

## ***Joanna and Susanna: Generous Donors to Jesus' Ministry***

Summer Sermon Series "God Uses People Like Me"

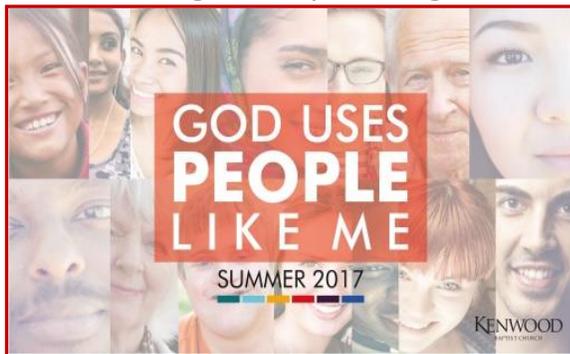
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

August 13, 2017

**TEXT:** Luke 8:1-3; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

It is good to be in the Lord's house this morning, and, like last week, I feel very proud of our church seeing so many reaching out to neighborhood communities across the street. Last night



we were at the city of Madeira, just making friends and talking with people. I was even convicted to attempt breaking a board under the tutelage of Chuck Davis after seeing Pastor Fred break about a thousand boards with students at Deer Park. Chuck ran out of small boards and gave me the thick board. I thought, "This is it, I'd better follow instructions very closely." I want praise God that

with just one icepack last night I'm able to stand up here and preach after successfully breaking that board. In reality, it was a joy to be in the community yet again and see how this summer series is playing out in real time and to see how God uses people just like you and like me. We have been looking all summer at how God uses the ordinary, normal Christian person to advance the Kingdom. This week in our church, not only did I see people from Kenwood reaching out to the neighborhood and talking to strangers, but I saw people from Kenwood minister and care for families going through intense times of grief. I saw people from our church reaching out to those having concrete needs. I saw people from our church sharing the gospel with other people. It is a profound thing, and it is something that will change both the present and future of Kenwood when we become gripped by this truth, that God really desires to use us. He doesn't need us. He could grow the Kingdom without us, and yet it's really our greatest dignity and privilege to be used by God in all kinds of different ways.

This morning, we turn our attention to a short passage in Luke 8, which draws us to a group of women who are mentioned by name. We will focus this morning on Joanna and Susanna, generous donors to Jesus' ministry. When we look at this group of women who supported the ministry of our Lord and of the growing community of disciples, we discover together in this text that generous giving flows out of our own encounter with Jesus. You cannot be convinced or persuaded to give to the things of God, but it is a response that flows out of a very real encounter with Jesus. Generous giving causes Christ's Word to be heard throughout the

community and in the lives around us. Generous giving also sets the trajectory of our own lives, and this is extremely important. We live in a society where we earn and spend great sums of money, and yet our spending often is not a trailing indicator, it's a leading indicator of where our lives will go. We will come to that towards the end. We are glad again to have the children with us, and I want to urge you to keep your Bibles open to Luke 8. It will become important for us to look at what precedes this and what follows this, so keep your text open. Let's draw our attention to God's Word and to the lives and example of these two women.

Luke 8:1 tells us:

*“Soon afterward [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him.”*

This is a description of the region of Galilee. Luke takes great care to point out to us that Jesus' ministry was not stationary. Jesus moved from village to village, from town to town. The translation of the ESV of *city* is generous. In Galilee, they are more like towns. There are a few cities. Josephus tells us that there are 256 villages in Galilee, so we have to imagine our Lord moving from place to place, and as He goes, the ministry of our Lord is focused on proclaiming and bringing the good news of the Kingdom. The central teaching, the major point of Jesus' ministry, the support of His parables, the signification of His miracles, is about the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Luke tells us that the Twelve were with them along this way. As Jesus moves throughout this region with a growing band of followers, this involves extensive travel that is motivated by concern that all would know of Him. Its focus is on proclaiming the Kingdom and the summons of response that is required. Mark tells us, for example, that Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, and this is the centerpiece that Jesus is teaching: “The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom of God is at hand.” The Kingdom of God is something known from Scripture. It is celebrated in Genesis 1; it is celebrated in Exodus 15. The Kingdom of God signals that moment when God rules and reigns in righteousness; evil is defeated. Israel was taught to expect the arrival of the Kingdom when God would rule and reign over all the earth, and the only thing that hadn't happened is that it hadn't come yet. Jesus didn't invent the Kingdom of God. Jesus' proclamation is the arrival of the Kingdom of God, and when the Kingdom of God has arrived, that means that the King of the Kingdom has arrived. Every time you hear Jesus mention the Kingdom of God arriving, it is an implicit statement of His own identity as the King of that Kingdom. As Jesus' ministry continues throughout the region of Galilee down into Judea, Jesus calls disciples to follow Him. He calls disciples Simon and Andrew. The big archaeological news of the week is that Simon and Andrew's hometown of Bethsaida has been positively identified by first century Roman ruins.

Jesus went around: He called disciples; He healed people; and Mark tells us that the fame of

Jesus spread throughout all the surrounding region. I'm just painting a picture for Jesus' growing Galilean ministry for us to consider for a moment. Luke considers something that we rarely consider—how is such a growing ministry sustained? How are Jesus' disciples fed breakfast, lunch, and dinner? They have left their businesses and consecrated themselves to full-time service. How do they have clothes, shoes to wear? Who is supporting this growing band of followers with concrete needs? Certainly they also needed materials to record Jesus' teaching and distribute them. It was a large endeavor. We have no evidence that they had a website or social media accounts, but other fixed costs of the growing band of followers required concrete support, and Luke is the only one, as he often does, to tell us about those who came alongside to support the ministry. In Luke 8:2, returning to our key passage, Luke tells us that not only were the Twelve with Jesus, but he says:

*“ . . . and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,”*

Mary Magdalene is so named from the city or town of Magdala on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, named for the Hebrew term *Migdal*, which means *tower*. She was from that area, and Mary Magdalene recognized in Jesus the lover of her soul and came to Him, and she was set free. The New Testament doesn't tell us the nature of demonic power working in her life, and at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that when she came to Jesus, she was healed; she was restored; she was forgiven and cleansed; and from that point on, she began to follow Him. Luke 8:3 draws our attention to two other women that don't get a lot of air time in sermons. I won't ask, because I know it's a small number, even if it were a few, of how many sermons you've heard about Joanna and Susanna. This is my first, and I assume so for many of you.

Well, Luke 8:3 tells us about these two women, and they are remarkable. The first is Joanna. This is Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who is described as Herod's household manager. This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas was the tetrarch of Galilee. You may recall Herod's will changed rapidly. His seventh and final will distributed his kingdom. He gave half of the kingdom to his son Archelaus in the south with the promise that he would become king if he proved competent. He ended up not being competent, so he was banished to the French Riviera. Herod Antipas became tetrarch of Galilee, and Herod Philip became tetrarch of the far north. Tetrarch means a fourth, and these two sons were each given a fourth of the kingdom to see how they would do. Herod Philip built the city of Caesarea Philippi where Jesus was confessed as Christ by Simon Peter. Herod Antipas is one that we encounter throughout the Gospels as one who is hostile to the gospel message. Herod Antipas is the one who is responsible for the death of John the Baptist. Herod Antipas is the one who clothed Jesus with the cloak and mocked Him at His trial. Herod Antipas is the one that Jesus called “that fox.” This

man who is ruling a portion of a country. He is deeply opposed to the gospel and violently opposed to emissaries of the kingdom. Yet the wife of the man who is in charge of his household is supporting the ministry of Jesus. Can you imagine? Do you believe in a God that is sovereign enough to move the heart of a pagan king to pay for God's people to return to the land? I do. It's an extraordinary window into the reality that the proclamation of the Kingdom was reaching up to the highest levels of society. Joanna is an Israelite name. Joanna is the Hebrew for *Yahweh is gracious*—short forms of this name are like *Anna* on the backend, or *Joan* or *Joanne* on the front end. Joanna, *Yahweh is gracious*, is an Israelite woman who is married to Chuza, a Nabatean name, and probably someone who was successful in business, someone that the Herodian family knew from Nabatea which is the region where they had come from before assuming the kingship. The wife of this man has become a follower of Jesus. It is extraordinary. Think of it! Chuza's wife is following the Lord! It's incredible that all the way up to the highest registers of society, people who publicly seem to oppose the gospel are privately supporting it. Do you have faith to believe that that can happen today? Chuza's wife Joanna is supporting the gospel, and we can't separate Luke 8:3 from Luke 8:2 which tells us that she is supporting it because she had been healed. Joanna had encountered Jesus just as Mary Magdalene had, and she had been healed.

Susanna is another woman we know only from this verse. Susanna is another Hebrew name. It is the Hebrew word for *Lily*. We have many named Susan, Sue, Suzanne—short forms from this name. She was another woman healed by Jesus. Then Luke tells us that there were many others. When we read this in English, we can quickly jump to the thought that there was a great crowd of supporters. But, the Greek language is wonderful in many ways, and Luke's relative pronoun here is in the feminine, and so he's signaling actually that this is a group of many other women who are providing for Jesus and the growing band of followers out of their means. It is really an extraordinary picture of the support needed for gospel ministry. Does Jesus need our resources? He turned five loaves and two fish into food to feed the multitude. He could have gone to the shores of the Sea of Galilee and turned the black basalt stone into gold coin, but He didn't. He graciously allows us—just think of this: the sovereign King of the universe allows us—to fund His ministry. Is it because He needs that, or is it because He knows that we need that? It is because the Lord knows that generous giving flows out of a response to an encounter with Jesus, that it enables others to hear the Word, and that it is the thing that sets the trajectory of our own lives.

Let's look at these things together. This really forms an extended application of this text for us and a call to action.

Number one: ***Generous giving flows out of our own encounter with Jesus Christ.*** I want you to look at the passage that immediately precedes this in Luke's gospel. At the end of Luke 7, Jesus

is at a banquet at the home of a Pharisee, and while He is there, a sinful woman of the city learned that He was there. She came and brought an alabaster flask of ointment and stood behind Him weeping and began to wet His feet with her tears. She wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus said in Luke 7:39:

*“If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.”*

Jesus answered in Luke 9:40 and said:

*“Simon, I have something to say to you.”*

You should always be a little scared when Jesus launches into a parable, because a parable forces a decision and reveals our hearts. Jesus begins this parable. It is very short, just two verses. In Luke 7:41-42, Jesus says:

*“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*

A denarius is a day's wage, and so the first person owes about a year and a half of salary. So whatever you make in a year, think of that as a debt that you owe someone—a year and a half of your salary. It's a significant debt. The other owed about a month and a half of salary. When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now, which of them will love him more? It seems so simple, and Simon falls right into the trap of the parable and says in Luke 7:43:

*“The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”*

Jesus says: *“You have judged rightly.”* Jesus goes on to say in Luke 7:44-47:

*“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”*

The woman in this scene recognizes in Jesus the Lover of her soul, and her generous giving flows out of this encounter with Him. The debt, that which is owed to God, is that she has been forgiven, and she loves in return. The generosity of her affection and of the anointing of Him with costly oil flows out of that encounter with Christ. Have you been encountered by Jesus Christ? Have you had a living encounter with the real Jesus who has captured your affections and has forgiven you of your sins? When that is the case, He simply cannot cease to be the highest object of our affection, and we seek and long to give in return to His cause. We see this

in the group of women mentioned in Luke 8:2-3.

Number two: ***Generous giving enables the Word of Christ to be heard in the community.*** The women's generosity actually causes the Word of Christ to be heard in their community. If they had not supported Jesus, then Jesus would not have gone from town to town, village to village, proclaiming the Kingdom. Jesus would be staying by the sea of Galilee and waiting for the fishermen to dry their fish and pack enough supplies for the whole preaching season. In fact, however, He is supported, and they are on the move. Luke, in his skillful way of telling the narrative in order, tells us what happened as a result of the support that Jesus received. I love this. Look at what happens next. Jesus and the growing band of disciples are supported, so ministry continues. Luke tells us in Luke 8:4, that with the generous support, ministry is flourishing, and "a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to Him." Do not miss the linkage between Jesus' preaching in town after town, village after village, that He is fully supported by those who encountered Him, and now great crowds of people are actually hearing. The ministry of the Word of God cannot be heard without this generous support, and Luke tells us about Jesus' Kingdom ministry, His preaching again with a parable. It's a little bit longer parable—a four-verse parable. Jesus tells us in Luke 8:5-8:

*"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As He said these things, He called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"*

Luke tells us that as Jesus went to village to village, town to town, He preached, and this was one of the central parables—the sowing and scattering of seed. Jesus invites us to hear, so we must hear the parable as the crowds that gathered around Him did. The parable begins with the imagery of a sower casting out handfuls of seed over prepared ground—broadcasting the seed. As the seed is scattered, it is usually followed by a drag or harrow to press the seed into the soil. In the parable of the sower, some of the seed falls along a hard path. It is trampled and crushed, and then the birds come and eat it. Jesus' sower sows in a field with a path through it. It could be a path on the border or a walking path through the center of the property. Some of the seed, this Kingdom seed, lands on this hard path and it is unable to penetrate the soil. Time is compressed in the parable and the seed waits there, vulnerable. As it sits vulnerable along the path, birds come and devour it. There are over 300 species of birds in Israel. Millions of birds fly through Israel as the land bridge between Eurasia and Africa during the migration season.

When we were in Israel last fall, it was the season of crane migration, and we saw hundreds of cranes flying over. Some of the flocks of cranes were so large and so threatening to crops that

the farmers were proactive and set up crane-feeding stations in the middle of their flocks: “Don’t eat my seed. Here’s some food instead.” The cranes came in huge numbers and ate what was provided. But the seed in the parable is eaten. It dies. Some of the seed falls along the rocks and it springs up. It springs up quickly. The rocky soil is right underneath, so there is no way for the plants to grow down. They can grow only up. There's a barrier present. It's a promising start from visual perspective as the seed germinates and begins to sprout. Hope rises in the morning and time is compressed again as the sun rises and the seed that germinates is



scorched and withers. A third portion of the seed falls among thorns. This is maybe the saddest end for some of this Kingdom seed. It grows among the thorns, and then the thorns also grow up and choke the seed to death. There are more than 20 different species of thorns and thistles in Israel: shades of purple and pink, spotted golden thistle, purple globe thistle. They dot the landscape even in the brownest part of the dry season. They are one of the most common wildflowers in the land and yet thistle multiplies and

proliferates through creeping roots. This image of thistle shows you the plants on the surface and this web under the ground of creeping roots. The saddest part about this picture is that it represents two years of growth from an original one-foot plant.



One plant of thistle grows like that underground in two years! It takes over the space. The creeping roots store food with underground buds below the level of the plow, and when you try to remove the thistle and rip off the top plants, it actually stimulates the growth of the roots, and they shoot out new plants. Thistle seeds can survive burial underground for 20 years. These are dangerous plants—part of the curse. The ground produces thorns and thistles as result of humanity’s disobedience, and in this parable, the thistle grows up and chokes and suffocates and kills the seed by strangulation. Yet, some of the seed falls into good soil. It grows and yields a hundred-fold—a staggering increase. The Roman naturalist Varro describes the seeds in this part of the world as yielding a hundred-fold. One bag of seeds produces 30, 60, or 100 bags of harvest. Jesus’ parable to the gathered crowds ends with a summons to hear, like Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

In Romans 10:17 Paul, says:

*“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.”*

Jesus warns us at the end of the interpretation of this parable. In Luke 8:18, He says:

*“Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”*

For years, this verse perplexed me, and I think I'm just beginning to understand it. It's kind of like in church that really busy people say “yes” to volunteering. The people who are working hard in one area are used to working hard, and so they do it. I used to think that people I know who are not involved, not engaged, not really volunteering, not serving in a visible way, that they have lots of time, so we will ask and they will come. But, they don't, because they are used to not serving, used to not giving, so the next time they are asked, they don't. Jesus says: “Watch how you listen,” because if you have a lot, Jesus says, “I'm going to give you more.” At first, we think: “Wait, Lord, I have a lot, like the first part of the parable. Shouldn't You ask someone else?” But Jesus knows if He has entrusted us with a lot and we use that for His kingdom, for His sake, then He will give us more. He will entrust even more to us. Then, the person who has not, even what he thinks he has—when we have a tight grip on our resources, our time, our accounts, we hoard them and hold them up to ourselves, we are fearful to squander them—Jesus says you are choking it, and you are going to lose it.

**Number three: Generous giving ultimately sets the trajectory of where our lives will really go.**

Generous giving flows out of an encounter with Jesus. Generous giving enables His Word to be heard in the lives around us, but for us, generous giving actually sets the direction of where we are going. Jesus teaches us this in Matthew 6:19 where He warns us:

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

Lay up treasures in heaven were you get an incredible return and nothing is destroyed. Jesus grounds this instruction in Matthew 6:21 with this promise:

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

This is a promise, not a declaration. Jesus says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be. It's vitally important that we see the future tense of that verb in the second half. Jesus says where your treasure is, where you invest, where you put your time, talent, and resources, wherever you put those things, your migratory heart will follow after. It is not the other way

around. We tend to think that where my heart is, then I'll put my resources there. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus says you have to invest. If your marriage is floundering, consider your investment in it. If a friendship is teetering, if your relationship with your son or daughter is not flourishing, consider the investment you're making in it. If you're not being at your best at work, consider your investment in it. Jesus tells us that where your treasure is you have to make this initial investment. You invest first, and then your heart follows.

Darrell Wehmeyer is a member of Kenwood, and he has a unique skill set of analyzing data. I don't look at the giving patterns of Kenwood in detail or by name, but Darrell is part of the finance team. He analyzed the Kenwood giving data over a couple of years and interpreted all these fascinating statistics and insights. It was very helpful for leadership, and I want to share just a couple of insights I learned from him about our church that I think are very powerful and very healthy indicators of where we are going. In 2015 and 2016, Kenwood received 9,000 gifts. In those two years, there were 9,000 different gifts to make the ministry go; 735 different people; 600 families; and \$3.5 million were given in the last two years. The ministry here would not be happening without those gifts. The most frequent gift was under \$25. I love that. That means every gift like that matters, and all together, those gifts make up one of the pillars of giving. The backbone of giving at Kenwood, 65% of the total giving that really sustains our ministry, comes through regular, monthly giving. People give every month. I believe the Scripture teaches tithing, and our family has been a tithing family for years. I was taught to tithe as a young Christian. It is the first gift we pay, and it sets our affection for the things of God first. Jesus knows you and He knows me. He knows that by teaching me to place Him at the front of my giving, it actually sets the trajectory of where my heart is going to go. I'm hooked on the Kingdom of God. I'm captivated by seeing people come to know Jesus Christ, seeing children hear the gospel. My highest joy and affection is to see the Lord known increasingly in our community. One of the ways we keep our hearts lined up in that direction is our giving. Was this really true for these women?

Where does regular giving take this group of women in Luke 8? They appear again in two other passages. They appear again at the end of Luke 23, at the scene of the cross. We discover that these women, the group mentioned earlier in Luke 8, the women who had come with Him from Galilee, they followed, and they saw the tomb and how His body was laid there. They are there at the cross. I think they watched where Jesus was laid, and then they returned and prepared spices and ointments, and we learn from John's gospel about the costly nature of these. There they are, giving again, preparing spices and ointments. As Luke's narrative continues into Luke 24, this group of women comes the first day of the week. They go to the tomb; they take the spices they prepared; they are the ones to find the stone rolled away. They went in; they did not find Jesus' body; they were perplexed. They are the ones who see two men standing in

dazzling apparel. The women were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, and the men said to them in Luke 24:5b-7:

*“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”*

Luke tells us in this narrative, in Luke 24:8:

*“And they remembered His words.”*

That means that from the giving in Luke 8 to the scene of the cross and the empty tomb, those women stayed with Him and heard His teaching. They remembered what He had said, and though the narrative of the gospels focuses our attention so often on the twelve disciples, here is this group of women and many others listening, supporting, making it happen, and they are the first ones there. They go from the tomb and tell these things to the eleven, and Luke wants us to be abundantly clear in Luke 24:10 where he tells us:

*“Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.”*

When you set the trajectory of your life on Christ, the trajectory take you to the cross and the empty tomb, and it doesn't stop there, because the last mention of these women is in the Book of Acts 1. Remember that Jesus taught the disciples that they would be filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and that they would be commissioned and sent out into the uttermost limits of the earth. His followers saw Him ascend in heavenly glory. The angel said He would return in the same way, and then His disciples came back to Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. They came to Jerusalem and entered the city. They went up inside the old city to an upper room where they were staying, and again the disciples are mentioned, and then Luke tells us in Acts 1:14:

*“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.”*

The next verse tells us there were about 120 people there. These women stayed with Jesus in following Him through cross, empty tomb, and upper room, where they, with the apostles, receive the Holy Spirit and are commissioned as witnesses.

I want all of you to be gripped by the things of God. This year has been the most generous year in the history of Kenwood Baptist Church, and I think there is a direct connection between that level of generosity and the growth in mission-mindedness and outreach to our community. Do you see the connection? There is a connection between the level of support and the things that God is calling us to do.

I want challenge you to take stock of your heart affection and where you are pointed. Have you had an encounter with Jesus? We would love to talk with you more about that if you never have. If you have never served or volunteered or helped make ministry happen, we would love to get you involved. This last point about how we are giving sets the trajectory of our lives. I want to challenge you in a very concrete way. One of the most helpful things you can do to see where your giving is reflecting your heart affections is to keep track of your spending for one month. Keep track of every dollar that you spend. There are online tools that can help you do that. It is fascinating to look at the end when you keep track of that. Husbands and wives team up. See where your giving, where your spending goes—every dollar for one month. At the end, as a couple, just ask the question: “What does this reflect about our hearts’ affections?” Let's pursue, together, having the Lord at the top, whatever that looks like. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your goodness and power. We thank You for the minor characters of Scripture. We thank You for women like Mary Magdalene. We thank You for women like Joanna and Susanna who gave out of the resources that had been entrusted to them. We thank You, Lord, for all that You've given to us. We thank You publicly, Lord, for every single one of the 9,000 gifts that have made ministry and mission happen at Kenwood these last two years. We pray, Lord, that You would make us good stewards of the resources that You've entrusted to us, and help us to reach our neighborhoods, our families, and our community, and help us to offer to You worship that is fitting to the glory of Your Name. Help us, Lord, to be a place where your Word is taught, learned, understood, and lived. Help us to be gripped by the vision of who You are and who You are calling us to be, as revealed in every passage. Lord, would You conscript us, gladly and joyfully, to join Your mission in the world? We praise You. We want to say “yes” to You. Let's do that by standing together and singing.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.