

19th Sunday after Trinity 2024

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Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Father, as always, our perennial prayer is that we would be those that read your word and submit to it, live underneath it, not to manipulate it, to say something it doesn't say, to fit our comfortability.

And this morning, Lord, it's no different. We pray that prayer. And Lord, we also pray that as we explore Acts 14 and ask the question, what is authentic Christianity, Lord, that you would help both to correct misunderstandings, but also to bolster and strengthen our faith.

And Lord, we pray all of this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. One of the things that my parents did for my brother and I is that we're very thankful for was start us working at a very young age.

We, my mom had a business and we both wore a sandwich board up and down the main drag of our town with so much embarrassment, but whatever, \$5 an hour from cash in your pocket, you can get you over some embarrassment awfully quick.

But it started with the next job and the next job anyways. As we, as, as we made money, my parents very wisely, now that I'm a parent, said, listen, if you want stuff, you buy it. It's on you.

[1 : 39] We're not buying you anything. Food, of course, shelter, of course, even some clothes. But if you want something, it's on you. So I get to high school. I want to play basketball, but I want to look the part as well.

So I find a pair of, of basketball shoes on eBay. And this is like early eBay. I asked my parents if they could use a credit card.

I would pay them back. And I got these, I don't know, I think they were like Jordan sixes or something, but they, they match our school colors. They look great. And then they arrived in the mail and I paid way more than I wanted to, but whatever.

Look good, feel good, do good. And the logo for Michael Jordan, it's called the Jump Man, had a much bigger head than what it ought to have had.

And I think it might have even been like a mirror image. So it was backwards. I put on the shoes and instantly they cramped my feet. I think I lost a toenail. I was in denial.

[2 : 41] I have, I have a pair of Jordans. I'm feeling good about life until I bring them to school and I get torched because I have fake Nikes. I bring up this story just to illustrate how there is a huge difference between something that is authentic and something that is fake.

And the fake could even look really good. Fake things now are very hard to distinguish between real things. There's a giant, massive online market for fake items.

And to tell the difference between real and fake, you have to go to the source, the authentic source, whatever that company is, and basically see what they have created.

See their authentic product. And then you can look at the fake one. You can see the differences.

Authentic Christianity is found in the Acts of the Apostles.

We need to be careful, and I've said this in the past, we need to be careful that as we read Acts, we don't read every story, every speech, every action of the Apostles as prescriptive in how to run the church or how to live out the faith.

[4 : 02] Some of it is descriptive. But by and large, you can sit down over a couple days, read through Acts, and get a pretty good idea of what the Christian faith is about.

And a core aspect of the authentic Christian faith is that it is costly. It is not an easy ride. It is not easy street. It is costly.

I mean, there are other forms of Christianity that aren't costly. Forms of Christianity that can be kind of tacked on to existing spiritual beliefs. Christianity that ends up looking a lot like other spiritual beliefs.

Christianity that is really light on the Bible. Light on the Old Testament. Light on Jesus. Light on morality. Light on morality. The type of Christianity like this is not an authentic Christianity. It's a fake Christianity. It's not authentic. Because it is way too easy. And it doesn't cost. I think this is both a beautiful reality and a difficult reality for us.

[5 : 14] Because on one hand, we live in a culture that values authenticity. However we want to define it, by and large, we would still say, we are people that value authentic things and authentic people.

Integral things. Integral people. Integral people. One philosopher calls what we live in today as the age of authenticity. But it's also difficult because we live in an age of hyper-individualism.

Where we can decide our own path. Dr. Steve Griffin, he's in the new year, God willing, he's going to lead us in a Sunday morning catechism, distilling a four-part sermon series he did.

This past summer in the downtown church. And he said one of the things that marks this type of spirituality, this hyper-individualistic spirituality, is that the journey is the one we make it.

It is less about the destination, but the path that we tread. This is what matters the most. So on one hand, we have this deep desire for authenticity.

[6 : 26] But on the other hand, we don't want to be told what to do. We want to chart our own path. We want to curate our own life. And these two things are exclusive to one another.

So we're going to jump into Acts 14 this morning. And we're going to continue reading about the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. We will see in this story what authentic Christianity is and what it does.

I've broken up the text into three different points. Hopefully this helps us to understand and organize our thoughts as we read through it. The first thing Acts chapter 14 will help us to understand is that authentic Christianity is disruptive.

It disrupts existing belief structures. The second thing is that it brings freedom. But freedom from vain pursuits.

We'll see that this is called idolatry later on in the chapter. And then finally, like I've mentioned before, authentic Christianity is costly, but incredibly meaningful and joyful.

[7 : 36] If you have a Acts scripture journal, you can turn with me to page 82. And we will begin looking at Acts 14.

And if you haven't got one, if you want to grab one, go grab one. You're not going to interrupt me. You can just stand up and grab one from the welcome table at any time. So just a bit of a background.

Our missionaries journey up to Iconium. So if you remember, they went from Antioch, which there's many different Antiochs, so it can get confusing, but this is Antioch, kind of in the southeast.

They sail up to Cyprus. They spend time in Cyprus. And then they sail a bit north into what is Galatia, what is modern-day Turkey now. And they're doing a bit of a tour, so to speak.

They journey up now to Iconium. Interestingly, Iconium is a Greek city in the Roman Empire. So Rome is Latin, but there's still Greek pockets within the Roman Empire.

[8 : 40] And this Iconium is an agricultural and commercial hub. Today it still exists. And it's not some kind of dinky town. It is the sixth largest city in Turkey.

And it's known as Kanye. I'm sure I'm not saying it properly. But it has some 2.5 million people. It's a huge place. Similarly, it's an economic hub in the modern-day country of Turkey.

As a bit of a background, let's jump into it. We'll look just at verse 1, and then we'll pause. Now at Iconium, they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.

Actually, we'll read verse 2 as well. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. That is, Paul and Barnabas and the other believers. If you remember last week, Paul said in no uncertain terms that the mission of God is turning away from the Jews.

It's going to the Gentiles, and yet we find that the missionaries continue to proclaim the gospel to both Jews and Greeks. They're proclaiming the gospel message, and they're doing it persuasively, both in terms of communicating in a clear way, but also in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 04] This is what it is implied here in verses 1 and 2. With a proclamation of the gospel, people believe.

Just pause really quick here. The term here for belief is not something to quickly gloss over or to define it in modern-day terms.

Belief in verse 1 is referring to those that come to faith, and it carries with it a changing of a worldview, a different way of thinking.

It carries with them not this trivial gathering of knowledge about the gospel, but rather that they entrust themselves to a new reality. True belief, as we see in the epistle that St. James wrote, that true faith changes us.

It means that we do good works. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit. We think differently. We begin to think differently. We entrust ourselves to the one true God and his rule and reign over our lives.

[11 : 18] Because this is what this belief is talking to. It's an active belief. It's an active entrusting ourselves to the one true God. As they heard the gospel message, it became real to them, and therefore it required them to shift their allegiances from their previously held belief systems.

So again, we see that belief here. It's not just described as the gathering of knowledge, although it certainly is that.

But it is the gathering of knowledge that points us to God himself, compelling us to entrust ourselves to him, to bend a knee to his kingship, and our allegiances, our values, our desires begin to shift and change.

Interesting. The interesting thing here with... Sorry, pause right there.

Look with me again at verse 2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against their brothers. What's interesting, so in chapter, or in verse 1, the disciples, or the apostles, proclaim the gospel.

[12 : 35] People believe. We've defined what that belief looks like. But then it says that the unbelieving Jews, the unbelieving Jews, seek to poison the minds of those that have come to faith.

In the original language, I'm no Greek scholar. In the original language, however, there's an interesting bit here, because the language used... The word used for belief in verse 1 is not the word that is used to describe unbelief in verse 2.

It's not the same root word. And in this case, it rather emphasizes a disobedience, which is to say they did not embrace the message. They did not embrace the God who the message proclaimed.

For they knew in doing so that their currently held beliefs and the system, their worldview, would be upended. And it's not as if they considered this, it simply wasn't for them.

What we see here is, again, not a passive disobedience or a passive unbelief, but an active one.

For these people, we see here, are not satisfied that this message is false for them, but it must be false for everybody.

[13 : 56] And here is where we understand the dynamic between a public and private faith and how this idea is a very novel one in the history of mankind. Because as people come to faith, it changes who they are, it changes the things they value, and social interactions begin to shift.

And for people that are choosing to not believe, that are actively disobeying and going against the gospel message and who Christ is, and ultimately who God is, even though they would claim an orthodoxy themselves, their entire world is being threatened.

And they're not standing for it. So we see that in the previous chapter, like in the previous chapter, disobedience, disbelief, and opposition to the gospel, they're all connected.

They're interwoven. And it's not as if they considered this, this faith, like I said, and it just wasn't for them.

There is no tolerance here. Tolerance, interestingly, even though it seems not the case anymore, but tolerance is very much a Christian virtue. They are intolerant.

[15 : 20] There has to be a uniformity in their belief system. And this just plays to, or communicates to us, the reality that the gospel is disruptive.

True, authentic Christianity is a very disruptive proposition. Because it isn't simply the forgiveness of sins and a ticket to heaven, although it certainly is that.

It's glorious and beautiful and wonderful, having our sins forgiven, promise of heaven. But at its core, the gospel and authentic Christianity, it beckons us to die.

And I've said this a couple weeks in a row now, but it beckons us to die. To die to our old ways, to our old allegiances, to our old desires, and to embrace, rather, the freedom that is in Christ.

But, that will be disruptive. What ends up happening, what ends up happening is that, as Christ becomes king, we become still citizens of the country, the region, the state that we live in, but our allegiances do not find their end in whatever government that governs.

[16:39] It gets bumped up to the next level. And when that happens, it threatens the status quo. It threatens the very social fabric that we live in.

It beckons us, this gospel, to forsake all that which we hold dear, that which we think will give us real happiness, that which we think will give us a comfortable religious experience, that which we think promises us a degree of happiness and prestige and recognition and momentary joy.

Rather, it calls us to not participate in the public differently than in the private. It says, as we embrace God through Jesus Christ, it changes our heart and it changes our lives.

It means we become citizens of heaven so that we seek out to live God's will on earth as it is in heaven. So there's opposition.

It causes a disunity, so to speak. It's disruptive. We are told that this is actually not the right way to go and we find ourselves, and if you've been a Christian for a long time, so maybe you've had a wonderful experience with Christ and then, as they say, reality hits and Christianity becomes hard.

[18:04] It's not as joyful anymore. We come to see the faith as still a beautiful thing, but as a battle and as a struggle between what the predominant ethos of our culture says and what God's word says.

Influencers and elites and cultural leaders of today aren't much different than the unbelieving Jews in Iconium. They say that we should not follow Christianity, that it is a lie, and actually, they are not going to be indifferent to it.

Do not pursue the kingdom of God. Instead, pursue pleasure in this life above all. This is the things that we are told. Keep church, even enjoy a bit of religion, but do not let it interfere or infringe.

So don't be hardcore. Don't be all in. Don't be extreme. Think about your job. Think about your promotion. Think about the things you'll miss out on.

Think about your friends. Think about how you'll be viewed. Chase your dream at any cost. Have your own heaven here on earth. And by the way, I'll just say it's very compelling.

[19:24] It is a very, very compelling message that we are flooded with day in and day out. Our eyes take in so much.

And we want it. I want it. But this is not true north. This isn't a guiding star. This is a broken compass. This does not point us to life.

We just spin around we have no destination. We live for the moment and the moment seems to never fully deliver.

So how do we resist such falsities? When we know the truth but struggle to live according to the truth, how do we embrace the truth?

When we feel like our minds are being poisoned like the Iconians. Look at verse 3 with me. We'll touch on this later on in verse 22, but in verse 33.

[20:29] So they, that is Paul and Barnabas, remain for a long time speaking boldly for the Lord who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

The missionaries remain. They are building up the believers by teaching them and catechizing them and helping them to understand the faith and understand how to differentiate between the authentic and the fake, the real and the less than real, the substance and the shadow that claims to be the substance.

They remind the people that God has saved them because he is sovereign and mighty but that he is not finished but instead by his Holy Spirit he will strengthen them and guide them.

In verse 22, if you want to turn there really quickly, we get a little idea of how the apostles will do this in the power of the Lord.

It says that they will strengthen their souls. They will encourage them to continue in the faith which is to say that it is really easy to not continue in the faith.

[21:44] It is really easy to get burdened down and to have our souls get weak. And here it is and we're going to touch on this with our last point.

And saying, this is the latter part of verse 22, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God which is to say it is a costly faith. And that can wear the soul down to its nub and we can be quick to just say I can't do this.

God, again, by inspiration and guidance of the apostles here is bolstering his church and helping them to endure.

He is strengthening their souls, encouraging them, reminding them, uplifting them. So as we believe the gospel message and as we entrust our eternal future to God Almighty, we can be sure that he will never abandon us.

And this is where we'll transition to the second point. The gospel will always divide because it always calls for a belief and allegiance to the ultimate authority. And by the way, that doesn't mean we can't be good citizens.

[23 : 04] I think that makes us better citizens. This section then ends, and I'm not going to read it, I'll just narrate it for you. This section ends with an attempted lynching that causes the missionaries to flee to the next town where the gospel continues to spread.

And as it does so, we'll see that authentic Christianity also offers freedom from vain things, specifically idolatry.

Look with me, verses 8 to 18, and we'll just actually read verses 8 to 10. Now at Lystra, there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

He listened to Paul speaking and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, stand upright on your feet.

And he sprang up and began walking. This healing is similar to that of Peter and the lame beggar in Acts chapter 3 when the disciples were still in Jerusalem.

[24 : 06] The miracle was a sign that confirmed the gospel message. Let's continue on. Verse 11 and following. And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men.

Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker and the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garland to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, men, why are you doing these things? I'll pause here. Unlike King Herod, who delighted in being called God, Paul and Barnabas are mortified by such a thing.

This is an example of a prescriptive instance in Acts. I don't know if anybody has mistook you for a god. If ever, this is the way you react.

Maybe not tearing your garments, but it has to mortify you. You have to scream out, no, not I. And that's what's happening here. Clearly, they don't understand the local language.

[25 : 25] But soon as they see the priests come out, they understand what's happening. They understand that they are seen not as men, but as gods. They are wanting none of it. They cry out, don't you dare.

We are men just like you. This is blasphemy. And then, all of a sudden, there's an opportunity to proclaim the gospel. But what is interesting is that unlike the recorded sermon, Paul's recorded sermon in Acts 13, you'll notice, as we read, no mention of scripture, no mention of the prophets, no mention of the history of Israel, no mention of Jesus in the sermon.

What gives? Okay. Let's take a look at this. Actually, before I go on, I'll read it, and then I'll comment. This is Paul speaking.

We also are men of like nature with you. We bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations, he, that is God, allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

[26 : 48] What we see here is that Paul is understanding his audience. These people have never heard of the God of scripture.

If they did, clearly it has not affected them. It is not in the social fabric, so to speak. They don't understand the history of Israel. They don't understand Jesus.

They've never heard of him. So Paul, understanding this, he takes a couple steps back. And then what he does is he appeals to universals, also gets on their level and in their belief system.

Historically, in the church, we've understood the word of God as containing two books. The scriptures, what we have, well, this is just Acts, but the scriptures, the entirety of the Bible, Old and New Testament, but also the book of nature, which is to say that God has revealed himself in his

creation.

You'll understand it if you're familiar with the beginning of Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

[28 : 01] This is not to say, though, that somebody can come to a saving faith in Jesus without hearing the name of Jesus, but just that God has sprinkled evidence and woven evidence of who he is in his character and in his characteristics all throughout his created order.

that somebody who truly is not, that dives deep into biology or into understanding the cosmos, it's not very long before they're dumbfounded at the complexity and nature of how cells operate or how vast the universe is or how if one aspect of the world's tilt or a degree off with its oxygen or whatever it may be, the gravity, life ceases to exist, that God's fingertips are everywhere in his creation, testifying to who he is.

The evidence of God is seen everywhere, specifically that he is transcendent, all-powerful, that he is sovereign, and that he is limitless with time and space.

So acknowledging a higher power, like I said, does not lead us to salvation to Christ, but what it does do is it lays the foundation to then appeal to the scriptures, that there is a God and that he has then revealed himself in a very specific way, not in a general way, but in a specific way to all them that would hear the gospel message, all them that he would draw to himself.

So this scene is very instructive for us in Canada, I think, for Christians, because increasingly, my generation, millennials, and the next generation, Gen Z, and I don't know the generations after, but there are some, and there'll be more, increasingly, increasingly, they don't know the Bible.

[30 : 16] There are no grandmas who are taking kids to church. There's multiple generations that have gone, that have not darkened a church door.

And it's not to say that, and by the way, I'll just say that for new Canadians and immigrants, it's very similar, especially people coming from parts of Asia, definitely in parts of the Middle East where there's misconceptions about Christianity, but by and large, there's a huge and ever-growing segment of our country that we can appeal to Jesus, we can appeal to the scriptures, we can appeal to the history of Israel, and it will be, it'll be a different language.

It's not to say that there isn't a place to proclaim the Gospels very specifically, but it's important that we know who we're speaking to. By the way, this isn't to say that Canadians, by and large, are not spiritual.

Canadians are very spiritual. They're spiritual in very new ways. many Canadians seek out religious experiences.

Many Canadians have belief structures. Many Canadians are increasingly interested in a self-curated spirituality. Again, I'm talking in generalities here.

[31 : 45] But what is common is that the spiritual landscape increasingly has little recollection of the scriptures. scriptures. We come back to Paul and his message.

We consider it once more, and we'll notice two things. First, in proclaiming this pre-Gospel message, if you want to call it that, this foundational, this spiritual foundational, foundation message that he is proclaiming, we'll notice two things.

The first thing is that Paul is making it clear that all roads do not lead in the same direction. That all roads do not lead to the same destination.

Existing roads are like, as I mentioned, Steve Griffin says, or the roads we make as we journey.

The worship of Zeus and Hermes was no regional religion, but the state religion of ancient Greece, which was adopted by Rome.

Paul calls this belief system not a good way to get to heaven, but a vain way to get to heaven, which is to say it is not a way to get to heaven.

[32 : 57] It is idolatry. Paul says that every belief system that does not have a foundation in the one true God, and later on he will proclaim the gospel, but in the one true God it is vain, and it is full of empty promises.

A belief that purports to have power to sustain and make humanity flourish, it will only come up short. There's only one creator that is transcendent, only one creator who is all-powerful, only one creator that is just, completely good, benevolent, who sustains all life, and everything else, the apostle Paul says, is vanity.

The second thing is this, that we can glean from Paul's short little message here from verses 15 to 17, it's this, it is good news to turn away from vanity.

It is good news. It's not a, it's not like a kind of good thing to turn towards Christ, and to abandon your existing belief systems that are vain.

No, it is good news, it's life itself. It is a good thing, and the only good thing, to turn towards the one true living God, which by implication means other faiths and spiritualities are not good news.

[34 : 26] There's good news and there's not good news, and Paul is, he is leaving no room for gray. I'm going to throw a term here, and I've heard it before, but I'll say I came up with it in my preparation.

This is gospel triumphalism. Who wants to talk about triumphalism? I don't. I want to say, hey listen, I'm a part of the community of citizens, I don't want to boast about how I'm better than other people, or that my belief system is far superior than everybody else.

They're on a one-way ticket to perdition. But the Apostle Paul is saying, no, no, no, gospel triumphalism is a real thing. It goes without saying that this is not a popular sentiment in Canada. It means that Islam is not good news. It isn't. It means centering one's chakra is not good news. It means salvation through keeping the law, the Mosaic law.

It is not good news. It means indigenous spirituality, friends. It's not good news. It means treating politicians as saviors and political movements as salvific.

[35 : 48] That's not good news. It means embracing expressive individualism. It's not good news. It means easy Christianity is not good news.

It's heavy. Apostle Paul is making a case here that gospel triumphalism is real. But just pause real quick because before we go on, this triumphalism, it is not rooted in bigotry or pride, but rather in humility and love.

Why? Because the triune God made himself known. Not because he needed us to know him. Not because he wanted us to love him.

But out of a pure act of love. Out of a pure act of mercy. That he did not want to see us thrash around madly in a bottomless ocean with no life preservers, with no hope of salvation.

He did not want that, but rather he extended salvation to us. It's not to say that we are better than our neighbors. It's to say that we're all, apart from Christ, hopeless.

[37 : 04] Gospel triumphalism. The very thing that satisfies our deepest heart longings, without which we will never be satisfied.

We will never have hope. However, this will not come without a cost. I've talked about costly Christianity a bit already. Now we'll look at it in verses 19 and following.

As we have already seen, authentic Christianity is disruptive. It chimes light into darkness. The darkness doesn't like having, the things hiding in the darkness don't like having the light shine on them.

There is, there is opposition and it will come and it is guaranteed. So we'll get into our third point here that authentic Christianity is costly, but I want to emphasize but it is joyful.

Look with me at verses 19 and following. But the Jews, that is the unbelieving Jews from earlier in the chapter, came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul.

[38 : 07] They dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God and when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The mob returns. This is not a judicial group. They are not trying to put Paul and Barnabas on trial. Rather, they stone Paul.

They are filled with malice and anger and greed. The poison that they are trying to poison the believers with in Iconium, it is raging through their veins.

They are coming for blood and that's what they're going to get. Paul, he is stoned. They think he is dead. They drag him out of the city, which is to say that he is refuse.

[39 : 25] He doesn't die. Nowhere, by the way, in this, I mean maybe, but this doesn't seem to be a miraculous healing of Paul. It just seems to be in their blood lust. The mob didn't finish the job.

So Paul and Barnabas, they flee as the crowd failed to kill Paul and they're on their way back to Italia to sail back to Antioch to return back to the church that is there to report on what has happened because the church was the one that commissioned them to go on this missionary journey and as they return, they're on the second part of the journey, which is to say that they're going to do a tour all the way back to encourage the believers.

They want to strengthen them. They want to remind them that the gospel is costly and by the way, Paul here will say, just in case you don't believe me, he himself testifies to the costliness of the gospel.

And why does the gospel have to be costly? Because we follow a king who has paid the entire cost of all of our sins, dying the death we should have died so that we might live the life we could never have achieved and we follow after his footsteps.

And if it costs him, it's going to cost us. And friends, this can be daunting, but know that you're not alone. And here's where the joy comes in. Because later on in the chapter, they return to Antioch, the sending church, and they get to declare all of what God has done and praise him with their brothers and sisters.

[41 : 12] But just know that you are not alone, even though real, authentic Christianity, it's costly. We come to this faith, as I've said a number of times, and this is not new to, I didn't create this, it's not original to me, but we come to the faith one by one, but we walk it out side by side.

You are not expected to live out this faith solo. You need each other. Of course you need the Lord's strength in all of this, but you need other people to help you. Notice here that Paul and Barnabas don't show up to the churches that they planted, say a couple nice words, say, you know, have at it. Rather, they install elders, which is to say, church leaders that will be under shepherds, people that will proclaim the gospel to them, would administer the sacraments, remind them that even though it is costly, that their eternal reward is Christ himself, that these elders will strengthen the church, help them to endure.

I say this just about my office, not about me, but friends, you are blessed because you have an elder in the church to do just that. By God's strength, I will try my best, but just know that God's grace to you is that somebody will open up the scriptures week in and week out on Sunday mornings as we gather.

Somebody that will lead us as we gather around his table and we will be nourished in a spiritual way. Our souls will be strengthened. People that will come up and read scripture like Jack did earlier and lead us in intercessions.

[42 : 58] This is all for our benefit to help us to endure, to strengthen us and to build up our souls. This is a gift from God above.

And friends, as we journey this life together, just know that there will be times of joy and the times of joy will far, far, far, far, far, both in quantity and quality outlast any of the difficulty and struggle that we may experience in this faith.

I'll close by words of another minister, a minister that knew very well the reality of costly Christianity. This is from Diedrich Bonhoeffer in a book he wrote on discipleship. He says this, he's juxtaposing cheap grace versus costly grace or what we would understand as authentic Christianity.

This is what he says. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

[44 : 13] Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field.

For the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy by that which the merchant will sell all his goods.

It is the kingly rule of Christ for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it is a grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

It is costly because it costs a man his life and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner.

[45 : 20] Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of his son. Ye were bought at a price and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God.

Father, help us to know the reality of authentic Christianity. Help us not to paper over the hard stuff. Help us not to walk in a delusional state thinking that we can tack Christianity on to 10% of our life and go on with the rest as if it has no influence.

Help us to not think that we can privately be your children but not publicly. Lord, help us to value Christ and as Bonhoeffer said, what costs you much ought not to be cheap for us.

[46 : 36] So Lord, help us by your strength, by the means of grace, with the proclamation of your word and the gathering around your table, build up our souls and help us to walk out this faith authentically in a costly, real way that we would do you proud.

Not that we need to earn from you, you've already given to us, but that we would, as an expression of the goodness and kindness and grace and love and mercy and salvation and life eternal that you've given us, Lord, that we would just give you just a small offering that is our life.

We pray all of this in Christ's name.