal priesthood. And in all of the various places. And spheres. And industries. And vocations that you've placed us.
[36:26] We pray that you would enable us to be faithful. That we would faithfully practice. Being present to you. Living before your face.

In all that we do Lord. For your glory. That we may proclaim the excellence. Of the one who has called us out of darkness. Into his marvelous light. In your son's name we pray.
Amen.

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