Foundations for Faith

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[0:00] So today we're going to look at Exodus. Let me just open in prayer. Lord, we see in Exodus you exalting your name, you declaring who you are, and forming a people for yourself who will worship you.

Lord, we want to join in that worship even this morning as we think about these things, as we listen or talk, or all that we're doing, Lord, let it be worship to you, and let your name be exalted among us. In Jesus' name, amen. So the book of Exodus, the big picture, is Israel is being formed into a nation.
There are two parts to that, two major parts. First 18 chapters is all a narrative of how, where Israel is at the beginning of the book, being oppressed by Egypt, how God intervenes and miraculously delivers his people from slavery to Egypt.
the last roughly half of the book is the establishment of the nation, kind of setting up like a constitution, if you will, and providing instruction and law.
[1:39] We have the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments, and then a bunch of other corollaries, I guess you want to say. And then we have the instructions for the tabernacle.

So the tabernacle is to be central to the life of the nation. And so we get all these detailed instructions. And then, at the end, they built the tabernacle.
The book is bracketed by one of the themes I want to look at is the name of God.
Who is this God? Name in the ancient world was the embodied character. And who is this person? And we see him give his name to Moses at the burning bush early in the book.
Much later in the book, God reveals himself to Moses. Moses asks to see his glory. And God reveals his name again, and it's about who he is.
[2:56] At the very end, we have the very last few verses of the book are God's glory coming to rest on the tabernacle. It's this amazing climax to the whole book when God's glory fills the tabernacle.

It must have been just an awesome, like really awesome, like not modern awesome, experience to see.
So in the ancient world, people could always point to an epic story about their origins, about where they came from, about who they are.
And that's what the epic said. It said, this is who we are. These are our values. Certainly, the moral and spiritual identity of Israel is captured in its laws, including those we find in Exodus.
And literarily, it's an epic tale. We have the epic hero. We have Moses, through whom God delivers his people. And there are more aspects of epic that I won't go into.
[4:11] But that's what it is. And we see throughout that God wants to make his name known. He wants to make himself known both to Israel and to Egypt and the surrounding nations.

He wants to reveal who he is. And we see, as we talked about in Genesis, how God made a promise way back in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned.
He said, this, I'm going to fix this. Right? In Genesis 3, 15, he says, he makes a promise that your seed will crush the head of the serpent, though the serpent will crush his heel.
So, we see now in Exodus God's plan moving forward as we have seen it since the fall. So, that's sort of the big picture of what we have.
I don't know why I'm waving these around. What we have in the book of Exodus. One thing to keep in mind that I don't think I've really mentioned is that really, the Pentateuch is one book.
[5:32] It's really one book and it's broken up for convenience. And, but it's really, it's really one complete whole.

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So, so this is like a section of the Pentateuch. It's probably, there are times when it's really helpful to remember that. So, we need to always keep in mind what's happened before.
And, most of us are pretty familiar with that. So, we remember, you know, the creation and the fall. We remember the call of Abraham, which we, you know, barely talked about in the last two weeks. But, the beginning of God's narrowing his plan for redemption to Abraham and his seed, his descendants. and here we see it progressing.
So, in the very beginning of the book, chapter 1, let's just start, I'm going to just read from verse 7.
[6:40] But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly. They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph and he said to his people, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

Come, let us deal shrewdly with them lest they multiply. And if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land. Therefore, they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens.
They built for Pharaohs, store cities, Pithom and Ramses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.
So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter and with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field.
In all their work, they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. And then as the scene setting continues, we see Pharaoh trying other ways to limit the growth of Israel and in fact, you know, kind of like starve them out.
[7:58] Let's work them to death, right? Let's have all the male children killed. They're working toward an extermination of the people of Israel.

So, so that's the scene, right? And it's this awful oppression. It's the worst kind of work that you and I can imagine.
And there's a lot of work in our world today that is pretty tedious and pretty meaningless. And as, as things get worse for the people of Israel, he then makes demands on them that are impossible to fulfill.
They're to make bricks without straw. So the straw, they have to go collect the straw, which is a necessary component of these bricks. They have to go collect it, but they still have to meet a quota. So it's a very, obviously, it's very difficult. Note, in the very beginning, just those words, then Israel was, were fruitful, the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly.
[9:08] They multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them. They are fulfilling the creation mandate of, of, be fruitful and multiply.

So that's just, I don't know. There's an echo there that I think is probably intended. So, in chapter 2, in verse 23, during those many days, the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.
Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
God saw the people of Israel and God knew. To me, that's just so powerful how he looked and he knew. He knew what it was like for them.
He knew how horrible and difficult it was. And in that knowing there's, behind that, there's compassion and care. It matters to God.
[10:22] And once again, we get this reminder that God is personal, that he is love, that he's concerned, that he hears prayer. He seems uninvolved during these years, perhaps.

Where the heck is this God that we've heard of? But he's there. And we know he didn't wait around for Israel to ask for help in the sense that he didn't know until then the situation.
He knew the situation. And it was part of his plan and it was part of something he was working out. But the people wouldn't have been aware of that. So then in chapter 3, we get God calling of Moses.
So this is obviously a significant passage as we approach the, Moses approaches this burning bush, this strange phenomenon.
And when God, when Moses asks, so the Lord, the Lord tells him what's going to, tells him he's seen the affliction and he's going to deliver them.

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[11:36] and Moses says, what is the, what is this God's name? The people are going to want to know. And God said to Moses, I am who I am.

And he said, say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. So this name, and we've all, we've all heard some of this, you know, I don't think I'm saying anything revolutionary.
In this name, I am who I am, he expresses his self-existence, his, he's, he's, we talked about the creator-creature distinction, he's completely other.
We can't, we're, we are who God made us. We are fully dependent on God. We have no breath apart from God. But God depends on nothing.
No one. He is life itself. He is himself. He is who he is. He is, he will be who he will be.
[12:44] He's unchanging. There's no other reference point to talk about God. There are no, you know, if, in the, in the conception of the people of the world, there are lots of gods.

But God, Yahweh, this I am is not a part of that picture. He is not one of those gods.
He is not, he is not like us except in that he has made us in his image, but he's not, he's not barren better than us and just, you know, a pure, more perfect version of humanity.
That's not, he's himself. notice that when Moses approaches the burning bush, God says, take off your sandals because this is holy ground.
And there's an interesting kind of a contradiction or a paradox here. It's holy ground. He is, as we learn throughout scripture, he is holy, holy, holy, completely other, completely pure and beautiful.
[14:04] And, and yet, he invites Moses to take off his sandals and approach and hear him. God is both, we've talked about this before, God is both this transcendent other and present with his people.

So there's this presence here that's really there and it's utterly holy and Moses, like all the rest of the people, is a fallen human being, sinful, corrupted by the curse and by his own sin.
In the fall, he fell with the rest of us. But God can be present with him. And so here again, we have this paradox of this holy, pure God, transcendent and other and this sinful humanity, but God is making it possible and that's what the whole Bible is about, right?
God is making it possible for him to be with his people. And again, the very end of the book we see his glory descend on the tabernacle.
That's where he's going to meet with his people. So we see this kind of tension between his holiness and his presence, his desire to be present.
[15:29] And as we think some more about his name, we're just going to park on this idea of his name for a few minutes. Toward near the end of the book, Exodus 33, I might have used bookmarks, but who thinks of that?

Exodus 33, in verse 18, so a lot has happened, right? They have crossed the Red Sea, they've been delivered, the law has been given, the people have rebelled with the golden calf, and here Moses says to God, to the Lord, this Yahweh, this Yahweh, this Yahweh, what verse was I saying? 18, sorry, and he said, God, Moses says, please show me your glory, which is what God wants to do, right? He really wants to do that, and we'll see that through the plagues, but we'll get back to that.
Show me your glory, glory, and God said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord, which is the I am, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy, and God explains what he's going to do, that his glory will pass by, and Moses will be hidden in this rock, and see just the back of God, because he can't see his face and live.
And then in chapter 34, after two more tablets are made, the Lord descends in the cloud, and stood before him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.
[17:32] All of these occasions of Lord are this covenant name, Yahweh, this name that he is his relationship name with his people, right?

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.
So here again we have the giving of his name. So this name, he still is, I am, but in giving this, he embodies his character and who he is.

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So we have this God who most of this, you know, a couple of sentences, most of it's about his mercy and his grace and his forgiveness. But he also includes his justice and he will by no means clear the guilty.
And here we have this, this tension, it's a tension for us, right, between God's love and mercy and God's judgment. judgment. And Christopher Watkin writes, the marriage of justice and grace in Exodus 33 stands in stark distinction to the way those two principles are wrenched apart and opposed in contemporary political and social discourse.
[19:17] He gives the example of political discourse about crime, law and order kind of things. And we have, you know, on the right, you know, this sort of throw the book at them, lock them up.

Obviously, I'm, you know, caricaturing them. But there's this, you know, it's the law, they have to obey it, we're going to punish them. And on the left, we're more likely to see this compassion, well, you know, it was because society was like this that they did this, and we can work toward reform, and we can, yeah, rather than punishment, let's not be so punitive, that's not helpful.
And these two, these two things, justice and grace, are divorced in our society to a great deal.
But God sees them together. They are together. He is always just. He is always merciful. and how that works together, of course, we see in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus, and on the cross, God executes his perfect justice, and pours out judgment on his son.
And in that, we see his mercy, this judgment Jesus takes for us. We deserve it. He takes it. and here in the cross, we see God knitting together his justice and his mercy.
[20:55] So, these, again, I've talked about how so many of these themes that arise in these early, in the Pentateuch, run through all of scripture.

And this theme of justice and grace runs through all of scripture. And we'll see, and we see in the context of this section of Exodus, Israel has rebelled, grossly rebelled in building this golden calf. And God is angry. And they have sinned greatly, even as they're being established as a nation, right?
This whole thing is going on, and the people, you know, they go rogue. They reject his rule. They want this figure.
And they've been told, no, no figures, no pictures, no golden calves. And yet, God has mercy on them. And Moses intercedes, and God forgives, he relents from his judgment, and he goes with them in their journey to the promised land.
[22:11] So, justice and mercy. in the scriptures always go together. And they can't be separated. There's no justice without mercy.

There's no mercy without justice. You can't just say, oh, never mind, it doesn't matter. Because there's wrong being done. There's people who are being harmed.
And his name is being besmirched. who uses that word? I don't know. So, he's getting a bad reputation because people are rebelling against him.
Right? And I'm sort of making it sound almost silly, but it's huge. And he can't just let it go. Remember, he is perfectly holy.
And he can't just hang around while sin goes on and not eventually deal with it justly. So, that's the name of God revealed for the first time in the burning bush.
[23:21] Now, let's just go back. We jumped ahead. And now, we're going to go back to the plagues and what's going on there. So, I'm not going to read all that but I assume that most of us are familiar with that.

In the plagues, God is executing judgment on the Egyptians who have rejected him. And Pharaoh in particular is singled out as the source of this rejection and rebellion against God.
Pharaoh flatly refuses to acknowledge this God of Israel. Pharaoh sees himself as God. and his people see him that way.
That's part of the thing in Egypt, right? In the plagues, God judges. In the plagues, God demonstrates his sovereignty over all nations and all peoples.
He is sovereign over and the individual plagues each confront one of the so-called gods of Egypt and God shows them up like they are powerless against these judgments.
[24:38] These gods can't do anything about it. He strikes at the heart of their religion and their beliefs and demonstrates who he is.

He summons nature to do his will. These plagues are not natural occurrences. Sometimes here, well, you know, there were a lot of locusts. But these are miracles.

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It's not just that there happened to be a plague of locusts and God used it for his purposes. Now, God does do that. There are natural occurrences that God then uses for his purposes.
But here we have something different and we see it in the ways that this plays out. So a plague will affect all of Israel but not Goshen where the Israelites live.
Like, that's just weird, right? That doesn't happen naturally. And we see God can turn it on and turn it off just like that.
[25:44] Moses prays and the plague ends. The more Pharaoh hardens his heart, the more glory God gets.

So God is getting glory through demonstrating who he is. In this case, his power, his sovereignty, and his care for Israel, his people.
So God demonstrates who he is, and the more Pharaoh resists, the plagues get, they ratchet up, right? And there's this systematic destruction of the nation of Egypt.
Crops are destroyed. You know, we have this weird and terrifying darkness that lasts longer than it should.
We have in this picture, sometimes it says, Pharaoh hardened his heart, and sometimes it says, God hardened Pharaoh's heart.
[26:49] One of the things I find really interesting about this is this kind of bugs us, but there's no sense in the scripture itself, as it's telling this, that Moses or the people were bothered by this.

So, there's something that we don't get about how this works, that they either understood better or just accepted better than we do.
We don't want to see God hardening someone's heart and then punishing them for that, right? There's something that strikes us as unjust. But, there's a, there's a, what's the right word?
I don't know what the right word is. There's this sense that these things go together, right? That, that Pharaoh hardens his heart, God hardens his heart, Pharaoh's responsible for hardening his heart, whether God creates that in him or not, right?
Pharaoh is held accountable for his sin. And, again, this is a thing we see throughout scripture, that there's a sense in which God is controlling all things, everything.
[28:09] And yet, we are responsible, human beings, we are responsible before God, and we'll be judged for our sin. So, that's where I'm going to leave it, because it's pretty, it's a difficult, it's a thorny issue, but I just want to point out that the Bible doesn't see it as a thorny issue.

And sometimes I think we see it that way because we don't understand who God is, and we don't, we just don't grasp his otherness, and his love, and his justice, and all of these things, we just, we're fallen, and our hearts are twisted with sin, and we don't understand it, and we look at these things from our own viewpoint, which is fallen, and deceived, and confused.
So, so then, so these plagues happen, the plague of the firstborn is the culmination of this, and Pharaoh says, okay, fine, get lost.
Israel is saved from slavery to Egypt, and Egypt is judged for its rejection and defiance of God. Israel is saved through that judgment.
God has mercy on Israel, and he does not have mercy on the hardened people of Egypt. Now, there were people, apparently, who believed God, and we see that it was a mixed bag that not only Israelites by birth, by ethnicity, not only they left Egypt, but there were others.
[30:02] There were others who went along because they saw this God, and they were like, okay, I want to be on his side because he's really something, and he's not, he's, he's, he's not what our gods are.

So there were people, so it's not that, that God only had mercy on Israelites and not on repentant Egyptians.
He did, and they went, they went along with Israel and the Exodus. Throughout these passages, God is calling them out of Egypt, not just out of Egypt, out of slavery, but to something, right?
God says, let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness. Let my people go that they may worship me. Let my people go.
And the point is always worship, the honor of God, reverence for God. The people are not just freed from slavery so that they can have their pleasures and do whatever they want.
[31:22] Like, there's a, you know, there's certainly, there's certainly joy in being released from slavery and all that work, but at the same time, we see the challenges of freedom.

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You know, when the Israelites complain to Moses, they're saying things like, we should have stayed, we should have stayed back there because it was better. We got fed, we got, you know, whatever, taken care of.
But now, it's different. Freedom is hard. We have to make choices, we have to take responsibility, we have to trust God.
There was a sense in which a life of slavery, and I'm not in any way saying it's a good life, a life of slavery takes some of that responsibility off, takes away your choices, which is sometimes a relief. I think we've all experienced that. If you narrow your options for something, it gets a little easier. So, what I want to contrast is what freedom in scripture looks like with what freedom in our culture looks like.
[32:33] Our culture, the United States in particular, but, you know, largely in the West, but freedom is our God.

As a people, we're all about freedom. That's what the Declaration of Independence calls for. We're free in the Constitution to pursue happiness.
That's the Declaration. In the Constitution, we have certain rights that we are free to pursue. and to take advantage of.
But this freedom, in the conception of most of our culture, is a freedom for our individual pursuit of what we want.
It's a freedom that says, I can do whatever I want, and I don't want anyone telling me otherwise. Right? It's a freedom that's in conflict with serving one another, it's individual, self-focused, and encourages claiming and securing one's rights to live as one pleases, regardless of any law, any written law, or any moral law.
[33:58] Which is not to say that there aren't people in the world who aren't moral, self, but if we look behind, if we could see as God sees, the motivations of the heart of falling humanity apart from Christ, we see something self-focused, self-serving, I do this good thing, and many people do good things, I do this good thing, I serve others, in order to feel better about myself, maybe, to look good before others, maybe, to gain power, maybe, we can't, it's dangerous to try and impute motive to people when we just don't know it, and I don't want to suggest, you know, that, well, I do want to suggest that all people apart from Christ are essentially sinful, and they are essentially bent inward, and they are serving their own interests.

That's true. It would be wrong to not appreciate the many good things that people apart from Christ do, and that's by the grace of God, right?
God restrains evil so that people are not as sinful as they could be, but that is the grace of God that he gives to us. Apart from that, this would all be much more obvious, and there would be no good things, when there are no good things that don't come from God.
So this kind of freedom, it feels easy, right? Like, I can do what I want, I don't need to obey someone else. The freedom that God gives can be hard, it requires sacrifice, difficult choices, resisting temptation, rejecting the kind of self-centered freedom the world has on offer, and the world, you know, daily, hourly, offers us this kind of freedom, like, just indulge yourself here.
How often do we hear those messages or see those messages in the course of an average day? You deserve this. You know, I get notifications from the McDonald's app that tell me, here's this great deal, you know, this, it's a good day to eat fries, you know, whatever, it's encouraging, it's not necessarily sinful, I hope, to eat fries, but it's this call to self-indulgence, right, and we see it in big ways and small ways.
[36:47] The whole book of Exodus, especially after crossing the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians is devoted to preparing the people to be a worshiping community, providing for their needs miraculously, we see God give water out of a rock, providing for their needs, giving instruction in the law, okay, this is what it means to be my people.

We have the Ten Commandments, and the commandments point us to worship of God, the exclusive worship of God, and the love of God and the love of neighbor, right?
The commandments urged them to remember the Exodus, remember that you were enslaved, and treat others with compassion, because you were once enslaved, and oppressed, poor, without power.
So, they are to remember that and carry that with them, that memory. And, obviously, these parallels to what we experience in salvation are, I hope, clear.
just like Israel was probably not expecting God to come and miraculously deliver them.

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[38:25] God comes to sinners and calls them to himself. He makes it possible for them to place their trust in him. He shows himself trustworthy. He rescues us from slavery, or slavery may not be to a human master, but we're all the more enslaved to the sins that bind us, to the habits of our heart that turn us inward to ourselves and not outward.

We're enslaved to a kind of misery apart from God. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, from God, and we, in our natural state, reject that.
We send that away. I'm going to do it myself. God rescues us from that and enables us, by his grace, to follow him, to obey him.
So, let me just make sure. So, so, so, so the book, so, so that that second half, the non-narrative portion of the book of Exodus is giving the instructions, is miraculously providing for them, giving the instructions, and building this place of worship, the tabernacle.
And as we read these things, as you're reading the book of Exodus, you get to this half of Exodus, and you're kind of like, you know, the Ten Commandments, those are helpful, that's good, I need to think about that.
[40:12] But then it just kind of gets, it seems so irrelevant, right? And then all this detail of the building of the tabernacle, we can get kind of like, why do I need to know all this?

And it's laid out in all this detail, and God reveals it to Moses, this is how you're to build it, and then we get a repeat of much of that detail when they actually build the tabernacle, and we're like, okay, couldn't you just say, and they did it, like, can we move on?
But all these things are that preparation of the people, and what we're going to see as we move on through not just the Pentateuch, but the whole Bible, all that preparation, all the ways that God showed them that he is for them, showed them how to live, provided for them a calendar that reminds them regularly of who God is and who they are.
They're given this world, and they live in this world that reinforces every day that they belong to God, that God rescued them, that they are beholden to him, that they are to be obedient to him.
All of their world fosters that, all of the Israelite world. There's a world outside that doesn't, right?
[41:51] But they're given so much richness to remember the feasts, remind them of what happened, remind them of their history, the sacrifices remind them, they see, you know, if you ever think about the amount of blood that gets spilled with an offering, and the seeming waste of bringing, you know, your best ox and seeing it destroyed, and a burnt offering, completely destroyed, reinforces over and over again to the people the severity of sin, but also the hope that God can forgive.

He provides a way to forgive. We, in the church, likewise, ought to be remembering, rehearsing, being reminded daily of our salvation, of the gospel that came, of the reality that God intervened in our rebellious hearts, and may, is, adopted him, us, for himself, that he chose to have grace and forgiveness, that he engendered faith in us, that we made a choice, empowered by his spirit, made alive by his spirit, we could then choose to follow God.
He reveals himself to us. None of this is our own creation, is not of ourselves, lest anyone can boast. I think the last thing I want to say about all of that is that I was reading about the sacrifices, I was reading about just trying to imagine and put myself into the senses, the smells, the sights, the slaughter, all this blood, all of this, and the oppression it must have made.
And we have things to remind us too. We have the Lord's Supper to remind us. We have weekly worship to remind us.
We have the scriptures that remind us. But as a people nowadays here, we're in the world.
[44:37] We are called out of the world, but we're in it, and we are deluged with messages that say, you're your own God. Indulge yourself.

You can be free, free to do whatever you want. You don't really need to love your neighbor. And what? God? God, if God exists, he's just a force out there.
He's just like, something. He's not a personal God who intervenes in our lives. Holiness, is that important? Oh, come on. We're all human.
These are the messages we get constantly, and I wonder, and I just, just as, you know, food for thought, how can we be better at creating a community in the church that shores up our faith in these ways that we need?
The Israelite, even the faithless Israelite, lived in the shadow of the sovereign God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Are we sufficiently surrounding ourselves and our families with

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reminders of God's great salvation in Christ?
[45:44] Are we helping one another sort out the culture's views on say, freedom from the biblical view? Or do we let it slide off our backs as we leave this building on Sunday and head out to the real world?

So it's just a challenge to pay attention to our lives and pay attention to the messages that we're getting and remember what God has saved us from and how he has saved us, to remember the gospel.
And we're blessed to attend a church where every Sunday we hear a reminder of the gospel. I need it daily.
I don't know about you. every Sunday is great, but I need more. It just runs out. I'm like a sieve and it just because I'm so surrounded, embedded in a world that doesn't believe any of it and that pulls me away from God.
So that's Exodus. I know it's like a big picture view, but that's what we've got. Let me just close in prayer.
[47:01] Heavenly Father, make a name for yourself among us. Remind us of your grace and your love and your salvation. Remind us of the severity of sin and what you rescued us from when you transferred us to the kingdom of your dear son.

Remind us what's coming. When the new heavens and the new earth, all of it is renewed and sin is eradicated.
Lord, remind us of the hope of that and give us hearts that long to look to you and to live in that, in that beautiful kingdom, even as we walk among our neighbors who are confused and lost and always, always tempting us to depart from you.
Lord, go with us now. As we worship, let us worship you in spirit and in truth. Let your name be exalted and let your people be blessed. In Jesus' name, amen.

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