

Advent: Shepherds

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Eric. I'm the youth director here at Watermark Church. And this past Friday our youth group had a Christmas party. It was lots of fun. We had fun games, we talked about the meaning of Christmas, we ate together, and then we watched Charlie Brown Christmas. I can tell some of you have seen Charlie Brown Christmas. For those of you who haven't seen it, it's a story about this boy. And this boy is having this existential crisis as he tries to figure out what Christmas is all about.

And he's shocked at how overly commercialized the entire holiday has become. And he just reaches new lower and lower levels as he realizes that even his dog has bought into the commercial spirit of the season. And even his little sister can't escape this commercialized season of Christmas. And Charlie Brown, this little boy, he's directing the Christmas play for all of his friends. And at one point during the play, he reaches his low point and he calls out, can anyone tell me what Christmas is all about? And this little boy, Linus, walks up carrying his blanket to the middle of the stage. He calls for the lights and all of the house lights dim and the spotlight is focused on him. And he gives this big speech to an empty auditorium and he recites this passage that we're talking about today.

In that area, there were some shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone about them. And the angel said, fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of a great joy that will be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And I think as we read this story, if we've been in the church for any amount of time or if we've heard this story before, that scene in A Charlie Brown Christmas is sort of what we picture when we think of this story. Not necessarily that scene itself, but the setting of that scene. All of this craziness is going on, all of this mayhem, and then all of the attention is focused on this one spot. Everything goes silent.

This picture of innocence steps forward and all attention is focused on him. But really, what's going on in this story is almost the total opposite of that.

The world didn't stop that night when Jesus was born. The world didn't, all of a sudden, everyone focus on him right here. The angel's appearance wasn't this calm, serene thing.

[2 : 3 8] It was big. It was bright. It was exciting and different. And if we just focus on what we've heard and seen traditionally in the church or in classic retellings of this Christmas story, I think we're going to miss out on a lot of what's happening right here in the story. Actually, this is a very shocking story. This is a very unique story. It has an unlikely crowd, an unlikely string of events, an unforgettable evening, and it leaves us with an inescapable call to follow the shepherds. So let's look at this story in Luke chapter 2. We start out with an unlikely crowd, the shepherds. Now, again, if you've been around the church for any length of time, the shepherds are a part of this story, and you know that, and you just take that for granted. Like, it would be weird for something besides the shepherds to be in this story, just because that's the way that it's always been. But why? Why shepherds? You know, there's commentators who will say shepherds were despised and looked down upon, but really the earliest manuscripts we have documenting that are from a couple hundred years after Jesus was alive. So I think it's tough to draw solid conclusions and applications on that. But what we do know is shepherds were hired help.

They weren't rich. They weren't powerful. They weren't famous. There were bankers. There were lawyers. There were religious leaders and politicians in Jesus' day, businessmen. The angels could have appeared to any of these people, but they didn't. Why? Why shepherds? Why go to the hired help? Like, let's picture this happening in Hong Kong today. Jesus is born in Hong Kong today. The angels don't appear to C.Y. Long.

They don't appear to Lee Ka-Shing. They don't appear to the bankers or the lawyers or the businessmen. They don't appear to Tobin. They appear to a group of domestic helpers. And they say, come, see this new baby who's been born. That is a shocking thing to our society's mind.

The angels go. They pick the most unlikely crowd, the hired help, who's out in the middle of the field, doesn't even have a roof over their heads in the middle of the night, leaving everyone else unaware.

You know, like, if we're drawing this Hong Kong parallel, C.Y. Long actually doesn't even find out until some foreigners come in and want a visa so they can visit the baby. Right? Like, this is insane. But this is who the story centers around. Shepherds. Out in the field, keeping watch over the sheep, in the middle of the night. And they were chosen to be a part of the story rather than the bankers, the lawyers, the politicians, the businessmen, the religious leaders.

[5 : 50] The story starts out in the most counterintuitive ways, and it's totally different than what we would expect. And this unlikely crowd receives an unlikely announcement. An angel appears to them. Now, every time an angel appears to someone in the Bible, it is a terrifying experience.

People see angels, and they're like, oh no, please go away, I'm terrified. And it says, when the angel appears to them, the glory of the Lord shines around them. And again, when people in the Bible see God's glory, they are terrified. They fear for their lives. And so the first word that the angel says is, fear not. Because when an angel appears in the middle of the sky, like, so I grew up in a house surrounded by fields in the middle of one of the most rural areas out there in America. And I can walk out into the middle of the field on a dark night and be in a place where I can see no natural, or no human lighting. It's completely pitch dark, and it's one of the most calm, peaceful, serene things. And if all of a sudden an angel appeared to me, boom, boom, that would be terrifying. It would not be calm. It would not be peaceful. It would not be Charlie Brown Christmas. And an angel appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

No, it would be terrifying. I would be frightened. And so this first word from the angel, fear not, that's huge, because they were terrified. And I think it's easy to miss how incredible of an event this is, because none of us have had it happen to us. Like, if any of us had been through an experience similar to what the shepherds had been through, just out in the field, hanging out, watching the sheep, boom, angels, we would come in here and everyone in the church would know about it the next week, because it would be a life-altering, life-changing experience. Terrifying, but amazing.

And so it's not this quiet, calm, serene thing. It's this amazing, incredible, unprecedented thing in the lives of these shepherds. They weren't out there that night expecting, hey, tonight we're going to get some great news. No, they were just watching sheep. And yet this message comes to them from the angels. And the true craziness of it is about to be revealed, because, yeah, the angels appearing to them is incredible, but the message that the angel brings is even more incredible. That the Lord of the universe, the one who created everything, the one who made these terrifying angels, wants the shepherds to come visit him. And although these angels are so big and frightful and terrifying, the one who made them is a baby. And he's lying in an animal's feeding trough. The angels, the big terrifying angels, come with this announcement that the Lord of the universe who made everything wants the shepherds to visit him.

So let's look at what the angels say. They start out, behold, I bring you good tidings. Where is it here? Fear not.

[9 : 23] Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be for all the people. There will be a great joy that's for all the people. It's starting out with the Israelites, which in the Old Testament, the first two-thirds or so of your Bible, that's God's chosen people. But it's going to be for all people. It's starting in Israel, but it's expanding. It's going out into all the world. Eventually, it's going to make its way to Hong Kong.

How exciting is that? But it's not just for all people spreading across the earth. It's also for all types of people. It's not just for the rich and the famous. It's not just for the prosperous and those with prestige in society. It's also for the little teenage girl who's giving birth to him. It's also for the shepherds, the hired help. And it's for the prostitutes and the tax collectors, the outcasts of society.

It's for all people. God's not sending Jesus just for one special group. He is coming for everyone. And the angel tells them the Savior is born today in Bethlehem. Now, for an Israelite mind, this word Savior would bring lots of associations into their head. Throughout the Old Testament, this word Savior is used again and again and again. And it generally refers to someone who brings victory in battle, a warrior, a strong person. They'll talk repeatedly about how God is my rock and my salvation.

God is my salvation. There's prophecies in Isaiah that salvation will come in an individual. But the picture that comes into an Israelite's head when they hear this word Savior is mighty warrior in battle and God. That's the two primary associations. And so when they hear a Savior, that's where they go.

And then they hear a Savior is born. The Savior is not a big, strong, powerful warrior. He's a baby. And they probably expected this Savior is going to be the one to save us from Rome because that's what saviors do. They save you from foreign armies. They save you from the oppressors.

[11 : 43] But he's a baby. So whatever salvation he's bringing, it's probably going to have to wait for a while so that he can grow up, so that he can get strong, so that he can be ready to save us in battle.

But then the angel says, unto you is born this day a Savior. He's not just some big, abstract, general Savior.

He's born for you. You, the shepherd in the field watching your sheep in the middle of the night. This Savior is born for you. He's not just out there, abstractly, the Savior of the world.

He's the Savior of each individual shepherd there. And he's born for us, too. He's born to be the Savior of each of us individually today.

This big, strong, mighty Savior who cares about each individual person that he came to save.

[12 : 57] And the angel says, this will be the sign unto you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Now, if you are the shepherds, you hear this announcement about a Savior that's being born, and you think, this kid is sleeping in a palace tonight.

You know, you've heard the prophecies. You know that the Savior who comes is going to be descended from kings. You know that kings sleep in palaces.

And you think, this kid, he's going to be the Savior. He's important enough that angels are coming to tell us about him. He's got to have a high-end security detail protecting him.

There's no way we could ever see him. Even though he's come to be our Savior, he's unapproachable. He's secluded from us. And yet there's a sign.

Now, in the Bible, when someone gives a prophecy, a sign affirms the validity of the messenger. It shows the people hearing the message that what the messenger says is true. But this sign also does something else.

[14 : 04] It makes the baby approachable. Because if you think that the baby is in a palace, and you're a shepherd, if you think that the baby is with the king, and you are hired help, there's no way that you're getting in there to see this baby.

But if you're a shepherd, and the baby is sleeping in the place where the sheep eat, then you being there is the most natural thing ever.

If the baby, instead of being in a palace with a security detail, his parents can't even get him a bed to sleep in, that means that you can go and see him.

That means that you don't need to stay away out of fear. That means that he's approachable. He's accessible. He's for you.

Now, the way that the architecture worked in ancient Israel is a lot of times families would build houses sort of up on stilts. The family would live up on the upper level, and the animals would live down below.

[15 : 08] And they'd have like a feeding area down there. And a lot of Bible scholars think that's the type of house that Mary and Joseph were staying underneath. And they say the family probably had an extra room upstairs.

That was what functioned as the inn. And then the animals would all live down below. If you go to some more rural parts of Cambodia, actually, you can still see this type of architecture. I was there a couple months ago.

And these houses, they're built up on stilts. The family lives upstairs, and they keep the cows and chickens and whatever animals they have down below. And there's a feeding area for them.

And it's just how it is there. And so a lot of scholars think that this is what it was like in Israel in those days, the general architecture. And that Mary and Joseph were probably staying under someone's house where they kept the animals.

And so this sign, not only would it make the baby accessible, it would also make him really easy to find. Because there may have been a few babies born in Bethlehem that night, the same night as Jesus. But probably every other baby born that night was going to be in a house, in a bed where a baby belongs.

[16 : 21] There would probably only be one baby born in Bethlehem that night, whose parents couldn't get him a bed. Whose parents had to stick him in the place where the animals eat for him to get rest.

And so when the shepherds went into town, it would make this baby very, very easy for them to find. They would know who they were looking for.

And he, again, would be very accessible. I think a lot of us can struggle with this idea. We see God and we think he's so high, he's so powerful, he's so mighty.

Just like the shepherds would have thought when they first heard that a Savior had been born. But what we see in Jesus is that God came to us. God came for us.

God came as one of us. He made himself approachable for us in Jesus. And so it's not just that Jesus was accessible for the shepherds.

[17 : 22] But for us today, we can access God through Jesus because he came to us, for us, as one of us. And after the angels tell the shepherds about this sign, more angels show up.

And it says there's a multitude of heavenly hosts. They're praising God and they're saying glory to God in the highest. And on earth, traditionally, what you've probably heard is peace, goodwill towards men.

But a more accurate translation of that would probably be peace among those with whom he is pleased. Peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Something I had to ask myself this week is, if you're the shepherds and you hear this line, peace among those with whom he is pleased. Is that reassuring? Think about it.

If it's true that in Jesus' day, the shepherds were the outcasts of society. Nobody liked them. Nobody was ever pleased with them. And if the other people who are messed up like you aren't pleased with you, how much more displeased with you would God be?

[18 : 33] That's a very easy mindset that they could have followed. And this word, peace among those with whom he is well pleased, very well could be terrifying.

Because you're so used to nobody being pleased with you. So used to everyone hating you and wanting you gone. That when you hear peace among those with whom he is pleased, you just group yourself in that chunk that's not receiving peace.

But this message comes to the shepherds. God comes to the shepherds and he welcomes them and he invites them to come and join and see the baby and be a part of what he is doing on the earth.

He shows them his pleasure and invites them to come join in and be a part of what's happening. But for us today, we hear this message.

Peace among those with whom he is pleased. How do we respond to that? Do we think God is pleased with us? Does that message, is it a scary message because we're pretty sure that he's not?

[19 : 49] And what are we basing our answer on? Are we basing it on how good we are? Are we basing it on how much power or wealth we have? We've just seen that God doesn't base his judgments on our standards.

How are we judging whether God is pleased with us or not? Anyways, the shepherds receive this message and they act on it.

They start out on an unforgettable experience. It says that they heard the message and they believed the message. And they said to each other, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

They believed the message from the angels and their belief led to obedience. That's a pattern in the Bible. When someone believes what God says, it leads to action.

And it's the same for us today. If we believe what God says, it should lead us to action, to obedience, to following him in our lives. And if we don't respond to God's messages with obedience, it shows that we don't truly believe what he says to us.

[21 : 06] And when the shepherds believe this message, they say, let's go to Bethlehem. And it says they go with haste. What about the sheep? Did they bring the sheep with them?

I mean, that's how it's traditionally pictured, right? But I feel like that would sort of slow them down from going with haste. Maybe they drew straws. But if I was one of the shepherds and I had drawn the short straw after just seeing all these angels in the sky singing, I would be like, forget it.

I'm just leaving the sheep. Do you think maybe the shepherds went and they just said, forget it. We just saw angels who told us about a savior.

Whatever we're going to go find is going to be way more important than the sheep. Let's trust God to take care of them. We're out of here. I feel like that might be what happened. They said, you know what?

This message is more important than our livelihood. There's a savior. And we have been invited to go be there with him for his first night of life.

[22 : 14] How incredible is that? How amazing is that? The sheep, forget about them. They'll be here when we get back, I hope. But the savior, he's here and he's called us to go and see him.

So they went into the village and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby. And they shared everything that had happened to them. They shared about the fact that the angels came to them and told them that this baby had been born.

And I'm sure Mary and Joseph shared with them about how the angels had appeared to them too. And then it says that all who heard these things wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Now, assuming that they were in this manger underneath the house, you know, if you're walking through that village and you see, like, if there are people down there, that's one thing.

That's normal. But if you see people huddled around the manger and then you hear a baby crying from inside the manger, you know something weird is going on. And if you see shepherds crowded around what looked like a mom and dad, you know something weird is going on.

[23 : 27] And I'm sure as the sun started to come up the next morning and people started to head out to go to work wherever they were, a handful of people noticed something weird is going on here and said, what are you doing?

And the shepherds had the chance to say, look, we were in the fields last night and an angel appeared. And he told us, come, find the baby.

This is the savior. He's going to bring peace to earth. He's come for us. He's come to us. He's come as one of us.

And we were invited to be there. How amazing and incredible and exciting is that? And everyone's like, yeah, the shepherds got invited. What's up with that? But it was incredible and it was amazing.

And a crowd gathered to hear what these shepherds had to say about this little baby. They became the first missionaries. Telling everyone about this baby who had come into the world for us.

[24 : 36] And then it says that the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told to them.

They glorified and praised God. When they went and they saw the baby after receiving the message, their response was worship. Their response was greater love for God in their lives.

Their response was praising God and telling others about him. And they give us this inescapable call to follow their example.

The shepherds give us an inescapable call to follow their example. When they heard the message about the baby, their lives were changed.

They didn't just sit there and say, oh, that's cool news. They went and found the baby. They told others about the baby. And they glorified and praised God.

[25 : 41] And after seeing the baby, they went back to their normal lives. But I feel like their normal lives probably weren't so normal anymore after that night. I'm sure as the next night came and they had another long night staying up having to watch the sheep to keep them safe.

They had a little bit more hope as they did this difficult task. I'm sure for a long time to come, every night as the sun set and the night settled in, their minds went back to that night.

The night when the angels appeared. The night when they received the invitation to go be there for the birth of the shepherd, or for the birth of the Savior.

I'm sure that when they walked through the village, every time they walked by that manger where the baby had lay, they remembered.

One night, I was there when the Savior was born. And my life can never be the same because of that. And the question is, how are we going to respond?

[26 : 56] I started out asking about why the shepherds? Why not the bankers? Why not the lawyers or the politicians or the religious leaders? And I think one of the big answers for that question is that out of all those groups, the shepherds are the only ones who immediately respond with worship.

People from each of these other groups have interactions with Jesus throughout his life. But all of them realize that if what Jesus is saying about himself is true, they stand to lose everything, and they're too afraid to lose everything to respond in worship.

Think about it. Herod was one of the political leaders. He was the first one out of these groups to learn about Jesus. Jesus. Some travelers came from far away, and they said, hey, we want to come see this new king who's been born in your kingdom.

And he's like, what? Tell me where he is so that I can go and worship him too. But he was planning to kill him. Herod heard about the baby and was terrified that if this is a new king, I'm going to lose all of my power.

And so he came up with a plan to exterminate Jesus. He actually had all of the children in the kingdom under the age of two, all the baby boys killed, to protect his rule and reign.

[28 : 22] Herod knew that if what they were saying about Jesus was true, he stood to lose everything. And so he responded in fear rather than worship.

How about the religious leaders or the lawyers? They had their entire lives and careers built around this religious system and this legal system that was tied very closely to the religious system.

And they knew that if what Jesus was saying about himself and about God and about the law was true, they were out of a job because their entire religious and legal system was going to be wiped away by what he was bringing into the world.

And that scared them. They knew that if they followed him, they would lose their honor and their prestige and they did not want that. They were afraid.

And so rather than worshiping him, they teamed up with the government to get Jesus arrested and killed. Now the businessmen and the bankers, they're the ones who seem to have the most promise.

[29 : 30] There's a story later on of a man, he's known as the rich young ruler. He comes to Jesus and he says, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And it starts out really promising. Yeah, we finally have someone who's from a more prestigious place in society who's ready to come follow Jesus.

And when Jesus says to him, sell everything you have, give it to the poor, come follow me. He realizes, I can't do that. If I follow this man, I will lose everything.

And I'm not willing to do that. And so rather than responding in worship and obedience, he responds in fear. And it says he goes away sad because he had many possessions.

Now in the world's eyes, the politicians and the religious leaders and the lawyers and the bankers and the businessmen, they had it all together. They had everything that you could want.

But precisely because they had everything you could want, they were unable to respond properly to Jesus. And I think for many of us today, we have wealth, we have power, we have honor, we have prestige, and if we're going to follow Jesus, it could cost us all of those things.

[30 : 54] Jesus doesn't promise us to keep our money safe. Jesus doesn't promise us to keep our reputation safe. He actually says, if they hate me, they are going to hate you too. And the Bible says that each of us has this fundamental need for a relationship with God that's been broken by our rebellion against him.

And each of us knows that there's something wrong, something missing. And we try and fill that with something. For some of us, it's money. For some, maybe it's sex or power or honor.

And it's dangerous because the more we get of those things, the easier it is to convince ourselves that we don't truly need God.

We use money, honor, power, prestige to blind ourselves to our need for a relationship with God. Last week, we were talking about the church at Laodicea, and they had this saying, I have my wealth, I need nothing else.

How many of us say that and use that as a way of blinding ourselves to our need for God? And these shepherds, I don't think any of us would want to trade places with them, having to sleep outside at night, having to wander around the countryside just to earn a simple living.

[32 : 16] But precisely because they were free of all these things, they were in a place where they could respond properly to Jesus. They had no money to lose. Their job was to take care of someone else's money.

And so they didn't have to worry about, what do I have to give up monetarily to follow him? They had no honor or prestige that they could lose by following him. Their life happened mostly outside of society, out in the fields.

They had no power that he was going to threaten. They were hired help already. And so they were perfectly positioned to be able to follow him. Perfectly positioned to receive an incredible blessing that many of us might pass up because we have our wealth, because we have our comfort, because we have our prosperity and our honor and our prestige.

And what the Bible is saying is that the shepherds are actually the ones in the privileged position here.

The ones who have nothing are able to gain everything in Christ, while the ones who have everything by the world's standards sacrifice everything in Christ in order to hold on to what they've worked so hard to attain.

[33 : 42] God's economy is completely backwards from ours. God's system of value is completely opposite of what we see as valuable.

God doesn't care about the power or the wealth or the money. He cares about trust and obedience. And he went to the shepherds on that night because they were the ones who would respond with trust and obedience.

And so I want us to ask ourselves today, what in my life is keeping me from responding properly to Jesus today?

What in my life is keeping me from responding properly to Jesus today? There was a theologian back in the 1500s named John Calvin and he said, our hearts are idol factories.

Our hearts just constantly churn out idols, things that we worship rather than God. For some of us, maybe that's money or honor or power or comfort, things that can be good, but that if we trust in them, they're deadly.

[35 : 02] What is that one thing that if God said, you have to choose between this and following me, you'd say, sorry God, maybe I'll come back to you later on.

This is too important to me. I can't give this up. What's the one thing you would hold on to in your life even if holding on to that meant that you had to let go of Christ?

There's another famous theologian back in the 300 to 400s AD named St. Augustine. He's very famous. He's written loads and loads of stuff, but in his earlier days, he was actually very rebellious.

And he wrote a book, a spiritual autobiography telling of his journey to Christ. And he shares how in his early days, he was addicted to sex. And he loved sex and having to give up sex outside of marriage was one of the biggest things that kept him from being a Christian for a long time.

He actually records a prayer that he has written down that you can read today where he says, God, give me purity, but not yet. He says, God, I know I have to give this up if I'm going to follow you and I know that following you is the right thing and I want to do it, but not yet.

[36 : 27] So God, give me purity, but not yet. What's our one thing that we say, God, I know I need to give this up to follow you, but don't take it from me yet.

Let me hold on to it a little bit longer. Let me have a little more fun. Let me have a little more comfort or honor or prestige or power. And once we figure out what that thing is, the question is, what are we going to do about it?

What? The Bible repeatedly again and again and again and again and again and again and again tells us that a relationship with God is worth more than anything in life that it costs us to get it.

if it means that we have to give up all of our wealth to gain Christ, then when we give up all of our wealth and we gain Christ, we actually come out in the positive.

If it means that we have to sacrifice all of our honor on earth to gain Christ, that we actually gain honor long term through gaining Christ in God's sight.

[37 : 36] we gain honor. It says that he is infinitely more valuable than anything else that we can give up to get him and yet we hold on to these things and we will not let them go.

We hold on to our money even though we know a stock market crash tomorrow could make everything we have in the bank worthless. We hold on to our power and prestige at work even though we know one bad quarter and we can get laid off.

We hold on to whatever honor we can get in people's eyes even though that's as fleeting as anything. We hold on to all of these things and we give up Christ for them or we hold on to Christ less tightly because we're having to use some energy holding on to this other thing and God says hold on to Christ that's all that matters.

Let go of everything else and so when we identify what it is that we're holding on to rather than Christ what are we going to do about it? Are we going to respond like the shepherds and say let's go see this new baby.

Let's go meet this savior who has come for us. This is amazing wonderful glorious news or are we going to respond like the herods and the religious leaders who say this will cost me everything and I don't want to lose that.

[39 : 13] What are we going to do? Personally I find this a very hard sermon to preach because I picture tonight if the angels appeared to me like they did to the shepherds how would I respond?

and I feel like once I had gotten over the initial shock of an angel being there I would think to myself my bed is a little too comfortable.

I'm sure the baby will still be there in the morning. You know this is exciting news but my life is filled with constant excitement on updates from my phone. I get messages and sports scores alerts and news updates all the time on my phone and this is just one more thing adding to the noise of my life.

Maybe I'll see him when I get a chance. But maybe I'll just go on with my everyday life because I'm too comfortable because I have too much going on already to be able to make time and space for a trip out to see this new baby.

But God doesn't call us to stay comfortable. God doesn't call us to stick with what we've gotten used to in life. God calls us to come to get to know this new baby who's been born, to hear his story, to have our lives shaped and transformed by this story, to fall in love with him and to never be the same because of it.

[40 : 45] God is to keep holding on to everything that keeps us from him or are we going to say, you know what, whatever else I have, it's not worth it to keep that if it means I can't have him.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your love for us. We thank you for sending Jesus as a baby to us, for us, as one of us.

We thank you that when we were in a position where we deserved nothing good from you, that you gave us everything good. And that you invite us to come and follow you and have our lives transformed by Jesus and what he is doing.

God, I confess that in my life I hold on to so many things other than you that keep me from knowing you like I should. And I pray that you would be with me and with everyone in here and help us to identify what those things are and respond properly with worship and obedience to you.

God, we love you. We thank you for being such an amazing God. In Jesus' name, amen.