

The Compelling God

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[0 : 00] I know that your word is faithful and true and reliable. I know, God, that my words often fall short of that standard. I pray this morning that your spirit may help me to speak words of truth, to speak what we need to hear and know.

Lord, I pray for this whole room, for all of us here, this entire congregation, as we listen to your word, as we hear it announced and preached, that you may open our hearts to receive it, that you may transform our lives through it.

Show us Jesus Christ more clearly. Lord God, we are listening to your word. May your spirit move powerfully this morning. Amen. Have you ever met one of those people who seem to be so good with words that they just somehow have this ability to make you do things?

I have. And unfortunately, I'm one of those people, I wish, you know, I wish, I like to think I'm my own man, you know, that no one's controlling me, no one's watching what I do. But there are people that I've encountered who can just sort of, I'm ashamed to say, they can manipulate me to get what they want out of me.

All right? I remember once talking on the phone, this was a job I had a few years back. I was talking on the phone with a lawyer. Right? And the whole conversation was against my will.

[1 : 25] I did not want to be stuck talking on the phone with a lawyer at work, but my boss was going to court against his client. And my boss didn't want to speak to the lawyer, and it was after hours, and I was talking on the phone with him, and the lawyer would not take no for an answer.

And he had already been talking with a co-worker of mine for what seemed like 10 minutes, and she was a super, super nice girl. And so I was like, you know what, why don't you hand it to me?

Because I was convinced, that's okay, I'll be able to shut this guy down. Well, 15 minutes later, I finally managed to escape that phone call. He would not let me end the conversation politely.

He just kept talking, talking, talking. And the reality is, I'd like to think that if I had to do it over again, that I would just say, I'd just tell him, no dice, hang up the phone, rudely. Right? Which, but when you're working a customer service job, it's kind of hard to do that.

It goes against all your instincts. But I'll just be honest. He probably would string me along for like 20 minutes now. So he would, because I was probably more a jerk back then than I am now.

[2 : 34] But the lawyer, he knew exactly how to keep me on that phone. He knew exactly the words to say. He knew exactly what to do, how to play me, so that I stayed on that phone far longer than I should have.

He was a compelling guy. He was very compelling. He got me to do what he wanted me to do. Now, the Lord, the God we're going to encounter today is a compelling God, but he's calling in a different way.

The difference is that the Lord compels us, not just to get things out of us, not to get to do things that are bad for us, are harmful to us, that are self-serving to him.

But he compels us to do what is good for him. But what is good for him is also good for us. What is good for the Lord is good for us. He has made us that way.

So that glorifying him, doing what honors him, brings us true happiness, brings us true joy, brings us the good life that we are longing for. And God compels us with exactly what we need to fulfill our purpose in life, the purpose that he has given us.

[3 : 39] And as we've encountered the Lord in the book of Exodus, as we've been continuing our way through this book in the Old Testament of the Bible, we've encountered a God who sees his people, who sees the people of Israel suffering in slavery in the land of Egypt.

And this God, he made a covenant commitment with their ancestors. And this covenant commitment was to make them a great nation. This covenant commitment was to give them a promised land where he would be present with his people.

This covenant commitment was to bless the whole world through them. And we've seen God reveal himself and his plans to a man named Moses, an Israelite man who spent 40 years in exile in the wilderness outside of Egypt.

And God has now chosen Moses to go to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to tell him, let my people go. Now, whenever you're encountering the unquestioned ruler of one of the world's great superpowers, which the nation of Egypt was at the time, you're going to have a little bit of hesitation.

And Moses is a little bit hesitant to take on this assignment. So we've already seen him ask God two basic questions over the last week or two. First of all, Moses has asked, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?

[4 : 59] The second question Moses asks is if I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, what is his name?

What shall I say to them? So the Lord responded to Moses' question, who am I? By saying, I will be with you. And he responded to the question, what is his name?

With I am who I am. So he brings his divine character, his reassurance, the fact that he is the God who is, like no one else is.

But Moses still has more concerns. And we're going to pick up his third response, actually his third through fifth responses, as the Lord meets him here.

And what we're going to find is we turn to Exodus chapter four, verses one through 17. And so if you're, by the way, if you're using one of the Bibles that our ushers have been handing out, that's on page 47. It's near the beginning of the Bible.

[6 : 05] Exodus chapter four, verses one through 17. The Lord's going to respond to Moses in an interesting way for response number three.

He's going to play a little bit of a practical joke on him. So here's what he says, chapter four, verse one. Here's Moses speaking to the Lord. He says, Behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, the Lord did not appear to you.

Now, let's be fair to Moses, okay? Isn't that a reasonable objection? I mean, if God came, if someone came to you and said, God told me such and such and such, this really difficult assignment, wouldn't your first response be, mm-hmm, sure he did.

is this unpopular exile going to return to the leaders of Israel and announce to them that the Lord has appeared, that they need to support him as he asks an enslaving tyrant to lead them out of his land.

That is an enormous leap of faith. That is a great risk. And Moses is convinced that they are not going to take that risk. Because no doubt, after this long period, hundreds of years of suffering, the people of Israel, they are just too beat down.

[7 : 26] They are too hopeless. They are too afraid to believe Moses. They've, you know, they've built this tough, cynical shell around themselves. The thing about cynicism is the reason that we resort to that is that it protects us.

Cynicism will protect you from being broken by your circumstances. The people of Israel have built a defense mechanism and it is called unbelief.

Unbelief and cynicism, they are the defenses that we use and that they use to protect ourselves from being hurt by false hope, by hope that lets you down.

And so the people of Israel, they aren't going to listen to Moses' voice. Their unbelief kills off any response that they might have.

They won't act because they don't believe. Moses expects, and rightly so, that they're going to say, the Lord did not appear to you. They will choose to disbelieve that God has revealed himself to Moses and to them.

[8 : 37] And so the Lord has a response for that. And the Lord's response to this cynicism and unbelief is he's got a couple of fun practical jokes designed to shock the cynicism out of the people of Israel.

So Moses gets to be the guinea pig here, and so we're going to have some fun at his expense. When young children want to prank someone, have you ever seen a young child do this, or maybe have you done this?

What's in my hands? Right? What is usually in their hands? Anyone have this happen to them? No? Nobody's ever experienced this?

You guys are lucky. Well, the classic, usually it's usually something, some sort of creepy crawly, right? Like a frog or a spider or something like that. You know, it's what's in your hands, and boom, surprise, and it jumps out at you right in your face.

Well, that's not the question God asks, because he's got one better. So here's what he asks Moses in verse 2. He doesn't ask, what's in my hand?

[9 : 36] He says, what's in your hand? Verse 2. And Moses is completely unsuspecting, and he replies, well, a staff. Being a shepherd, he's got a staff with him, and the Lord says, throw it on the ground.

And what happens next gives Moses a pretty good scare, because he throws it on the ground, and we see here, he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent. Sure enough, it is that creepy crawly, just like before, right?

And I love this response. And Moses ran from it. He was so surprised, right? I don't know. Maybe the snake was poisonous. Who knows? Maybe he has good reason, or it could have just been startling him.

This isn't the sort of thing that happens every day. And even better, this great prank is about to turn into a great dare. Because now the Lord says to Moses, verse 4, put out your hand and catch it by the tail.

And you know what? One of my favorite things about this is I love how at no point does the Lord ever tell Moses what's going to happen next when he obeys. He's like, hey, grab that snake by the tail, watch what happens.

[10 : 46] And if Moses has struggled with unbelief himself, well, God is pretty much, he is coaxing him out of whatever unbelief he has.

He's coaxing faith out of him. Well, Moses apparently, he does have some degree of belief and trust in the Lord because we read in verse 4, well, he put out his hand and caught it and it became a staff in his hand.

Whew! You know, lesson learned. Don't get in a prank war with the Lord, right? Some of you I know are notorious for this. This is someone you don't want to challenge. Verse 5 is key though because the Lord finally tells Moses why he has gone to the trouble of scaring him half to death.

It's not just to get a laugh out of him. Verse 5, that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.

Now that is the reason why the Lord is giving Moses the sign. This is a sign that serves a purpose. It signifies, much as a sign does, it signifies that Moses is not speaking on his own authority.

[11 : 52] He is speaking on God's authority. Moses is going to be the Lord's authorized messenger. And so the words that Moses gave to the Israelites and the words that are given to you and to me in these writings, these are words that come with the authority of God the Holy Spirit.

And Moses points us not only towards God the Father, he points us towards a man who also is authorized, designated by God, a man who has a divine authority because he is the Son of God.

That is the new messenger, the new chosen, anointed messenger from God. The Apostle John is going to write about the signs that this new man also performs.

And he tells us in John chapter 20, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

God didn't want the people of Israel to have blind faith in Moses and in what Moses was saying. And God doesn't want you and me to have blind faith in his Son and in what his Son says.

[13 : 12] He wants you and me to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because he's been authorized by God himself. He's been authorized by the signs that he performed that are written in scriptures that you can read about these signs in the New Testament of the Bible and that you can believe.

Our unbelief is met with God's compelling power. Our unbelief is met with God's compelling power. Now, it is very hard and the Lord understands that it is very hard to move from unbelief to belief.

It is really hard to take that protective shell that you have built up around yourselves often since you were a child to dismantle that, to take it apart and to expose yourself so in our story in Exodus, God is going to help out the people of Israel.

He doesn't just give them one sign. He gives them a second one, which of course means a second great practical joke on Moses, who's probably by this point becoming a little bit jumpy. Verse 6, the Lord tells Moses this, put your hand inside your cloak and once again, he doesn't tell him what's going to happen and Moses does it and he takes his hand out and he finds the skin that's turned white with this horrible skin disease.

You know, it says that his hand is turned as white as snow. Now, which would probably before this weekend wouldn't have terrorized us as much, but now when we think about snow, maybe that's terrifying you right now.

[14 : 47] But for Moses, that's scary. You look at the skin of your hand, it's all white as snow. Hilarious joke, but thankfully, the Lord also tells Moses this, put your hand back inside your cloak and skin's healthy again.

So, verse 8, here's what the Lord tells Moses. If they will not believe you, God said, or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on dry ground.

So, unlike those first two signs, this is one that the Lord doesn't show to Moses because he's not standing by the Nile River, he's not anywhere near it. Turning the water of the Nile River to blood.

That is different from the other two signs. It's different because it shows the power of the Lord like the other ones do, but this one also shows the judgment of the Lord.

This one is going to be the beginning of the Lord's judgment on Egypt. His judgment on a river that was the source of life for the land of Egypt. A river that they, throughout all their history, they viewed as divine.

[16:04] This divine river. The foundation of Egyptian civilization. And its water is turning to blood. And so the Lord is patient with our unbelief. But here, we see here that there is a point that judgment comes.

His patience is limited. God is patient and understanding. He gives people time to turn to him. He's generous and gracious. But there is a point where our unbelief, because it dishonors him, there's a point where his patience runs out.

Where he would no longer be right and good to just allow us to put him off, to downplay him, to reject him forever.

At some point, our unbelief will be met with the judgment of God. The Apostle John writes in John chapter 3, this famous verse, God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

They'll know the good life that God has made them for. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

[17:27] But there reaches a point where if we do not respond in belief, the Lord responds with condemnation. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

The only son of God. You and I must respond when we read about the power of Jesus Christ. God is compelling a response from us. Let us respond by believing in Jesus just as God has compelled us to do.

Our unbelief is met with God's compelling power. When we come back to Moses, we find that Moses has a fourth response to the Lord, because he has seen the Lord's ability just now, but Moses is doubting his own ability.

Verse 10, Moses tells the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.

Now, it's a little bit unclear exactly what Moses means by this, because, you know, one possibility, maybe he's saying he has some sort of speech impediment, like stuttering or something along those lines.

[18:47] Maybe, on the other hand, maybe Moses can speak fine, but he just believes he's not a good public speaker or under pressure when standing before Pharaoh, he thinks, I'm not the kind of guy who's quick on his feet.

I'm not a good talker. I'm not a man of words. That's literally what he says. I'm not a man of words. There's another strong possibility, and that is, maybe Moses is a perfectly good speaker.

I mean, he was trained, he was raised actually in a royal palace. He would have been trained in the art of speaking. It's possible that Moses is just simply being humble here.

He's downplaying his own abilities. even if this third possibility is correct, Moses isn't faking it here. It's not a false humility. Moses seems to be speaking what he believes is the truth when he says that, you know, I'm not a man of words.

I'm slow of speech and of tongue. And the reason that it appears that Moses is telling the truth, that he really does believe this, that he really does find himself inadequate for the position, is because of the way the Lord responds in verse 11.

[19 : 52] Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.

And so it seems based on that response and based on the events in the following verses 14 through 16, in those verses the Lord provides a spokesman, to speak for Moses.

It seems, you know, yes, Moses is humble, but Moses is also sincere. He believes that his speaking abilities are not adequate for this task. So how is the Lord going to respond?

Well, in our culture, if we want someone to feel more capable or more powerful, we tell them, you know, we tell them the good things that we see in them that maybe they don't see.

We remind them of what they're capable of doing. We tell them, you know, you're unique. We, you know, we take them, we push their limits, we encourage them to excel. You know, this week I've spoken with a few people who are, they're grateful for people who have, who have done this for them.

[21 : 05] They're grateful for a father, for a mother, for a girlfriend, for leaders at a Salvation Army camp, individuals in their lives who did this for them. But when it comes to the Lord, the Lord wants us to see ourselves clearly.

And notice that instead of telling Moses, you know, oh, you're a great speaker, Moses, you'll be fine, don't worry, I believe in you. Here's what he says in verse 11. Who made man's mouth?

Is it not I? The Lord. He is the one who created Moses. Moses. And the Lord is the one who created you and created me.

So the one who made Moses' mouth is also the one who can enable him to speak and to speak well. The problem is that Moses is fixated on himself.

All he sees is himself and he sees his own inability. That's it. And the Lord is trying to get Moses' eyes off of himself. His eyes are in the wrong place.

[22 : 18] They're looking at the wrong person. The Lord wants him to fix his eyes not on his inability. He wants him to fix his eyes on God's ability. There's a commentator I read this week who explains it this way.

He says, Moses seems to resist God's call because he assumes that he is playing the central role in the deliverance of the Israelites whom God calls my people. Moses seems to think he is playing the central role.

What Moses does not yet understand is that God cares more about Israel's deliverance than he does. And God is fully capable of directing the means to bring this about. It is God who will bring his people out of Egypt.

He will display his might precisely by working through weak and ordinary means. means. Moses has not yet learned that salvation is of the Lord.

Salvation is of the Lord. It is the Lord's domain. It is not Moses. Saving God's people is not Moses' job. It is the Lord's.

[23 : 29] Moses did not have the ability for this mission. Only the Lord can do it. And the Lord's ability, it won't help if the Lord is not present with Moses.

So here's what the Lord tells Moses in verse 12. I will be with your mouth. What he means is that he is going to be present to bless Moses by instructing him in what to say to the leaders of Israel and what to say to Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

the Lord is with him. We have already learned that our unbelief is met with God's compelling power and now we're learning that our inability is met with his compelling presence.

Our inability is met with his compelling presence. And so for you and for me, we also have a mission. We have a life purpose.

What we were meant to do as human beings. And that mission, that purpose, it's expanded beyond the mission and purpose that Moses was given. That mission and purpose to save God's people, to make them a blessing to all nations.

[24 : 46] Because here's what Jesus commanded his disciples in Matthew chapter 28. Go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. This great commission that Jesus gives, this is a task that is beyond my ability to do, beyond your ability to do.

And not only has it led many Christians to suffer, to sacrifice, to die, but it's a task that is utterly impossible.

Because you and I, we simply cannot compel people to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow Jesus Christ. This is a mistake that the church has made in the past, believing that this is something that we can do by force.

You know, we can convert people at the point of a sword. The whole point is that we can't. We are incapable of changing a person on the inside. Only God can do that.

[25 : 52] We can't carry out this mission, the great commission, because disciples are only created when a person's heart is transformed. And changing someone's heart is something that only God can do.

Our inability is met with God's compelling presence. Jesus followed this great commission with a promise. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Our inability is met with his compelling presence. He is with us. And God the Holy Spirit remains among us. He is enabling, he is compelling us to do his work, reviving, renewing everyone that he compels to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

If you are obeying God's call on your life, if you are working to fulfill this great commission, you are going to feel inadequate, not just some of the time, but all of the time.

You are always going to feel inadequate. You're not up to the task. And that's why we express our dependence on the Lord. Tonight, 6.30 p.m., we're holding our concert of prayer here in the building.

[27 : 10] Come, express your dependence on the Lord together with the rest of your family here at Squamish Baptist Church. We're going to request his powerful presence among us that compels us and that compels those who don't believe in his irresistible saving grace.

Our unbelief is met with God's compelling power, our inability with his compelling presence. But you know what?

In spite of the power of God, in spite of the presence of God, sometimes we are like Moses. And we're like him in this way. Sometimes we just don't want to do it. Right? I mean, you can be honest.

Are there times you just don't want to do it? You know what God has called you to do. You know what tasks God has put before you and you just don't want to? Moses' fifth and final response to the Lord is found in verse 13.

Oh my Lord, please send someone else. He's, you know, he's being very polite and very honest.

[28 : 19] He is flat out refusing the Lord's call. And there are only two people in the whole Bible who do this, who God says, who God comes to them, brings them a message and assignments, and they pretty much flat out say, no, I'm not going to do it.

The other one is an Israelite prophet named Jonah. Neither Moses nor Jonah wants to carry out that assignment that the Lord is calling them to do. In Jonah's case, the Lord won't take no for an answer.

Jonah hops on a ship, tries to sail in the complete opposite direction that the Lord tells him to go, and the Lord pretty much sends this huge storm. Jonah gets thrown overboard. There's a fish involved. He ends up in Nineveh anyway.

You know, the story goes on. That's Jonah. Let's see if the Lord will permit Moses to refuse his call. Well, verse 14.

Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. And he said, is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well.

[29 : 20] Behold, he is coming out to meet you. And when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.

He shall speak for you to the people and he shall be your mouth and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff with which you shall do the signs. Well, the Lord does not take defiance well, nor should he.

Up till now, the previous four responses, the Lord has been very patient, very understanding with Moses. This one, he is not. And those of you who are parents, you know how it is and you know why this is.

You know, when you ask your kids to do a task, sometimes they have questions. They don't know what to do. They fail to do it. They don't, they're, sometimes they just get distracted, right? And that's not good, but you know, you help them, you work with them on that, hopefully, if you're patient.

You help them deal with it. But then when your kid looks you in the eye and says, no, I'm not going to do it. Oh, boy. Things change then, don't they? That is something else altogether.

[30 : 36] And it is very consistent throughout the scripture that the Lord responds to defiant disobedience with anger. Even if the disobedient person is trying to be polite like Moses is, when God calls you and me to join his kingdom, when God calls you and me to kingdom service, he's wanting what honors himself and he's wanting what is good for you.

And he doesn't take no for an answer. He does not take no for an answer. When we give our own desires, when we give our own sense of, you know, our own priorities, our own agendas, our own sense of honor and shame, when we give them priority over the Lord's mission for us to make disciples, then the Lord does respond with anger and he is right to.

He would not be a good God and a loving God if he didn't. Any more than a good or loving parent would respond to defiance by just letting it happen.

And accommodating it. And accommodating it. But just because the Lord is angry doesn't mean that he isn't willing to grant help. He is not done with Moses.

He doesn't burn Moses to a cinder right there. No, no. What he does is actually, he helps him out. Moses wants someone else so the Lord sends him someone else. And it's his brother Aaron.

[31 : 58] Now, the catch is, Moses wants someone else to go instead of him and the Lord is pretty much, nope, he can go alongside you, but you're still going. Now, the good news is that Aaron is tailor-made for Moses' fears.

Because the Lord says he can speak well. And to a man like Moses, a man who's worried about whether he will be welcomed, whether he's going to be accepted by the people of Israel, you know, it would be really encouraging to hear the Lord say, when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

He's actually going to be glad to see you. He wants to be with you. And even better yet, when they go to the people of Israel, this Aaron, he's a guy that they know.

He's a guy who can stand up for Moses. Who can lend him credence, even though he's an outsider. But the Lord is clear that Aaron is not going as a substitute.

He is not going to replace Moses. He is going to assist Moses. He's going to serve as Moses' mouthpiece. Verse 16. He shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.

[33 : 12] So basically, it's kind of funny because Aaron is later going to become, him and his descendants are going to become the priests of Israel. The people who mediate between God and the people who serve as that bridge, that connection.

And this is sort of the first time that Aaron serves in that role. Sort of this priestly role where he's mediating between God's messenger and God's people. You know what?

The Lord is good. You know he's really good because he not only gives Moses his brother, Aaron, he gets a second buddy. The Lord concludes with verse 17.

Take in your hand this staff. Moses gets Aaron and he gets a stick. This is like one of the weirdest buddy cop films ever. But here's the point, right?

We've learned that our unbelief is met with God's compelling power, our inability with his compelling presence. And now we see that our unwillingness is met with compelling partners. Our unwillingness is met with compelling partners.

[34 : 12] God supplies gospel partners, fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and God's family. He supplies them to help us, to provide for us, to strengthen us when we are weak.

And that is critical. You know I know a lot of people who would claim to be Christians and their mindset is why do I need to be a part of a church? Why do I need to be a part of a church family?

It's just me and Jesus. I've got this personal relationship with God. Here's the thing, you're kidding yourself. You're absolutely kidding yourself if you think that you're going to be able to do the Lord's work on your own.

Without brothers and sisters, fellow partners to serve alongside you. If you think you can do it on your own, you have an incredibly grand and exalted opinion of yourself and your ability to stick in there, to stay true to the mission.

Whatever the task the Lord has given you, we need to come together to urge one another on, to encourage each other because we have a tendency to waver, a tendency to falter, to fall away.

[35 : 24] In Hebrews chapter 10 in the New Testament it's said in this way, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. For he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some. But encouraging one another.

We meet together to encourage one another all the more as you see the day, the day of the Lord's judgment drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

We need one another. Because those final verses are what happens when we wander away from one another, when we try to isolate ourselves, when we fall away from the Lord's mission and from his kingdom.

Remember that the God who appeared in a burning bush, he is the same God who is going to come with fiery judgment. We have been given this overwhelming assignment to let the world know the truth about this holy God who loves everyone and thus hates sin and hates the destruction it causes.

[36 : 48] to tell them that there is salvation. That there is a new life.

To be found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Our task is overwhelming but our unbelief is met with God's compelling power. Our inability with his compelling presence.

Our unwillingness with compelling partners. We are going to take some time to participate and to commemorate what the Lord has done for us as we celebrate communion together.

Let me pray as we prepare to move towards that.