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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**June 6, 2021**

**Communion Sunday**

**Mark 6:30-52**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your gift. Lord, especially on a communion Sunday we just thank you for what you have given to us on the cross. We pray as we again open up your book and look into your life and look into that cross that you would give us the grace and the strength and the insight and the wisdom we need to worship you and to make this of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as I said, this is the first Sunday of the month. This is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them as recorded in Matthew 26. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink*

*again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and blood, then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And he asked them to continue to remember his sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we're doing right now. We call it "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month. Some folks celebrate it every week, some folks celebrate it twice a year. We do it by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross and we examine ourselves, we ask God's Holy Spirit to point out those areas where he's convicting us of sin, we confess our sins and then we participate in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark. It's been a full two months since we've been at Mark's gospel. There was Easter for one month, we were out west visiting the next month. And if you recall when we last left Jesus he had been sending the disciples out on their first missionary journey. It was incredibly successful. We pick up at *Mark 6:12*. It says: *So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and*

*healed them. Well, since then much has happened. John the Baptist has been beheaded. The disciples are starting to understand the rhythm of the ministry that Christ is in. They recognize that the pace is growing more and more frenetic, crowds are growing bigger and the demands on them are expanding. And Jesus notes this and he knows that they need a rest. Verse 31 says: And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.*

Well the crowd very quickly realizes that Jesus and his disciples, they're leaving and they're leaving in a boat, so they take off running. They're running along the outside perimeter of the lake in order to meet them on the other side. It was about a ten-mile journey to run that way and it was a four-mile straight shot going across the lake and yet for one reason or another the entire crowd manages to arrive just ahead of the disciples. Verse 33 says: *But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.* You see, life for the disciples now has completely changed. I mean they too are gospel celebrities who no longer will have a private life. The dynamics of their interaction with the crowd is just what Jesus warned about on numerous

occasions when he healed someone. If you remember, very frequently he would said, *"Tell no one what has happened."* Well he knew that once the word was out both he and the disciples would be dealing with much more than just simple people, they'd be dealing with crowd dynamics. Their days would be spent ministering to a crowd that Jesus knew one day would turn on him. But you know that mattered not one bit to Jesus. Verse 34 says: *And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.*

Now these multitudes in Jesus' day, these are actual physical crowds who could turn on a dime. These are the same crowds that could shout "Hosanna to the Lord" and then next shout "Crucify Him." We too are faced with fickle multitudes but more often than not it's not the same type of crowd that Jesus faced. Instead their name's on a Facebook page or on Twitter or TikTok or any of a host of other ways that people use to connect with other people. And we may not be a physical mob but we behave just like one. We take off after whatever seems to be the answer for this week, this day, this month, and we put people in positions of great authority. We make them into heroes and then just as rapidly we dethrone them. We're in the midst of what we call "cancel culture." And it's a time when everybody knows that all it takes is one wrong move and

you can be canceled, you can have your reputation shredded, you can lose your friends and acquaintances if you're identifying with the wrong people or ideas. In some instances you could lose your job for something you said now or even 25 years ago. And wouldn't you know it, many of the ideas that you can now get cancelled for have to do with believing what the Bible teaches about gender or sexuality or marriage. You see, Jesus was dealing with the ultimate in cancel crowds. These were people who saw him either as a political leader able to lead them out of the oppression of Rome or perhaps a miracle worker able to help them deal with some disease or affliction or even somebody who could just supply them with a meal. If anyone knew the nature of these crowds, it was Jesus. The vast majority of them were there because they had seen or heard of these miracles. And whether or not they were looking for a political leader or someone who could physically ease their circumstances, these were not people who were bent on some spiritual journey looking for the Messiah. These were simply people who were in need and their numbers were growing exponentially.

So Jesus recognizes that his hopes for a time of rest and retreat with his disciples are now dashed, but instead of growing frustrated like his disciples did, he just doubles down on the compassion that he offers the crowd. Well, not so the disciples.

It says: *When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."*

One commentator said the disciples wanted to get rid of the need by getting rid of the needy. "Send them away," they said. Well, Jesus saw not only a need but an opportunity. It says: *But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat."*

Understand now Jesus is looking at a crowd of approximately 20,000 people. You know it's only 5,000 that are mentioned here but that's just men; if you add the women and the children, you're going to have a much, much bigger number. So this command from Jesus seems absurd on the surface. This is an enormous crowd. They're in the middle of nowhere. There's no food, there's no kitchens, there's no food prep, there's nothing. *And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"* Now 200 denarii was about a year's salary. It was a considerable amount of money; for us, just say \$50,000. And they're basically telling Jesus that \$50,000 wouldn't be enough to give this crowd a bite or two. Well Jesus is nonplussed. I mean after all he's already fed millions in the desert every single day for forty years. I mean he could have fed these people in an instant without breaking a sweat. And yet he says to the disciples, *"You give them something to eat."*

Why do you suppose Jesus put it to the disciples that way? I mean why not just make some manna rain from the sky like he did before? I mean why lay this task at the disciples' feet? Notice how God is constantly seeking is to partner with us in the ways that he endeavors to connect us with our fellow man? We see the pattern in scripture. I can go all the way back to Noah building an ark for 120 years that God could have made in a nanosecond or Solomon taking generations with a force of thousands and thousands to build a temple that God could have built with a snap of his fingers. This is the God who builds universes and black holes and mountain ranges and forests and oceans all by the power of his spoken word. So why does he want to involve us in anything that he undertakes? I mean, why complicate this with human interaction? Why would Jesus seek out a boy's bag lunch? I mean what possible usefulness can he find in spreading five loaves and two fishes among 20,000 people? Well could it be that God graciously wants to involve us as the crown of his creation, as future co-regents with him of his universe, could it be that God wants to involve us in the process of actively participating in the way he runs his universe? I mean the disciples were incredibly ordinary people, but right now they are sitting on twelve thrones in heaven ruling. And you know, a similar glorious future awaits every one of Christ's sheep. Every one of us are co-regents in training. Listen to this promise Jesus once made. This is *Revelation 3*: *"To him who overcomes I will*

*grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

You see, as we're following Jesus in these gospels we see him encouraging and prodding and sometimes exhorting his disciples into actively taking a role of his image bearers. And what makes you think that Jesus just stopped with his disciples? This is the prayer Jesus said about his disciples in *John 17*. He said: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."* Jesus was talking about us, folks. How incredibly gracious it is of God to truncate his power and ability down to this puny level of human effort in order to include us in the process. It's an inclusion the disciples really didn't want anything to do with. Verse 38 says: *But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see."* And when they found out they said, *"Five, and two fish."* Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they all ate and were filled.

Now there's some important details that Jesus employs here. First

thing he does, he organizes all of the people into ranks. The Greek word that's used here is really the same word they use for organizing rows of vegetables in a garden. Jesus wanted everybody to arrange themselves in an orderly fashion in order to avoid the panic that might ensue. We just got a brief taste of that with Pastor Papaf when he's describing giving out the food in India and how fearful he was at that time. There was a panicked crowd and that panicked crowd literally was threatening. So Jesus has his disciples to organize the crowd to preclude that kind of response, and then he solicits whatever food there is to start with, I mean, we're talking about a paltry five loaves and two fishes. I mean, that's barely enough to feed one family but God uses that human effort and then he multiplies it so much so that in the end after having fed the 5,000, which is actually 20,000 if you include the women and the children, after feeding them all he winds up with twelve baskets of leftovers. Nothing is left to chance and nothing is wasted. Verse 43 says: *And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.*

So here we see God working this miracle but we also see that he insists on it having a human element. There's another area that God insists on including us humans in as he interacts with this world and it's the arena known as prayer. You see, the whole point

of prayer is to involve us in what he is doing. And it always raises this one question, and that is if God is sovereign, that is if he controls everything, then why should my prayer have any affect whatsoever on what he's doing? I mean if God is going to do what he's going to do, why should I kid myself thinking that my prayers are going to have any affect whatsoever? Well the answer to that is simple but it requires a little bit of unpacking, and it's because God has ordained both the ends and the means of his purposes. I've said this often, the simplest way to understand this is to say, first of all, God does all things in response to prayer. If he wants a mountain moved, the very first thing that he's going to do is move people to start praying for that mountain to be moved. And then in response to that prayer, he moves the mountain. So the end is that the mountain would be moved, the means to that end is his sheep praying for that mountain to be moved. We provide the means; God provides the ends. You know Jesus demonstrated that very thing for us. I mean, his prayers became the means to God's ends, and that's why Jesus bathed everything he did in prayer. It's also one of the reasons why he dismissed the disciples after feeding the crowd. It wasn't just that the crowd wanted to worship him; they did. That wasn't the only reason that caused Jesus to send the disciples on ahead of him. It was his need to pray. This is what verse 45 says, it says: *Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go*

*before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.*

There was nothing more important to Jesus than prayer. It was perhaps the number one thing that he wanted to pass on to his disciples. And because it's so incredibly vital and such a huge part of how God has decided to interact with us, it's also the number one thing that Satan works on to dissuade us from. I always relate to prayer as spiritual labor, spiritual heavy lifting. And because the enemy knows how crucial it is, he will do everything in his power to distract, dissuade, and defeat every single effort we make to pray. Just consider these words from Paul. Paul said this in *Philippians 4:6*, he said: *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

So as we go to prepare for communion this morning, it's a question I think we should ask ourselves: Do I bathe everything in prayer? Ask God for the grace to do just that. This is God's warning that he gives us about taking communion. He says this in *1 Corinthians 11:28*. He says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not*

*discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* I say this every month, I say communion is this extremely serious undertaking and entering into it in an unworthy manner is asking for disaster. And I plead with you, if you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of your life to this altar, then just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, then err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

On the other hand I make this point each time as well. You can think you have to be spotlessly perfect in order to receive communion and that's a mistake as well. I say being a child of the King doesn't mean you don't sin, it doesn't mean you don't fail, it means that you recognize that the salvation you have been given is a gift from God and it's never earned by -- quote -- "being good." I quote Dane Ortlund each month because his words are so pregnant with meaning. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that

when we fail, we are aware that we've sinned and the reason why we are aware of it is because God has placed his Holy Spirit inside us. So when we sin we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us, a Father who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless, it doesn't mean that you're sinless. It means that you understand that when you sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus himself up in heaven speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have the righteousness of Christ himself and not our own righteousness, because of that, we are now free to eat from his table. So if you love the Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. He lived that life that we were all supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven, so that we could participate in this.

So take a moment to open up your package and remove the bread. And one thing you might want to ask yourself as you're confessing and coming before the Lord is am I really laboring in prayer for the kingdom? Am I doing that task in a way that brings honor and glory

to God?

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.*

There's an event that takes place in Mark's gospel, it's between verse 44 and 45, something that Mark doesn't even mention but it certainly points to the immediacy of Jesus sending his disciples alone into the boat while he dismisses the crowd. This is what Mark's gospel says in verse 45 and 46. It says: *Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.* Well John's gospel tells us a lot more than just that and he tells us what the immediate reaction of the crowd actually was. This is John's version of the same thing. It says: *Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself*

alone. Understand, there was nothing in this crowd's adulation that was in the least bit attractive to Jesus. In fact it was a response that he actively tried to forestall because he knew how it would complicate his mission. Jesus responds to the adulation of the crowd by sending the disciples back immediately across the lake while he heads up to the mountain to spend the night in solitary prayer. Again verse 46 says: *And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.*

Just picture this. Jesus, he's up on the mountaintop, he's praying to his Father. His disciples are out on the lake, they're up against this terrible head wind and they're straining to get back to shore and Jesus supernaturally sees them straining at some time after 3:00 o'clock in the morning, and Jesus sets out to join them. It says: *Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.* I want to you picture what it is the disciples are seeing. They're rowing into this incredible head wind, they're in a terrible storm and of course they're facing backwards because that's the way you row and because they're facing backwards, they see this figure approaching them from behind. So while they're rowing this way they see what they think is a ghost and he's walking on the water. Verse 49

says: *And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled.* Now the text here indicates that not just that they were troubled, the text indicates that they were terrified. Before you think less of them, just imagine what your reaction would have been. You're furiously rowing like they are and suddenly you see somebody coming through an intense storm and he's walking on top of the water. No human has ever seen this before. This figure's approaching them, they see that, they're absolutely terrified! It says: *But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."* Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.

And once again we get a very incomplete picture if we're simply relying on Mark's gospel because there was another major incident that took place during this event that Mark doesn't include in his gospel but Matthew does, and this is Matthew's version of the same incident. He says: *Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."* And Peter answered Him and said, *"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to*

*You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. So here's Peter demonstrating his faith as only Peter can do, which is amazing considering that Peter has just shifted from screaming in terror of Jesus as ghost to asking Jesus if he can now join him on the water. How like Peter is this? Of all the apostles it would be Peter who would step up and demonstrate real courage and real determination to put his faith into practice and how like Peter is his next reaction. It says: *But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"* Now Peter had only one way to see that the wind was indeed boisterous, he saw that was boisterous because the waves are whipping up furiously. And so he takes his eyes off of Jesus and he puts them on the waves and immediately his faith starts to diminish and as his faith begins to diminish the miracles supporting him begins to diminish as well. The more Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus, the more are begins to sink. Eventually he cries out "Lord, save me!" and Jesus physically grabs him, chiding him for his faith. Well, the analogy here is pretty obvious. Any time we take our eyes off of Jesus, we're going to find ourselves losing heart, losing courage and ultimately losing faith. I have great sympathy for Peter because that's an incredibly easy thing to*

do. I mean, it's not often that you find yourself walking on water in the midst of a squall. And yet Jesus's attitude is the same as it was toward the feeding of the five thousand. Peter, what seems to be the problem? Jesus once said, "*With man this is impossible. With God all things are possible.*" And Jesus wants Peter to be thinking in terms of the impossible.

So how does this translate to us here in America in the 21st century? What kind of boisterous wind is whipping up the waves of your life? I mean it could be finances, it could be health, it could be family issues, it could be work, it could be this cancel culture. Any one of these things can take our eyes off of Christ and onto our circumstances, and once we do that we're going to find, just like Peter, we're starting to sink.

I spoke last Sunday about the conviction of sin. I spoke about how important confession was and I lamented the fact that we Protestants spend very little time thinking about or even entering into the idea of confession. I remember back to my youngster days in the catholic church making sure I was ready for confession by having all of my sins laid out in my mind, how many times I committed them, I had them all set so I could say, bless me, father, for I have sinned. It's been three weeks since my last confession. I used the Lord's name in vain twice, I lied three

times, I did this, I did that. I basically recited a catalog of all my junior offenses for little ones. As Paul said in *1 Corinthians 13*, he said: *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* I mean, confession should be serious business for anyone at any age, but I thought of it as a child, just simply a catalog of things that you blurt out. I don't really think that's what God is looking for in our confession. Just stop and think for a moment. What do you think matters the most to God? What made Jesus say to the disciples, *"You give them something to eat"*? What mattered to Christ when Peter stepped out of that boat and onto the water? What matters to Jesus in the attitude of his disciples? It's almost always a matter of faith or the lack thereof. I mean it's sad to realize that Jesus's words to Peter as he's sinking that night have become the phrase that we use to describe our own mistrust of people, places and things. *"O ye of little faith."* How many times have you heard that? *"O ye of little faith, why did you doubt?"* Have you ever thought about confessing to God your lack of faith? See, faith is what delights or discourages Jesus.

Mark's gospel describes an incident in the boat with Jesus again without even speaking about Peter's meeting with Jesus and it ends with this strange statement, it ends with a quiet rebuke of all the

disciples. I mean just like Peter, they'd all been terrified when they thought Jesus was a ghost and incredibly comforted when they realized that it was Jesus. After Jesus has this confrontation with Peter, they both get in the boat and the wind ceases and they find themselves at shore. And John's gospel ends with the disciples astounded at Jesus's power and they're worshiping him in the boat. This is *John 6:32*, it says: *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."* But Mark's gospel, the one that we're studying this morning, that one ends on a very different note, on a much more somber note. This is how Mark's treatment of this situation ends. He says this: *Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.*

Mark describes this miracle, this meeting of Jesus in the middle of the lake as something that caused them great amazement when it really shouldn't have, because according to Mark -- and I'm assuming he's including himself in this -- they never took the time to reflect about what Jesus had done only hours before. I mean what was there to understand or not understand about the loaves and the fishes? Jesus had clearly done a spectacular miracle. I

suspect the disciples were so caught up in the mechanics of distributing it, of getting the food out to people that they forgot all about where it came from. I mean remember, Jesus dismisses them very hastily because the crowds wanted to make him into a king and he saw this as a great temptation for his disciples. He knew that they had given in to that temptation previously on numerous occasions. Now the crowd itself is calling for Jesus to be king and he wouldn't have it and he didn't want the disciples to come under that kind of influence, so he very quickly dismisses them. Well, you know, I could easily see the task of feeding 20,000 people. I can see that gaining the ascendancy and squeezing out the need to publicly acknowledge the absolute worship such a miracle should produce because our hearts grow hardened by circumstance. And it's not like we haven't seen this before. Remember the reaction of the Jews in the desert to the miraculous feeding of over one million people every single day by God who literally rained down food from the sky. I mean the response of the Jews went from the miraculous amazement of *Exodus 16*, it said: *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you"* to absolute scorn and derision because years later that same supernatural food disgusted them. I mean grace accepted had produced what it always seems to produce, grace expected. *Numbers 21* says: *And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For*

*there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."*

So how had the disciples hardened their hearts? Well probably the same way that we harden ours. We just get used to the blessings and miracles that we participate in each and every day. *For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.* If the disciples who were with Jesus every single day had hardened hearts, how about ours? I mean God himself loved us enough to be willing to suffer the pain and humiliation of being nailed naked to a tree, of being thrust out from his deepest love because Father, Son and Holy Spirit had agreed that the wages of our sin was his death. I mean, that God himself would be willing to exchange his righteousness for our sin if we simply placed our faith in his sacrifice, it's beyond comprehension. How could anyone ever take such a gift for granted?

Well, our two takeaways from Mark's gospel this morning have to do with the only two things that we can ever give back to him. And it's the two things that keep our hearts tender: It's prayer and it's faithfulness. And we see in Jesus's attitude, we see in his action that they're intimately connected. So as you go to take the cup this morning, I'd like us to ask ourselves these two questions: Where is my prayer life, and how is my faith growing? Just take a

moment to think about that.

*1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." So take, and drink.*

This is the part where we talk about head, heart and feet, a practical way that we try to help remember the sacrifice of Christ. And one of the things that I was struck about that I want to talk about is how we are surrounded today by what I call "faith shredders." You know, cancel culture hates, it just hates the gospel. And you know, we are surrounded now by deconstructionists. A deconstructionist or somebody who deconstructs, it's somebody who says, "I used to believe in this stuff, I don't believe it any more," and then he goes at great lengths to explain what it is he's doing and why he's no longer a believer in Jesus Christ. We saw that with Joshua Harris, it was shocking. I mean, Joshua Harris wrote the book that we give out to people as an introduction to the church. Here's this wonderful book that he wrote and here's this guy saying, "I don't believe this stuff any more."

Well, deconstructionists have become incredibly popular. Anybody here ever heard of Rhett and Link, a group? Well, that's

encouragement to me. Rhett and Link are two men, they were missionaries, then they were staff people on Campus Crusade Crew. They started a podcast. Their podcast was how they no longer are Christians, how they deconstructed their faith. Their podcast has 16 million subscribers. Six billion views. They have amassed a fortune of over \$20 million just selling their deconstruction. It is huge today. So we have faith busters all around us, faith shredders.

What I want to suggest today, this morning, is that you actively pursue faith builders. There's just a couple that I just wanted to mention. Alisa Childers, she's the one that I recommended her book, her book *Another Gospel* that she wrote, wonderful book. She's got a podcast. I listen to her all the time. She brings on people who are marvelous. And the marvel about these people, she primarily is somebody who deconstructed and reconstructed, saw the absolute emptiness of where she was heading and then went back and studied intensely the Bible, the scriptures, went to seminary, went to seminary classes and learned and learned and brought in all these other people and saw the richness of the truth of the gospel. And is here re-proclaiming it.

Anybody here ever heard of Richard Rohr? Again I'm thrilled that none of you know who he is. Richard Rohr, I was telling somebody

this morning, he is Oprah's favorite theologian. That should tell you everything you need to know about Richard Rohr. He's a heretic, he's a false teacher, but he's incredibly popular. He's on Amazon, his book is the number two book of Christology, about who Jesus Christ is. And I was listening to Alisa Childers on one of her podcasts and she had a fellow on by the name of Steven Bancarz. Steven Bancarz was a person who ran a huge new age website. He was so -- he had over a million subscribers. He was making \$40,000 a month advertising just running his website and he said one night he met the living Christ. And he said it just reduced him to absolutely nothing. The next day he wrote a letter, an open letter to all of his subscribers, said, "I am done. I'm am done. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior." And so for me I'm listening, I'm just sitting there, I spent two and a half hours listening to Michael Bancarz take apart Richard Rohr verse by verse and all of the false stuff he's been saying and it's a huge, huge boon to my heart to hear not only the fact that there's this new group of hippies out there, it's people who are proclaiming the gospel, reconstructing the gospel away from all of the deconstructionists. So I would just encourage you to get on Alisa Childers' podcast.

I also listen to The Briefing with Al Mohler. That's a biblical worldview applied to the worldview every single day. And then

finally for the emotional part, I don't know if anybody has seen *The Chosen*. Again I've become -- I don't think there's a single person that I have encouraged to watch that that hasn't come back and said I'm addicted to this. This is the best thing I've ever seen. It is an incredible proclamation detailing the life of Christ. And it was a crowdfunded thing that the guy started out. It's not a Hollywood thing. They're not spending tons of money trying to advertise it. And it just goes, they're going to do 56 hours of the life of Christ. He knew he couldn't do it in a movie. So this is the second season. They're starting the second season. And there's some caveats to *The Chosen*. I mean obviously what they do is they stick the scripture but wherever the scripture doesn't speak, they make fiction. And the fiction is incredibly fascinating and it involves all kinds of interesting guesses as to what the disciples are thinking, of who they are and how they act and how they respond, but it's a guess, it's fiction. And there's a danger of somebody thinking that's what the Bible says. They're very clear to say that's not what we're doing, we're sticking with scripture where scripture is, but then we take artistic license. But it's just a marvelous, marvelous emotion of seeing people portraying Christ where the actors can actually act and the plots are amazing and you just get incredibly encouraged.

So I would just encourage you this morning in light of the faith

shredders that are all around us, you need to actively start looking at faith builders and a lot of times that's just going to be podcasts, it's going to be what the Internet giveth, the Internet taketh away. Well let it give to you. Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you for who you are. I thank you for the gift that you are to us, the gift that we celebrate this morning.*

*Father, I just again, I think of all of those who have put so much energy in to shred other people's faith, what a terrible thing that is, what a terrible waste of energy. And I pray for all of the wonderful things that are out there, the solid belief that people have and are willing to share, and I just pray that you would give each and every one of us just the right combination of being able to access that to grow our appreciation, grow our ability to tenderize our hearts, to grow our faithfulness and grow our prayer and be able to say, Lord, we love you. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*