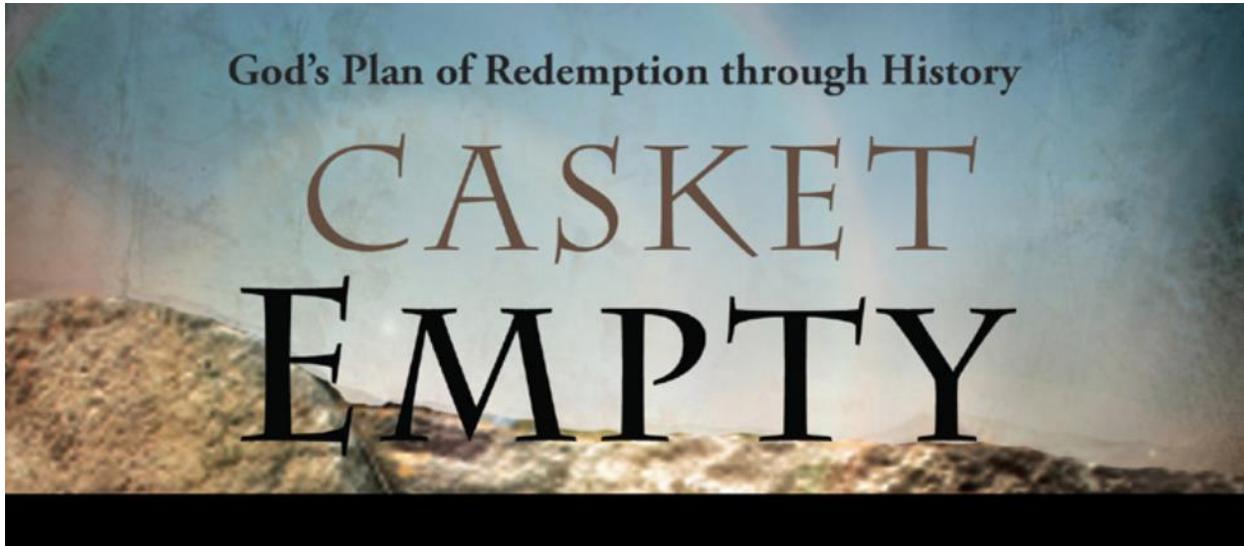


T is for Teaching - Part 3
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
May 13, 2018

TEXT: 1 Peter 4:12-5:11



What a joy to see new life in Christ and obedience to the Lord in all things big and small. This morning we continue in our spring overview of the New Testament. We've been using CASKET EMPTY as an acronym covering the Old and New Testament, and this morning we complete T is for TEACHING. We have looked the past two weeks at how the Word of Christ goes forth from Jerusalem unto the ends of the earth as God's people, filled with the presence and power of the Spirit, actually teach the gospel to the nations. It is critical to remember that Christianity is not an intuitive lifestyle. It has to be taught; it has to be seen; it has to be cultivated in our soul because if God's account of your state and mind without Christ is accurate, and I believe it is, we are actually in pretty rough shape. We are not equipped to live in a way that pleases God, so we have to be taught it. Have you ever noticed that you don't have to teach children to disobey their parents? That program is already installed, and yet, God's Word comes in and turns things right side up. We've seen the last two weeks how the Word of Christ spreads out into all the earth in an expanding sphere of witness.

Together with the CASKET EMPTY study, there is a timeline for each the Old and New Testament, and the portion of the timeline that deals with TEACHING is a map. It's a map of expanding the Christian witness, and you can see this up on the hallway behind me. If you haven't, there are copies of it in the back. This map shows us how the Word of Christ actually

does go out. By the time the New Testament canon is closed, Christian missionaries have gone out in a dramatic, expanding witness of Christ, and the 21 letters of the New Testament are the documents that follow this missionary activity to teach people how to live. We've looked at this map and some of these letters, but I want to point out something to you on this map. Every map needs a key. This is the pre-GPS map, and some of you are thinking: "I don't need a map. I've got a smart phone, I've got a GPS that tells me where I am—even right as I'm driving off a cliff." It tells me I'm driving off the cliff now, and I should be sure to communicate plans for my end-of-life to the nearest of kin. It's like the last message that you get. But, actually, you need a map if you are going to make sense of this world. Christian vision has a map—the map that Jesus told us was all the earth. You see, all of the earth belongs Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus Christ sits this morning right now as we are gathered here enthroned in glory, running the universe, calling people, opening the hearts of children to have saving faith in Him? The key to this map, and what coheres Christian mission are these key beliefs, and that's what's at the bottom corner of this map.



These are the beliefs that really define Christianity against what is non-Christianity. This is not



the map key for dividing groups of Christians from other Christians. We spend a lot of our time and energy, too much of our time and energy, saying: "I'm this kind of Christian." This is the key to the map that separates Christian from non-Christian. What do Christians really believe? They believe these seven things. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah: He is the promised King of Israel; He is Lord of all the earth. We are the only people on the planet that actually believe that.

Christians believe that if you believe in Jesus Christ, then you receive forgiveness of sins. We are the only people on the planet that believe that forgiveness is secured—not just offered—and accomplished for all who believe in Christ, so we are justified by faith. Christians believe that as a forgiven people, then our sins are atoned for, removed, and that God's Holy Spirit can freely

enter into you. It's amazing to think that human beings are filled with the fiery, consuming presence of God, and yet we are. The only reason it's not scary is that we are forgiven of our sins, so that God's consuming fire does not consume us, but empowers us.

Last week we looked at a crucial passage in Ephesians 3: Christians believe that in light of the forgiveness we receive in Jesus Christ and the infilling of the Spirit, every single person who believes in Jesus Christ is a member of God's family. That's astonishing! There is no second-tier section; there are no bleacher seats in the kingdom of God; there is no other side of the tracks in the kingdom of God; there's no nation, people group, cultural lifestyle that you would exclude on the basis of it, *a priori*. We are one in Jesus Christ, that is, anyone who believes in Him. I've had many moments in my life where this was very vivid to me. One was in the Spanish church where we were married. I remember singing in the Spanish church and worshiping and just realizing that this is my story. I looked around the congregation, and there were perhaps 10 gringos and around 370 people from all over Latin America, and it didn't matter. We were one in Christ. I remember getting into a boat on the Orinoco River in the Amazon basin and being taken in a wooden boat to the edge of the tribes of the Yanomami Indians and going to see and meet with the Indian chief who had all these facial decorations sticking out in all directions. You think nose rings and ear piercings are dramatic. This man had dramatic objects, many objects coming out of his face, and yet, we looked at each other, and I thought: "We are brothers in Jesus Christ!" It's amazing! One in Christ.

This morning week, we look at these last three convictions. These last three convictions that define Christianity are rooted in Scripture, but they all have a bit of a paradoxical nature. I don't want you to miss that, because it's vital for us as we look at 1 Peter. The first of these last three, the fifth defining characteristic of Christian faith, is **the obedience of faith**. This strikes many of us as an oxymoron or a paradox. How can obedience and faith go together? Yet, Paul says the goal of his ministry is to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations. Obedience of faith is the description of what Jeremiah saw in Jeremiah 31—that God would make a new covenant with His people, that He would inscribe His Word on the tablets of our hearts, and that our lives would be radically changed from a disobedient people to an obedient one. This is thrilling, actually. It is not an obedience to merit God's favor; it's an obedience that flows from the grace that we have received and happens over time.

The sixth quality is that we are **called be living sacrifices**. Again, this has a paradoxical quality, doesn't it? Most sacrifices are dead after you sacrifice them, but these sacrifices are living. This is the biblical image of people who are consecrated to God, holy to the Lord. Paul says in Romans 12 that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices. In other words, we are a people growing in obedience, but we are also a people who have committed themselves to

God, and we are a holy people. That means that we are reserved, or consecrated, for God's special use in the world.

The last conviction that really defines Christianity vis-à-vis non-Christianity is that Christians are the only people on the planet that believe that **Jesus Christ will return in visible glory as the Judge of the earth**. Sometimes Christians get to talking with one another, and they are particularly keen to differentiate themselves from one another on their millennial views or this apocalyptic scenario, and yet, when you pull back the camera, you realize that Christians are the only people who actually believe that Jesus Christ will return. I believe that. Do you believe that? He's coming back and we will see Him in glory, and that has massive implications for how we live now, doesn't it?

These last three key beliefs have a paradoxical aspect to them that helps us with the theme of this morning, which is: "How do we deal with the difficulties in this life?" As we have been going through the New Testament, the Gospels are filled with an atmosphere of fulfillment. Jesus fulfills all that was promised. As we go through the narrative of Acts, we see the expanding witness of Christian mission, and it looks like all is success. As we read many of Paul's letters, we see the expanding witness in the triumph and the note of glory that is sounded, and yet the latter few letters of the New Testament wisely remind us that the journey we are on is a journey that began with the empty tomb. But, there is still more yet to come. When you believe in Christ that God commits Himself to you and to me and to us together in a relationship of covenant that makes it certain that He will preserve and protect us until the end, it means that the difficulties that we will encounter in this world, God will use for our good. It also means that in light of the death and resurrection of Christ, as the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are replayed to the world in our lives, there are going to be hard things. Some of you are older than I am, and you know this already. Some of you are younger than I am, and you are just beginning to discover this. When I was a brand-new Christian, the first church that I ever started going to was a wonderful church. It was a church of about 125 people, with vibrant praise and worship, but the teaching and preaching of the church was constantly emphasizing the victorious Christian life. So I received my first wave of teaching as a new Christian that if I just understood the Bible correctly and applied it, I would never experience any difficulty. And, if I did, it was my fault. Some of you may have been taught something like that. I hope not here, but I know that you hear and are fed the Word of God, and we are in a flock together, but I know how sheep act, especially sheep in the digital age. Sheep in the digital age can reach over and extend their necks to other pastures. It's amazing what you can do with social media as a sheep. You can reach out dramatically and eat from other fields, but as your shepherd here, I have to tell you that not all grass that grows is good and healthy. This morning, I want to empower you, as Peter empowers those who heard him, about the challenges that we face in this life and how we are

to approach them as believers that have paradoxical tension between who we are and who we are becoming and how we live in Christ.

So, let's look at this passage together. In 1 Peter 4:2, Peter says:

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

When you think of a fiery trial, the image you should have, that comes to your mind, is the refining fire. It's not a fiery trial as though we are all being attacked with flamethrowers. It is a fiery testing that is coming upon you, and yet in God's providence, the difficulties in this life come upon us under His sovereign hand, and they actually produce good, long-term. It takes faith to believe that. He says: “Do not be surprised as though it is something strange happening to you.” So don't be surprised when you have a child you love and have raised and for a season is not walking with Christ. Don't be surprised when you've done your very best at work and you get passed over for a promotion that you thought you deserved, or that you were first in line for. Don't be surprised when the bills that you have to pay exceed your resources to pay them. Don't be surprised that these mortal bodies get sick, tired, and sometimes are diagnosed with catastrophic disease. Don't be surprised when a coworker insults you or demeans you for your faith in Christ. Don't be surprised when, in the context of your study, a professor or teacher belittles faith in Christ as though it were beneath the intellectual dignity of humanity. We encounter all these things. We've encountered all these things as a community this last week. Peter says, “Don't be surprised,” but in 1 Peter 4:13, he says something incredible. Not only does he say not to be surprised, but he says:

“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.”

How do you do that? You rejoice, he says, because you share in those difficulties in the reality of sin in the world—you share in Christ's sufferings. You rejoice in your afflictions, your testing, your trial, that you may also rejoice when His glory is revealed. Peter signals for us, right at the beginning, that there is more yet to come in the Christian life. We have the deposit of forgiveness of sins, the presence of the Spirit, but we are on a journey together as a people toward a future glory. So there will be difficulties along the way. “Rejoice,” he says. In 1 Peter 4:14, he says:

“If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

That is a paradox, isn't it, that we are blessed if we are insulted? Most of us, when someone puts you down or insults you, don't have the immediate reaction of: “Hallelujah! What a blessing!”

We were passing out Bibles a couple of years ago, and one of our young adults at Kenwood, a dear guy, a willing guy, had never done that before. He felt like he was obeying Christ by being out in the community and handing out Bibles. He gave a Bible to a student, and she just glared at him and ripped him in half verbally and then shoved the Bible back. His eyes went wide, like: "I thought this was going to be fun. I thought that I would enjoy this." With his eyes wide, he looked over at me. Thankfully, I had had the requisite Scripture saturation, so I knew the truth, and I just said: "Mike, that's a blessing!" He got his feet back under him, and we kept passing the Bibles. It's a blessing! Why is that a blessing? Look at the end of the verse. Do you want the ending? You can't have the ending without the beginning. Look at the ending: "You are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Wow! So, when you experience difficulties in this life as a Christian, Peter says, you are blessed, reminding us of our Lord's words: *"Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

In 1 Peter 4:16, he says another paradox:

"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

We live in a world where many Christians today are suffering as believers in other parts of the world, even parts of the world like Atlanta, Georgia. In Atlanta, the head of the fire department who had served with distinction for decades, was fired recently because of a pamphlet that he wrote on Christian discipleship for a group of men that he met with, unrelated to the service of the department. Because of the strong Christian views that were expressed in that pamphlet, he lost his job, and the mayor of Atlanta said: "Well, that's not the kind of spirit that we want in our city." Peter says, and to us this morning, "Don't be ashamed, but glorify God." How do you do that? You do that because you know there is still more yet to come.

In the next two weeks, we will look at what is YET-TO-COME in the Christian life explicitly as we look at the Book of Revelation, but for now, we have to embrace the paradox of the Christian life that though we have these glorious solid truths on which to build our lives—that Jesus is the Messiah, that He died for our sins; that we are filled with the Spirit; that we are united together as brothers and sisters in Christ and the body of Christ in the world—that body of Christ is on a journey to glory that is going to involve suffering, difficulty, hardship, and insulting along the way. So, don't be surprised, and risk everything, Peter says in 1 Peter 4:19:

"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

As a Christian, you know the ending, so you keep doing good. You keep doing what's right even

when you don't get the immediate reward. This is so important for the Christian life, it is so important for raising kids. It is important for moms, isn't it, to remember how much you do good with delayed gratification? You love the homemade Mother's Day cards early on, but there is so much serving and doing good that you don't really get back for a while. The reward is a parable of the Christian life: We entrust ourselves to God while still doing good. How you keep doing this? How do you keep this mentality of faithfulness to God despite difficulties in this world, trusting God that He will sort out the reward in the end? How do you keep doing that? You keep doing that with what Peter says next. The only way to live this way is to be taught this and to see it lived out. Scholars have wondered what the transition is between the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. It's tucked in this little word: "So." In 1 Peter 5:1, he says:

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:"

The only way that as a community of people, not just individuals on our own but as a community, we can really live this way, doing good, risking everything on the future of Christ's reward, rejoicing in difficulty, being glad in affliction, not being ashamed, but glorifying God in a different way, it is when you have a group of people mature in Christ around you pointing you in that direction. He says: "The elders among you, as a fellow elder, witness of the suffering, partaker of the glory." He is convinced of this himself, and he tells this group of people in 1 Peter 5:2-3:

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Right in the middle of this description of sustaining attention of the paradox of the Christian life, we are reminded that we all need godly leaders. This strikes a note of terror in the heart of Americans, because we tend to think that we are individual and autonomous people.

We had the blessing last night of going to the last symphony concert of the season, a stirring rendition of Beethoven's seventh symphony. It was glorious. My wife and I were talking afterwards, and she said, "If you look at how everyone was dressed, you would never have imagined that we all just came out of the same event. Some people were wearing suits and ties. Some wore T-shirts and shorts and flip-flops. Some had tons of makeup, some had none. You know," she went on, "in Greece, there is such social conformity pressure." I said, "Well, we don't have that here. We really do value the individual life." But you see, the Christian life is not meant to be lived that way, and so we need leadership. Peter says this is the connection. How do you live that way? There is a group of leaders, and they are leading in this way. Look at what he says: "They are leading, not under compulsion, but willingly; not because they are forced to,

but because God has moved on their hearts.” This is important in general; it is important for Kenwood in the near term because we are on the cusp of making an important, significant step in the life of our congregation—to vote to entrust leadership at Kenwood to a group that is identified just like this, a group that is leading, not because they are being forced to, but willingly, because God is stirring in their hearts, a group of people leading, not for shameful gain, not because of what they are going to get out of it, but eagerly for what they will give to it. That’s how you can recognize godly leadership in imitation of Christ—not people domineering over others, but by being examples to the flock. The vote we will take as a community in just a few weeks actually isn’t the really important vote. The really important vote as a community is not the decision to say we want to go in this direction to build our lives around God’s Word. The really important vote is to look as a community for people who live this way. God has placed among us godly people who are examples of how to live in Jesus Christ, and it is on us together to recognize that and say, “That’s how we want to go.” We want to move away from that devastating line in Scripture that “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” We want to say, “Let’s go together, and let’s make leadership that is aspirational for us for godliness, people whose hearts God has stirred, serving willingly, and examples, people around us who show care for souls, real care for souls and are examples to the flock.” We need this charge, Peter says. We need examples to point us in this direction, and then in 1 Peter 5:5, we also need together as a community to follow well.

We need leaders who lead well on this template, but we also need as a community to follow well. The first statement in 1 Peter 5:5, he contrasts those in the community:

“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

He speaks of elders and younger. I don’t think this is a statement of age, but of position in the community. Leaders are to lead in this way, and then he says that all of us are to follow well. The first one is to be subject. Oh, that is such an offensive word, isn’t it? Let’s just be honest. We hate that word. Maybe that’s too strong. But we resist it. Subject myself? It is like the Pharisees, who Jesus’ day said: “We’ve never been slaves to anyone.” And Jesus says: “Did you forget about those 400 years in Egypt and the four hundred years of exile?” The words, “be subject,” actually isn’t as frightening as it seems to modern ears. Be subject means to be a good follower. It means to be not resistant, but responsive. It means to follow the godly direction of those who will give an account for your souls. As Hebrews 13:7 says:

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Don’t imitate them slavishly, but imitate their faith in Christ. Hebrews 13:17 says:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

You want to talk scary. What is scary is not to be responsive to God’s leadership. It is terrifying that I look out at you and I know that I have to give an account for your soul before Almighty God. That is a weighty thing. How are you doing in following Christ? That is a part of the responsibility of any who would shepherd or lead or serve as elder among us. So, be responsive, not resistant.

Secondly, Peter says that we need to be humble, not proud. In 1 Peter 5:6, he says:

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you,”

Pride always insists on its own way, doesn’t it? Pride says: “You know, if you had asked my opinion, this is how we should have done it.” Pride always says: “I want to have all of the authority but none of the responsibility.” Humble yourselves as a people. That verb is in the plural, for all of us under God’s mighty hand, that He may exalt us.

The third quality of good followers is that they trust God, so they are not worrying, but trusting. In 1 Peter 5:7, he says:

“. . .casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”

The only way as a community that we can sustain the tension and paradox of the Christian life is to have godly leaders pointing us in that direction, and for us together as a community to be humble in God’s eyes, to be trusting in Him, and to follow well together. There is a huge aspect of the Christian life between what’s already at hand and is still yet to come that is precisely dependent on our being good followers. Why is that so important?

The last point Peter makes to underscore the necessity and requirements of godly following of godly leadership is because the journey between what is already at hand and what is yet to come has difficulties, testings, trials, obstacles, but now we find out the most dangerous feature of the journey. The most dangerous feature in the Christian life is in 1 Peter 5:8. Peter says:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

You have an enemy on that journey. What a scary image! If you don’t think you need leadership in your life, that’s naïve. If you think you will be successful in the Christian life by maintaining a posture of resistance, pride, and anxiety, that is being ill-informed. The Christian life must be

lived together, moving, following Christ, because there is an enemy who is going after you, and some of us don't believe this. We are children of the Enlightenment, and we think the devil, demons, that's something from the Middle Ages. Demonic power is real; the adversary of your soul is real, and he works mightily and relentlessly and seeks to destroy you. Peter is writing this letter from what he calls Babylon, which was a code name for the city of Rome. Peter had seen and heard the presence of roaring lions in Rome by the hundreds. When the Coliseum was first dedicated, the opening celebration games lasted a hundred days. The opening day, 9,000 animals and 3,000 people made in the image of God were killed on day one. A roaring lion, such a gripping image, seeking to destroy you.

Let me just share my heart. I see the foe. He goes after us, sometimes through the gateway of our anxiety. He goes after us, sometimes with the lure of temptation, promising you gifts that God has already given you. He goes after you, making false promises of who you will become. His handiwork always has the aroma of pride about it and resistance, and in the end he is seeking to devour you. So, we have to be watchful. In 1 Peter 5:9, we see what our God-given capacity for resistance is to be used for:

“Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

Resist! This is the opposite word for being submissive or being subject. These two words actually go together, and the opposite of being subject is to resist. We are to be subject, in other words, to follow God, but we are to resist the enemy, firm in your faith. That doesn't mean your faith is some abstract principle, but it means firm in trusting God, because the original temptation in the Garden of Eden was, “Did God really say that?” Our ancestors should have said: “You know, actually He did! Get out of here!” Then that would have been the end of the Bible. Resist him, trusting in God. Trusting in God, that God who has called you to His eternal glory will restore. The devil will always try to steal things from you, and Peter says, you trust God and He is going to restore them. He is going to confirm you and strengthen you and establish you.

As the Word of God teaches us this morning, it calls us to courage. It calls us to a courage in the Christian life; it calls us to a courage in doing good even when we face adverse circumstances or difficulties. Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due time you will receive a reward. The Scripture calls us to a courage in the Christian life, and that courage can be lived out only with attention on the line between what we have already in Christ and what is still yet to come. If all of your attention is on what is yet to come and you're not deeply persuaded that Jesus is our Messiah, that He has died for sins, and that the Holy Spirit lives in you, if you're only future-focused, then you are wobbling on the side. But, if you have your head down and you are only

so concerned with and absorbed with the benefits of the cross that you have now, then your back is turned to the dangers and difficulties, stress, and trials of the Christian life. We need both of these things. These are the circumstances that call forth courage.

So I want this morning to admonish us, number one, to be courageous in such circumstances. I want, number two, to invite us, to select leaders for our church who have these very qualities, and let's have the courage to see that, recognize that, and affirm that. I think it's really exciting for our future, and I'm praying for a consensus decision. It is the church's decision. It is not mine. It is our decision together, and I think it is very exciting. We need, number three, not just the courage in our circumstances, we need the courage for those called to lead, and we need the courage to follow well. As we follow Christ well, we will resist the enemy and we will follow Christ well.

What will happen to us as a result? When we follow Christ well, as the flock of Christ here at Kenwood, we will move together. We will follow with Him on His mission in the world. We will be healthy sheep. We will eat well, we will drink well, and you know what happens to sheep when they eat well and drink well? It's really cool. They start growing wool, and as they grow the wool, what happens to the wool? Every once in a while, the shepherds come and they put the sheep in a line, and, old-school, they used clippers. Now they have high-tech equipment, but they shear the sheep. I imagine that would seem slightly terrifying for the sheep the first time: this man I trusted, loved, followed, is coming at me with knives. But, if we follow the Lord well, and we eat and drink and the wool grows, and it gets cut off from us, what happens next? What happens next is why we are here. It gets taken and it is made into a blessing. The wool is spun and made into garments. It is made into tents; it is made into material that can be used for the blessing of others in blankets, and we as a group of people realize that we're going through this life making it safely to the end not for our own sake, but for the sake of the world. You are blessed to be a blessing and will be on a mission with God, and these are the circumstances that call forth courage. May we follow Christ wholeheartedly this morning. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we extol You and we praise You. We thank You for the many good gifts that You have given to us. We thank You, Father, that You teach us in Your Word that You do not leave us as children to figure out Christian living on our own, but You teach us patiently, passage after passage, letter after letter. We thank You for the rich instruction that You give to us this morning. We all need Your instruction, Lord. Help us this morning to embrace the paradox of the Christian life and to rejoice in our present difficulties, entrusting ourselves to You. Fill us, Lord, with courage and bravery, and help us, Lord, to recognize godly leaders among us who will call us to the same, not just one, but many. Gift many, Lord, we pray, so we can go together

as your sheep, well-fed, well-watered, and Lord, would You take the wool that You have grown on us and help us not to keep it to ourselves. Lord, would You shear us and make us a blessing those around us! We ask in Jesus' Name. Fill us with courage; make us brave. Hallelujah!

Amen.