

# Public Witness

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[ 0 : 00 ] My novel stirring peacefully sets in the Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 2 : 59 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. As we gather for worship, let's come away from rush and hurry into the stillness of God's peace.

[ 5 : 10 ] Let's rise and sing.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

He alone will satisfy.

Hello, good morning, God, we gladly die. My name is Tommy.

[ 8 : 51 ] And I'm glad we're going to have a little bit of a prayer. We're going to have a little bit of a prayer. We're going to have a little bit of a prayer. But we're going to have a prayer. And we're going to have a prayer. We're going to have a prayer.

And we're going to have a prayer. We're going to have a prayer. We're going to have a prayer which vai to go to Dr quote, towns, we'll have a prayer for thent Sites Saint John's foot and down on path. We're Ele stell will■■■■... There sound of a prayer that we'll have I?, the first medication and there's a prayer that we're you■■, whether we're her and I didn't.

So, we'll just rooms and we're going to have Ma'am. Are you all right? bit later in the service, we'll dismiss kids ages three and four to go to children's worship, and then we'll have them return just before the baptism because we like to give our chance to kids to see and celebrate baptism with us. Let's worship the Lord together.

Blessed be God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Blessed be his kingdom now and forever.

Amen. Let's pray this prayer together. Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name through Christ our Lord.

Amen. Now hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says. You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind. This is the first and the great commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Therefore, when we hear these words and we consider the truth of our own hearts, we can only cry out, Lord have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.

What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer? There is no more for heaven now to give. He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom, my steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace. To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, for my life is only bound to His. Oh, how strange and divine I can see, all is mine, yet not I, but through Christ in me. The night is dark, but I am not forsaken.

[ 12 : 14 ] For by my side, the Savior, He will stay. I labor on, and I listen and rejoice. For in my need, His power is made. To this I hold, my shepherd will defend me.

Through the deepest valley, through the deepest valley, believe. Oh, the night has been won, and I shall overcome. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The future is short. The price it has been paid. For Jesus bled and suffered for me.

For my part, and He was raised. Jesus, I hope. My sin has been defeated. Jesus now and ever is my feet. Oh, the chains are released. I can see that I am free.

I am free of my life, but through Christ in me. With every bed, I know He will bring me home. With every bed, I long to follow Jesus. For He has said that He will bring me home.

[14:17] And day by day, I know He will bring me home. And day by day, I know He will renew me. Until I stand with joy before the throne.

Till as I hold, my hope is only Jesus. All the glory evermore to Him.

When the grace is complete. When the grace is complete. Still my lips shall repeat. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

Yet not I, but through Christ in me. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

Amen. The Lord be with you. And the Lord be with you.

[15:50] Let us pray. Let us pray. O Lord God, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And with pure hearts and minds to follow you.

The only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This time, we're going to dismiss kids ages 3 and 4, so I invite them to gather in the aisles. You'll see processional crosses in the back of the aisles. The kids can follow them down to children's worship.

Let's pray together for our children. Almighty God, Heavenly Father, you've blessed our congregation with the joy and the care of children. Give us courage, patience, and wisdom as we bring them up in the faith, that they might never know a day apart from you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Open up our ears to listen. Open up our eyes to see.

[16:57] Plant the seed of understanding. Grow it up like the tallest tree. Pull the blinds, open wide all the windows. Fill our hearts with the light of your truth.

Open up our ears to listen. Open up our eyes to see. Plant the seed of understanding. Grow it up like the tallest tree.

Open up our eyes to see. You may be seated. The New Testament lesson this morning comes from Acts chapter 21, 37 to 22, verse 16.

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, may I say something to you? And he said, do you know Greek? Do you not the Egyptian then who recently stirred up a revolt and led the 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness?

Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people. And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people.

[18:23] And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying, Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you. And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet.

And he said, I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, as of all of you are this day.

I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From then, I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon, a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And I answered, Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

[19:37] And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do. And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand of those who were with me and came into Damascus.

And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and standing by me said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very hour, I received my sight and saw him. And he said, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For you will be a witness for him to every one of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[ 20 : 42 ] Please stand for the reading of the gospel. This is the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Mark.

Glory to you, Lord Christ. And he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee in the region of Decapolis. And they brought him to a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment.

And they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears. And after spitting, touched his tongue.

And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, Atfada, that is, be opened. And his ears were opened and his tongue was released. And he spoke plainly.

And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well.

[ 21 : 46 ] He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. The gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. Please be seated.

Again, let me say welcome to all of you.

I haven't yet started taking for granted our ability to be together. And so I just love it. And I love especially seeing some of you whom I haven't seen in a very long time.

It's just an absolute delight. In light of everything that's happened over the last couple of years, I've been thinking a lot about this truth.

The truth that crisis reveals character. The crisis reveals character. You know, when your life is calm, when things are stable, when things are fairly predictable, when things are supposed to happen, happen, and things that aren't supposed to happen don't happen, you can pretend to be pretty much whoever you want.

[ 22 : 54 ] But when the crisis comes, then we begin to see more of the truth of who we really are on the inside. You know, I think the temptation is to convince ourselves, oh, well, I was just under a lot of pressure.

That's not what I'm normally like. I actually think it's probably the reverse, as much as we don't like to admit it, that under pressure in times of crisis, we actually do get to see who we really are and what we're really like.

And I think that that's certainly been true over the last year and a half, as we've faced a number of crises, not the least of which has been this COVID pandemic.

I think we've seen things about ourselves that maybe we would prefer not to see. And this is also true of the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts. This idea that when we see someone facing a crisis, we get to see some of who they really are, that is absolutely what happens in Paul's life.

We've been in this study of the Book of Acts for the entire summer, and we're coming now to this last section of the Book of Acts. It's a huge section, chapters 21 through 28, that's really all about Paul.

[ 24 : 14 ] And it's basically Paul in crisis. He's facing a series of threats. He's having to endure violence, imprisonment, the very likely possibility that he's going to die, a series of legal trials where he has to stand before leaders who have authority to end his life at any moment.

And it's here in this last section of Acts that we actually see Paul's true character emerge. And so that's what we're going to look at. We're going to look at specifically chapter 21, verse 37, through chapter 22, verse 16.

We're going to see Paul's character. What is it that emerges when he endures these crises? And then we're going to talk about our own character. Where does a character like this come from, and how do we go about cultivating this kind of character in our own lives?

So Paul's character and then our character. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the gathering of God's people that we have, both in person here and those joining online.

Lord, we thank you that in a few moments we're going to celebrate these baptisms together. What a joy that's going to be. Now we turn our attention to your word, and we pray that you would do your work through your word in each one of us this morning.

[ 25 : 35 ] In ways only you can. In the power of your spirit, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. So first of all, I want to walk through this passage a bit and say a few things about Paul's character.

Paul in this section is confronting an angry mob. And they want to kill him. And they are literally beating him. And as he confronts this angry mob, we see these three characteristics emerge in Paul's character.

One, we see tremendous courage in Paul. When Paul came into Jerusalem, as we saw last week, for those of you who were here, Paul does everything he can possibly do to make peace with the Jewish Christian converts.

He subjects himself to their purification rites, even though he doesn't believe they're necessary, which shows that Paul is willing to go the extra mile to build bridges into the lives of other people. Nevertheless, some Jews, these are not Jewish Christians, these are Jews, come down from Asia. The Bible calls them Asian Jews. And they got people worked up. They start to rile people up against Paul.

[ 26 : 48 ] They basically start saying to everybody, this man is a threat. This man is dangerous. This man needs to be stopped. It says in verse 28 of chapter 21, he's teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and the temple.

So they're basically saying Paul is here to subvert the entire Jewish way of life. He's an existential threat. He needs to be stopped. So this is the message that goes out. A riot breaks out.

People get angry. A lot of people don't even really know why they're rioting. They just see a whole bunch of people running that way, and they grab a stick and they start running that way. So it's this very confusing situation. Thousands of people rioting.

Verse 31 makes it clear though, they're going to kill him. They want his blood. They want his head. Now Claudius Lysias is the Roman tribune. That's like a high ranking military official.

And he's the one who's in charge of the Roman garrison. Could have been something like a thousand troops. And that was located right next to the temple grounds. So basically they're sitting there in the office.

[ 27 : 48 ] They look out. They see this riot breaking out. And he says, you know, troops with me. And they go out to try to quell this uprising. Right? And they see Paul and they realize that Paul is the kind of center of the disturbance.

He's the eye of the storm. And so they all go, they grab Paul, and they start to try to pull him out of this mob. But everybody's trying to get a whack in. And so they actually have to carry him to get him out of the crowd. Now you would think at this point when the soldiers show up, they put their riot shields down.

They grab Paul. They say, let's get this guy out of here and figure out what's going on. That Paul would immediately begin hurling threats and curses at these people who were beating him. Right? How dare you?

Don't you know who I am? Now you're in trouble. But that's not what Paul does. Instead, Paul stops the tribune and he asks very politely if he can address the crowd, this angry mob.

And this sheer fact that Paul doesn't say, get me out of here right now. But instead he wants a chance to speak to the crowd. Commentators agree this shows tremendous courage.

[ 28 : 56 ] His life is hanging in the balance. So there's this moment of unbelievable courage in the face of suffering, violence, and likely death. The second thing that we see in Paul is we see that he's extremely competent.

He's extremely competent. The tribune assumes that Paul is this local Egyptian rabble rouser. A guy who led a revolt about three years earlier.

He's a kind of wanted felon and authorities have been trying to find him. He's been eluding capture.

They assume that they've got him. So the tribune's probably thinking, I might get a promotion.

I just caught this guy. And so that's who they think. It's a case of mistaken identity. But then Paul turns to the tribune and he speaks to him in high Greek. Now it's hard to pick this up in the English translation, but he speaks to him in high Greek.

It's a very formal, very stylized version of Greek. It's very impressive when somebody speaks this high Greek as opposed to Koine Greek. And he addresses this tribune and he says, I'm a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia.

[ 30 : 06 ] And now when he says that, he's kind of name dropping. In, you know, Tarsus in Cilicia, that's a very well-known university town. It's an intellectual center. It's a center of high culture and a lot of wealth.

And in the ancient world, people's status was often associated with their hometown. And so when Paul says this, it's very impressive, right?

He's from a very well-known city. And then in a very respectful way, as I said, he asks permission to formally address the crowd. And then when he turns to the crowd, he makes a gesture. Now this is an orator's gesture.

We don't really have anything like this in our culture. But in the ancient world, being a professionally trained orator, public speaker, was something that people did.

And you could sort of signal to the crowd that you were trained to be a public speaker by giving an orator's gesture and people say, okay, quiet down, quiet down. This guy actually has something to say.

[ 31 : 07 ] And then later in the chapter, he actually goes on and tells the Tribune that he's a Roman citizen, which strikes fear into their hearts because they've done a lot of things to Paul that you shouldn't do to a Roman citizen because citizens have a lot of privileges that non-citizens don't have.

So in all of these ways, Paul is signaling to the Romans that he's a person of high status, that he's well-educated, that he's culturally savvy, that he's a citizen with all of the privileges that come with that.

He's essentially saying, no, no, no, no, I'm one of you. Now that's very important. I'm one of you. Because then what does he do? Then he turns to the crowd of Jews and he addresses them in a totally different way.

He switches from high Greek to Aramaic, which was the sort of street language of the Jewish diaspora. You had a lot of Jews who lived in other parts of the world.

They didn't speak Hebrew. So the common vernacular street language that allowed everybody to communicate was Aramaic. And so he's sort of speaking the language of the street to them. And then he addresses them in a very different way than he does the Romans.

[ 32 : 12 ] He addresses them brothers and fathers. That's a very Jewish thing to say. And then he immediately gives his Jewish credentials. I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are to this day.

What's he saying to the Jews? I'm one of you. Right? To the Romans, I'm one of you. To the Jews, I'm also one of you. So this shows tremendous competence in Paul.

He is literally code-switching between two diametrically opposed people groups. Oppressors, oppressed. And Paul is speaking and relating on their cultural terms to both groups.

Incredible competence. We'll come back to that. The third quality we see in Paul is compassion.

Most people, if they had just been dragged into the street, beaten, and assaulted by an angry mob, bent on their destruction, as I said earlier, they would be hurling all kinds of threats, all kinds of insults.

Paul's doing none of this. Paul wants to share his testimony. He wants to share his encounter with Jesus. And what this shows us about Paul is something that you see all through the New Testament.

[ 33 : 31 ] That Paul is willing to risk suffering. He's willing to risk his life to tell people about Jesus. To reach people who moments ago wanted his blood.

Right? So just think about this. Right? In the face of imminent danger, as Paul kind of comes into this massive crisis, could be his final moments on earth.

We get a glimpse of who Paul really is. Right? Crisis reveals Paul's character. And we see that Paul, on the inside, is a man of tremendous courage, impressive competence, and genuine compassion.

Right? So this raises the question for us, where do qualities like this come from? You know, I read this and I think, would I be this courageous, this competent, this compassionate, in this kind of crisis or not?

How do we begin to develop a character like Paul has, so that when we face crisis, similar qualities might emerge in us? And we see the answer to this question, where does he get this kind of character?

[ 34 : 43 ] We see the answer to this as Paul begins to address the crowd and he shares the story of his conversion, his encounter with Jesus. And the short answer to the question is this, the reason that Paul is able to have such courage and competence and compassion, even in the face of death, is that Paul has a Jesus-centered view of his own life.

He has a Jesus-centered view of his own life. And I want to walk through each of these characteristics and show you what I mean. Paul's courage came from a Jesus-centered view of his future.

You know, Paul tells the crowd about his early life. He says, you know, I was a strict follower of the law. I was zealous for God. And, you know, like most people, Paul had hoped and he had assumed that if he lived a good enough life, that he worked hard enough, if he proved his devotion to God, that one day he might get to be with God.

And that's essentially what most religions say. If you work hard enough, if you prove your devotion, then one day, when you die, you might get to be with your Maker. That's how Paul lived.

But then, Paul meets Jesus face-to-face on the road. And Paul does what anybody does in the Bible when they come face-to-face with the glory of God himself.

[ 36 : 04 ] He immediately falls to the ground on his face. And Paul realizes one of the great truths of the Gospel. That our hope is not to one day climb our way up to reach God.

That the great hope of the Gospel is the opposite. It's that the God came down to meet us. And as he sees Jesus, and he sees the glory of the Father shining through the face of his Son, that's the only explanation.

God has come to me. So, Paul realizes this, and then from that moment on, the thing that mattered most to Paul was being with Jesus.

Being with Jesus. It didn't matter where. It didn't matter how. It didn't matter when. He just wanted to be with Jesus. Once he saw him, that became his top priority.

So, he writes in his letter to the Philippians from prison. And another time in his life when he's facing the very likely threat of execution. And in chapter 1, he basically says, It doesn't really matter if I live or if I die.

[ 37 : 17 ] Because everything that is happening to me. The fact that I'm in prison, and people are making fun of me and mocking me, and false teachers are coming in to try to replace me. If the gospel is being preached, that's all I care about.

Because I get to be with Jesus. And he goes on to say, you know, I can't decide if I want to go on living or if I want to die. Now, he's not being suicidal. What he's saying is this.

You know, if I live, I get to go on talking about Jesus, and that's amazing. And I know Jesus will be with me in that. But if I die, I actually get to see Jesus again. Face to face. I get to be with him for eternity.

He says, I'm honestly kind of divided on this. Because that's what his priority was. The thing that we need to see with regard to courage is death no longer has any hold over Paul. The gospel says that God has come to us in the flesh, and that if you give your life to Jesus, he's going to be with you always.

And what that means is that death itself simply becomes a gateway into the presence of Jesus. And you know, I've lost three people who were people I knew, friends, family, people who are close to me.

[ 38 : 33 ] And I've been thinking a lot about death. And I've been thinking about, over these last few weeks, these three deaths, and I've been thinking a lot about what death is for the Christian who belongs to Jesus.

And it's this gateway into the presence of our Lord. So take a moment and imagine, what would your life look like if you believed that on a deep down, flesh and blood, DNA kind of level?

You know, there are so many choices that we make in our lives, if you're, if, I think if we're honest, if you're anything like me, there are so many choices that I make that are probably motivated primarily by self-preservation.

I'm avoiding discomfort. I'm avoiding inconvenience. I'm avoiding suffering. Certainly, I'm avoiding death. Imagine how different your life would be if you had a Jesus-centered view of your future.

I'll tell you this before we move on. The most dangerous person there is, is the person who has reckoned with their own death.

[ 39 : 36 ] Because that person can do anything. That person will do anything. So this is the first thing, a Jesus-centered view of our future. That's what gives rise to that kind of courage we see in Paul.

Now, I say, well, where did this competence come from? And Paul's competence came from a Jesus-centered view of his resources.

And I want to help you understand what I mean by that. Paul basically says to this crowd that in his early years, his life was all about him. You know, he was full of zeal. He was full of ambition. He was the rising star.

He was on track to be among the greatest of the Pharisees. He had a fine pedigree. He was impressive on every level. But then he meets Jesus. Right? And all he can say to Jesus, what shall I do, Lord?

Everything I thought my life was about is now gone. Right? Now you tell me what to do. What shall I do, Lord? And then Jesus gives him a new purpose for his life.

[ 40 : 40 ] And he gives this to him through Ananias and the words of Ananias. Paul's aim up to that point had been to be the best Pharisee he could be. To blow everybody else away.

He was like an Enneagram 3 probably. I don't know. And just wanted to achieve. Right? And then he meets Jesus and he gets a new mission for his life. Ananias says, The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear a voice from his mouth.

For you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. So Jesus says, here's the aim of your life. You're going to be my witness.

And I'm going to send you to the Gentile world. You're going to be a Jew and I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. Paul gets the real purpose of his life. And then once Paul knows the purpose of his life, it begins to transform the way he makes sense of his life up to that point.

So think about this. Paul's hometown. Paul's family. Paul's education. His culture. His ethnicity. His language. His social class.

[ 41 : 48 ] His money. His privilege. He begins to see all of these things as resources to be used in so many ways. Be used in service of the mission that Jesus had given him. Right?

He begins to realize, oh, it made sense why I was born there. It makes sense why I speak multiple languages. It makes sense why I might be able to be a citizen. It makes sense why all of these. I had the education I had.

I had the. You know, he begins to see all. God was equipping me to do the thing that he put me here to do. To be a witness to the Gentiles about Jesus. To be a gateway between two worlds.

The world of the Jewish diaspora and the world of the Gentiles, particularly the Roman occupiers.

For the sake of the gospel. Now, have you ever heard the old saying, God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called?

You know, it's kind of a meme that gets passed around. But that's what comes to mind as we think about this. You know, God had a purpose in mind for Paul.

[ 42 : 50 ] Paul didn't know that purpose until he was an adult. But everything that God did in Paul's life, all of those things weren't random. They actually became resources that Paul needed to fulfill that purpose.

And when he understood the aim of his life, he could then begin to make sense of the course his life had taken up to that point. Right? And the reason this is important is the same thing is true for every single person in this room.

For every single person in this room. You know, your purpose may not be Paul's purpose to be a witness to the Gentiles. Right? As a Jew going to the Romans. Right? Probably not your purpose.

But I guarantee you there are things that God put you on this earth to do.

Reasons that you are here. Things that God maybe can only do through you. And God has given you this life, the one that you have lived up to this point, in order to give you the resources you need to fulfill that purpose.

If you go out and try to fulfill Paul's purpose, you might not succeed. So the key is understanding why am I here? What is God calling me to do? What is my vocation? And then how has my life prepared me to do what God has called me to do?

[ 44 : 04 ] Right? Paul actually says in Acts chapter 17, a few chapters ago, that God determines allotted periods and the boundaries of our dwelling places. So God chose your birthplace. God chose your mom and your dad.

He chose your body. He chose your temperament. He chose your culture and your race and your ethnicity, the languages that you speak, your social class. Right?

Are you educated or uneducated? Do you have wealth? Do you not have wealth? And you're poor, right? Whatever circumstances you have grown up in, God has allotted those things. And they're connected to the purpose that God has in mind for you.

These are resources that God has given you. Right? Sometimes we look at our life and some people sort of ignore the fact that they have privilege. They say, well, I've done all this myself. Or they want to go out and use the things like that to sort of benefit themselves even at other people's expense. Right? They resent their family. They resent their upbringing. And they wish like crazy.

[ 45 : 06 ] They feel like God made huge mistakes. And they say, well, why couldn't I have lived her life? Why couldn't I have lived his life? Why did I have to live my life? And then other people sort of, if they have wealth, if they have privilege and they're Christians, they feel like the only thing they can do with that is just self-flagellate.

Right? Talk about how guilty they feel about it. It's like, no, none of these things recognize that God doesn't make mistakes.

That God had reasons in mind why he gave you the life that he gave you. And I guarantee you they're connected to the reason that you're here. And the purpose that God has in mind for you. So instead of ignoring or taking advantage of or taking for granted or resenting these things about ourselves, stop and ask God, what purpose did you have in mind for me when you gave me the life that you gave me?

How do these things become resources to fulfill your will for my life? Right? So that's how Paul's competence is to be understood. Once he understood the aim of his life, he could begin to make sense of the course of his life.

And then the third characteristic in Paul is his compassion. And Paul's compassion came from a Jesus-centered view of himself and his own sin.

[ 46 : 30 ] A Jesus-centered view of himself and his own sin. One of the pillars of the Jewish worldview was the idea that Jews were clean before God, but Gentiles were unclean and defiled.

So whenever a Gentile, God-fearer, wanted to come in and become Jewish, the Gentile had to be washed. They had to be baptized.

Because they were unclean. But Jews didn't need to be baptized because Jews were already clean. They were God's chosen people. That was a cornerstone of the Jewish worldview.

But Paul says, you know, I was not just a Jew. I was the Jew. He basically says, I was the Jew of Jews. I was the archetype. All Jews wanted to be me.

Right? And he says, you know, I was the Jew of Jews. And yet I also had to be baptized. I met Jesus. Once I saw Jesus, I realized, I'm no more clean than anyone.

[ 47 : 35 ] Right? Compared to this glory, compared to this radiance, I'm in filthy rags. Right? And so in verse 16, he says, Ananias then said to me, be baptized and wash your sins away.

This would have been scandalous to his Jewish audience. And I think this is partly why they then react so violently. Right? In other words, Paul is saying, you know, here's what I had to realize. And he writes about this in places like Romans 1 and 2. Romans 1, 2, and 3. He says, you know, I realized actually there's no difference between Jews and Gentiles. I realized that we're all unclean. We're all defiled. And that the only way to become clean is to call on the name of Jesus and be baptized in his name. I need to be washed. But in his name.

And then I'll be clean. Because of his grace and the blood of the cross. See, I think most of us tend either towards superiority or inferiority.

[ 48 : 36 ] You know, most of us sort of tend to live life assuming that on balance, I'm probably better than most people. Now, you'd never admit that. But I think there are some people that sort of live that way.

On balance, I'm probably living a better life than most people. There are other people who have the exact opposite tendency. They always compare themselves to other people unfavorably. She's so much prettier. He's so much stronger.

He's so much better looking. She's so much more successful. Right? They're so much smarter. And you're always focusing on the ways that you fall short. And you know, honestly, both are equally self-focused.

Both are equally selfish. Both are equally self-absorbed. And if you're focusing either on your superiority or your inferiority, you're not really going to be capable of genuine compassion. Why? Because compassion requires that you focus on someone else. Right? I remember this thing. I heard it and I love it. You know, it says when you're in your 20s, you worry what everybody's thinking about you.

[ 49 : 35 ] When you're in your 40s, you stop caring what people are thinking. And when you're in your 60s, you realize nobody was ever thinking about you. They were only ever thinking about themselves. And I love that because it's really true. Right?

If you're focusing on how you rank compared to other people, you're not going to really ever think about them. You're only thinking about them through the lens of yourself. But the gospel is profoundly equalizing.

Because on the one hand, it says to the people who think they're superior, no, you're not. How dare you think that? We are all unclean. We are all defiled.

We all in the presence of Jesus are covered in filthy rags. How dare you think yourself any better than anyone? But then it says to the people who think that they are inferior, oh, no, you're not.

How dare you think that? How dare you think that you are any less than any other image bearer?

How dare you think that you're any less than any other human being for which Jesus gave his life to save?

[ 50 : 36 ] How dare you? How dare you call God a liar when he says that you are of infinite value to him? you to him. So it's this profoundly equalizing truth that recalibrates the way we see ourselves and other people. And that sets us free to simply stop thinking about ourselves and to begin to actually notice and see and cultivate compassion for other people. No one's any better than you, no one's any worse than you. We're all sinners, we're all born slaves to sin, and only by the unmerited grace of Jesus do any of us get set free. So if you want character like Paul, if you want to know that you're the kind of person who when you face crisis, when the bottom drops out in your life, you're going to have these kind of characteristics. You're going to be the person who has courage and the person who has a kind of unique competence that fits the situations that God puts you in, that you know that you're going to be a person who responds with compassion.

Right? It begins with having a Jesus-centered view of your life. A Jesus-centered view of your life is the seedbed from which this kind of character emerges. To put a little bit more of a point on it, your life is not about you. And until we realize that, very little in our lives is going to make sense. It's not about us, it's about Jesus. And this is why it is so vital for us to gather together and worship each week, because we come together to sing and to pray and to read scripture and to confess the creeds and to share in the sacraments. Days like today we get to do both.

The focus of all of this is on that message. All of these things are ways that we recenter ourselves away from ourselves and to Jesus Christ. So that's why it's important that we gather. And the more that we focus on him, the more we focus on Jesus, the more truly human we actually become. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the power of your spirit. Lord, we pray for your word to do your work in us. That those who are feeling timid and afraid and beset and dominated by fear and anxiety, that in the name of Jesus Christ you would give them courage.

Those who are feeling bitter, angry, resentful, an unwillingness to forgive, that you would give them the compassion of Jesus Christ. And that those who are struggling, feeling like they don't know what their life is about, they don't know what the aim of their life is, they don't know how to make sense of their experiences of their childhood, that you would give them a vision of why they're here, that they would know their purpose, and that they would begin to make sense of their lives in light of why you've put them on this earth. We pray that in all these ways, Lord, you would make us into a people who glorify you, who resemble you, and who are salt and light in this world. For your name's sake, in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

[ 53 : 58 ] Let's now ask God to give us a Jesus-centered vision by singing this prayer together. Let's stand.

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart. Not be all else's vision.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word.

I ever with thee, and thou with me, Lord. Thou my great Father, I thy true Son. Thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one. Riches I heed not, nor man empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always.

Thou and thou only first in my heart. High King of heaven, my treasure thou art. High King of heaven, my victory one. May I reach heaven's joys, O bright and sun. Heart of my own heart, whatever befall.

[ 56 : 24 ] Still be my vision, O ruler of all. You may be seated.

Now, as promised, we have an opportunity to celebrate these baptisms together. So I'd like to ask the parents and godparents and children being baptized, if you could gather here on the floor in front of the Lord's table across here so people can see you.

I love opportunities to celebrate baptism, to welcome people into our church family, to remember that all of these symbols throughout Scripture, the flood and Noah being preserved through the flood, the parting of the sea and God's people passing through on dry ground, that all of these symbols point us to what we're now going to celebrate together. This is really the fulfillment of all of those things.

And so what I'm going to do, moms, dads, grandparents, or parents, godparents, whoever's up here, I'm going to ask you to answer a series of questions and make a series of professions of faith on behalf of your children until they're old enough to do so for themselves. And then one at a time, we're going to have each family come up here when it's actually time to do the baptism.

Dearly beloved, Scripture teaches that we are all dead in our sins and trespasses, but by grace we may be saved through faith. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, said, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And he commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[ 58 : 19 ] Here we ask our Heavenly Father that these candidates, being baptized with water, may be filled with the Holy Spirit, born again, and received into the church as living members of Christ's body.

Therefore, I urge you to call upon God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his abundant mercy he will grant to these candidates that which by nature they cannot have. The candidates for holy baptism will now be presented.

Excellent.

Excellent. Today on behalf of these children, you shall make vows to renounce the devil and all his works and to trust God wholeheartedly and to serve him faithfully. It is your task to see that this child is taught as soon as he is able to learn the meaning of all of these vows and of the faith that you will profess as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. They must come to put their faith in Jesus Christ and learn the creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and all other things that a Christian ought to know, believe, and do for the welfare of their souls.

When they have embraced all these, they are to come to the bishop to be confirmed, that they may publicly claim the faith for their own and be further strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve Christ and his kingdom. Are you willing and ready to undertake this?

[ 60 : 10 ] Now I'm going to ask you to make a series of renunciations on behalf of these candidates. Do you renounce the devil and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? Do you renounce the empty promises and deadly deceits of this world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? Do you renounce the sinful desires of the flesh that draw you from the love of God? Almighty God, deliver you from the powers of darkness and evil and lead you into the light and obedience of the kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Now do you turn to Jesus Christ and confess him as your Lord and Savior? Do you joyfully receive the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? Will you obediently keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in them all the days of your life? Now I'm going to ask all of you to take a vow. And this is something we take seriously in our church, that we believe that it's our collective responsibility to raise these kids in the faith, to do all we can to support and nurture their relationship with Jesus. If you agree with what I'm about to say, answer we will.

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these children in their life in Christ?

We will. Excellent. Now let's join together with these candidates and proclaim our faith using the words of the ancient baptismal confession, the Apostles' Creed. I invite you to please stand.

Do you believe and trust in God the Father? I do. I believe in God the Father, I believe, and here I am.

Do you believe and trust in Jesus Christ? I do. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son and our Lord. He was the seed of the Holy Spirit, the born and the virgin here. He suffered and not just died. The Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the life of God and the Holy Spirit. He descended into heaven. On the third day he rose again, He descended into heaven, and he received the right hand of the Father. He was the only man who was the living in the dead.

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit? I do. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the cross.

[ 62 : 41 ] Amen. Let's now pray for these candidates who are to receive the sacrament of baptism. After each petition, you may respond by saying, We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That these children may come to confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That all these candidates may continue in the Apostles' teaching and the fellowship and the breaking of bread and the prayers.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That they may walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called, ever growing in faith and all heavenly virtues. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That they may persevere in resisting evil and whenever they fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That they may proclaim by word and deed the good news of God in Christ Jesus to a lost and broken world.

We beseech you to hear us, good Lord. That as living members of the body of Christ, they may grow up in every way into him who is the head. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

[ 63 : 48 ] That looking to Jesus, they may run with endurance the race set before them and at the last receive the unfading crown of glory. We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting Father, in your great mercy you saved Noah and his family in the ark from the destruction of the flood, prefiguring the sacrament of holy baptism.

Look mercifully upon these, your servants. Wash and sanctify them through your Holy Spirit, that they may be delivered from destruction and received into the ark of Christ's church, being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in love.

They may pass through the turbulent floods of this troublesome world and come into the land of everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. You may be, actually remain standing for a moment, and then you may be seated.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts.

[ 64 : 54 ] Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give Him thanks and praise. We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.

Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John in the river Jordan when the Holy Spirit descended upon him as a dove.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in His death. By it we share in His resurrection. Through it we are made regenerate by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into His fellowship those who come to Him in faith, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now, Father, sanctify this water, and by the power of your Holy Spirit, may all who are baptized here be cleansed from sin, born again, and continue forever faithful in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.

To Him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen. Now I invite the congregation to be seated and the first family to join me up here.

[ 66 : 21 ] That's great. Amen.

Hello. Hello. How are you? Oh, Jesus, I pray that you would heal this finger. I pray that you would help it to feel better and take away all the pain.

Come here. Come here. I know. I know. Scary man with a mask. You want to just hold her? Let's bring her over here. Name this child.

Lillian Kathleen Netzel Hall. Lillian Kathleen Netzel Hall, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. Amen. Good job.

[ 67 : 42 ] Hey. Hey. Hey. All right.

The Lairds. oh yes there we go here I've got her there here you know we love you we are all crazy about you because you're absolutely beautiful but the one who loves you the most is Jesus it's actually because of his love that we baptize you now y'all come over here name this child Eve Elizabeth Laird I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever and ever amen here here there we go there you go good all right hey hey hey beautiful hey you guys come over here so everybody can see you also are here and you are greatly loved the one who loves you the most is Jesus and it's because of the love of Jesus that we're going to baptize you you're going to make lots of promises and you're probably going to break most of them if you're anything like me but Jesus never breaks his promises and when Jesus loves you and he promises to be with you he will always keep that promise name this child

Alexander Francis Haig Alexander Francis Haig I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and you are marked as Christ's own forever and ever Amen There you go Hey Hey

Hey cutie say hi to everybody hi yeah we love you very much but Jesus loves you the most and it's because of Jesus that you're here today name this child Polly Adair Sayo Polly Adair Sayo I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and you are marked as Christ's own forever and ever Amen Here you go Okay Alright Heavenly Father we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin received them as your own children by adoption made them members of your Holy Church and raised them to new life in grace sustain them O Lord in your Holy Spirit that they may enjoy everlasting salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen Now we're going to have a presentation of gifts that each of our newly baptized members receives We are so excited and glad to welcome these newly baptized children into our family We have a few gifts from our family ministries and also from our congregation as a whole The first is a baptism certificate We also provide a book that explains baptism at a level appropriate to a child's age and then finally a baptism candle that can be lit on the anniversary of your child's baptism each year So now we're going to do something that's a tradition in our church and that is to mark this moment the beginning of their education as Christians by singing a song to them Instead of singing Jesus Loves Me we're going to sing Jesus Loves You And we're going to go through it a couple of times because we're actually going to recess out of the sanctuary and then we're going to come back in and that marks their formal entry into the family of God So as we recess and precess, let's sing together

[ 73 : 44 ] Jesus loves you this time Jesus loves you this time So as we guest leaders here Jesus loves you this time Jesus loves you this time Jesus loves you this time Jesus loves you this time He is strong

Yes, Jesus loves you Yes, Jesus loves you Yes, Jesus loves you The Bible tells me so Let's say these words together and welcome the newly baptized.

We receive you into the fellowship of the church, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in the royal priesthood of all of his people.

I invite everybody to stand. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you. Let us greet one another with the peace of Christ and let's give thanks for these new members of our family.

Praise the Lord. Now please greet one another with the peace of Christ. Thank you.

[ 76 : 26 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. All right.

If you could please be seated. Once again, we wanted to welcome you to our church, the Church of the Advent. And we know we have many newcomers today for the baptisms and other newcomers as well.

So thanks for worshiping with us. If you would like some more information about our church and just let us know that you're here, you can fill out our digital welcome card. And you can text the word connect to the number that you see on the screen.

We also have it on our homepage of our website at the bottom. You can click on there and fill it out as well. But that just gives us a chance to send you some information and find ways to get you connected to our church. So thanks for being with us this morning.

Just a few announcements. First of all, children's ministry. This week is the last week of our summer programming. So that's we've also we've had nursery for two and under and preschool worship and play for threes and fours.

[ 77 : 24 ] We are planning to launch our full fall in-person programming for nursery through eighth grade next week. And so just a reminder that if your child plans to participate even occasionally this fall, then we would ask that you register them so that we can plan ahead for that.

Registration for our fall core groups is open. And you can view all of these on our website under the tab connect. And I wanted to encourage you. I know if you're new, this is a great way to just plug in immediately and get to know people.

I know for some people you might feel like, you know, I'm really busy. It's hard to get involved. But I would just encourage you to look at the list. We have, of course, groups that meet every week in person. But we also have groups that meet online, different frequencies every other week, once a month.

Groups for men, for women. So just check it out and see if there might be a group that would work for you. We'd really encourage you to get involved in a core group this fall. Core groups are going to begin meeting after Labor Day. So after next week.

Some groups have caps. And so be sure to, if you want to sign up for one, sign up soon. I'd like to invite up a couple of core group leaders who are going to be sharing. Sarah Das, Chris, and Robert. They are going to be sharing about their groups specifically.

[ 78 : 34 ] Hey, y'all. I just wanted to share about the women's core group. I did this group last year. It was a real blessing and a gift to me at a time when I was feeling pretty isolated and lonely.

So we are going to meet Wednesday nights. We'll do Compline. It will be in Darlene Malden's beautiful backyard in Riverdale. I really hope you'll join us. Yeah. Hope to see you there.

Hi there. I'm Chris Holby. This is Robert Gunter. We'll be leading the men's core group. This is a new group.

It's inspired by some men that have been leading the men's ministry, as well as some other guys at Advent who have been looking for a group focused on male fellowship for some time.

I should say this group is open to all adult men, my own children who won't go to bed, notwithstanding, and newbies, oldies, everybody at Advent, and also men outside of Advent.

[ 79 : 37 ] We'd like it to be an open door. We'll meet for food, discussion of the word, Tommy's sermons, really whatever we feel like discussing, and prayer.

So I hope you'll join us. I'll pass it right. And then a few quick logistics. We'll be at the Holby's house in Edgewood on their back patio. It will be the first and third Wednesdays of every month.

So the 15th, not this Wednesday, but the next will be our first meeting. I think 7:30, we'll have food provided, about 45 minutes or so of that, and then the discussion afterwards. And if you have questions, myself, Chris, Chad McCracken, Josh Britton, Ben Evans, Jeff Simpson, Mike Preston are guys you can go to for more info.

And we'll be out in front of the church by the benches after the service to answer any questions.

Thanks. All right. Thanks so much, Serdas, Chris, Robert. On Friday, we sent out a Rector's Video update announcing an event that's coming up that we are going to be co-hosting with the Trinity Forum.

Those of you who have been around, we've co-hosted events in the past. COVID put a little bit of a pause on that, but we have a grant and are going to be co-hosting and then putting on events with follow-up dinner discussions of those events.

[ 80 : 54 ] And so we have an event coming up. It's this coming Friday at 1:30. It's online, and it is on the topic of transhumanism. So these are events that kind of are around subjects of science and faith.

So if you did not know what transhumanism is and you had to look that up, then you're not the only one. So this is exploring the question of artificial inheritance, artificial intelligence, and how this shapes our vision of what it means to be human.

And so we have a couple, a theologian and a scientist who will be discussing that on Friday. And then there will be a follow-up dinner discussion on Sunday night at the Tacoma Busboys and Poets. We have a cap of 30 for that, but Pastor Tommy will be leading that discussion and talking about this event.

So if you can't participate on Friday, it will be recorded and put out the next day. So as long as you can watch it in advance, you could participate in that dinner discussion. And then this is just also a great opportunity.

If you know people who might not come to church but might be interested in talking about science and faith and are exploring that, then this would be a great thing to invite them to as well. Now we have an opportunity just to recognize a couple of people before we come to the Lord's table.

[ 82 : 00 ] We've got a, there's a few people that we just need to, we need to mark that they were here and mark how God has used them in our community. The first is Pastor Anwar, who if you've been around any this summer, you know, you know what Anwar has meant to us.

He is a pastor at Tacoma Park, Seventh-day Adventist Church, our wonderful friends here. When we knew the Beelmans were going to be going on sabbatical, we wanted someone who could come in and really just sort of take the lead and basically be an interim worship pastor for the summer. And we asked Anwar and praise the Lord, he said yes. And I know I speak for everybody when I say it's just been an absolute tremendous joy to serve with you, to worship under your leadership. All of the time that we've gotten to spend before service, just sort of setting up, getting to know each other, just for me personally, has just been extraordinarily rich. And I think he's brought a lot to our community.

And he says that he'll be willing to come back from time to time. And there might be some ways that we do, that we swap Dan and Anwar, that we hope still to bring in Pastor Nixon to preach.

[ 83 : 15 ] And I hope for an opportunity maybe to go and greet their people with God's word as well. So we're looking forward to future opportunities for collaboration. But I just want to join together and give thanks for Anwar and all of the blessings that he has been.

Next, I'd love to invite Luke and Jill to join me up here. You know, D.C. being what it is, we have people coming and going on a pretty regular basis. And honestly, we don't take time in the service to recognize a lot of people when they leave.

Not because we don't love them, but simply because if we did that, we would be doing it every week all the time. But every now and then, we sort of break out of the norm. And we want to just take a moment to mark when certain people leave.

And typically, these are people who have just been very instrumental. Often people who have been working behind the scenes. People who do a lot to make our church work. But maybe you don't see them because they're not up front often.

And these are some of our most important people because they're really the key to our church operating. And to us being able to come together and worship the way we have. You know, Luke and Jill have been around Advent for five years.

[ 84 : 29 ] They've led several core groups together. Luke jumped in and started running sound. And has since been serving as our production ministry head. Which is a high pressure role.

Let me tell you. It takes a certain kind of person to be able to do that. He's been doing that for almost three years. I'm not sure what the average lifespan of somebody in that role is. But he's been doing it for three years.

Which is pretty amazing. He's also been our resident statistician. So he looks at all of our numbers. And helps us predict what current and future giving trends might look like.

Which is very important as we on the parish council. Our planning, spending, and budgets for the coming years. Jill has served on our prayer team.

Leading us in the prayers of the people. She's led us in the reading of scripture. On the Eucharistic prayer ministry team. And the Shemiks are now headed to Charlottesville. Where Luke's going to be doing a postdoc in the Democratic Statecraft Lab at UVA.

[ 85 : 30 ] Jill's going to continue working with IU admissions. So she will be passing through D.C. from time to time. So we will hopefully see you here and there when you're visiting schools in the DMV area.

They obviously, these are huge shoes to fill. And we're praying now for who might step up into the very important role that they have served in our church. But I just want to take a moment to give thanks to God for these amazing people.

And to bless them on their journey. So let's give thanks. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And I just want to pray.

If we could just join together and pray for this transition. Lord, we thank you. I'm reminded how you say in scripture. You say in Ephesians 4 that Jesus sets people free from captivity.

And that he gives them as gifts to the church. That the spoils of war are actually people who have been set free from sin and death. Whom you give to your church as gifts to do what only they can

do.

[ 86 : 35 ] Lord, and I think about the way that Jill and Luke have served. Often selflessly, Lord. Often at great sacrifice to themselves. And often behind the scenes, Lord.

In ways that have really been central to the life of our church. I ask that you would bless them now as they transition to Charlottesville. As Luke starts this new program, Lord. I pray that you would provide them a wonderful place to live.

That you would provide community. That you would provide them a church to worship in. That you would provide them friends. That you would provide them everything they need, Lord, for this next chapter of their life. I ask that you would bless them.

Provide for them. And continue to lead them in all that they do. And I ask this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Alright, another thank you.

This is our last Sunday doing our summer programming with our kids. Ages four and under. And I just want to say how thankful we are for the volunteers who made this possible.

[ 87 : 41 ] You know, COVID was a time when it was very easy just to turn inward and to go into survival mode. And there were some people who really were willing to step up and say, Whatever you guys need, we're here.

We will do it. We will serve. We will make it happen. And with our kids, that was particularly important. We had about 30 volunteers who served in nursery and in preschool worship and play in this last season of children's ministry.

And that included five student volunteers. So, if you're one of those 30, could you please just stand where you are? If you served with our kids during this last season. There we go.

There's some of them. Stand up. Now, they stepped up at a point of transition to lead and to serve children who were truly learning to be in church together.

A lot of these kids had never been to church before. Our nursery volunteers had to engage and comfort extra fussy babies and toddlers.

[ 88 : 45 ] And our preschool volunteers were able to create a safe and welcoming and joyful space outside for our three- and four-year-olds to worship together for the first time since they were babies.

And so, I'm just, I'm absolutely staggered anytime I see people step up and serve that way. I mean, that is the church being the church. And I just want to say an extra special thank you.

And if these people would please stand, should go out to Megan Moore, Alison Manuel, Sarados Holby, and Audrey Adams, who really stepped up with creativity and leadership.

So, give thanks for them. So, this posture of gratitude is very appropriate.

We're about to come to the Lord's table. And it's appropriate that we take a moment and reflect on the blessings of God in our lives. And for those who would like to give an offering as an act of worship, there are several ways that you can do that.

[ 89 : 41 ] Three of them are listed on the screen behind me. And then for those of us who are here in person, you can give an offering by coming up and putting an offering in the offering boxes as you come up to receive the Lord's Supper.

At this time, we're going to come down and we're going to celebrate at this table. So, I'm going to say farewell to our people who are joining in via live stream. I ask God's blessing and protection and provision on your life.

And we look forward to seeing you or joining with you virtually again next week. Now, as we prepare to come to the Lord's table, I want to make it clear that this is not the table of Church of the Advent.

This is...