

It's not a fun part of my job, but it is part of my job. And I know that in some of your hearts, there's a little root of bitterness because I've been hearing about it lately. And so I want to take care of that and say publicly right now that I did not pray for Snow. Let's go ahead and start off with prayer and then we'll begin. Father, we ask you to be with us even as we're stuck in homes and and we are in a Snow globe right now, father, we ask you to bless us as we enter your word and as we pray together, as we See what you have for us.

I pray you'd bless each person, keep them safe, and father that you would, you would be with us this morning as we dive in together. In Jesus his name. Amen. In high school, I was in a play called South Pacific. And as part of that play, I wasn't gonna do it, but then the teacher said, if you do it, you get out of 2 of your classes.

And so I got out of 2 of my classes since And so I started working on the set. And as part of working on the set, I had to go to our local college that had put on the play before, and they had a big piece of the set that we needed. And so me and my friend were given a truck and a piece of rope and they said, go get the set. And so we went and it was a 6 foot by 10 foot whale. It wouldn't fit in the back of the truck and so we said, we had one rope.

So we'll just tie down the front And my idea was that I would ride on top of it to hold it down as we went through the streets. And it worked until it got about 35 miles an hour. And the 35 miles an hour, the back of the whale started to lift off of the bed. And then about 40 5 miles an hour, the entire whale lifted off the bed and it was just flying. So I am riding a flying whale, through half of Arlington, Texas until we finally touched down in the school parking lot.

I'm until we finally touched down in the school parking lot. I got several questions about my my decisions. I still get questions about my decisions, but They were questioning my sanity and my safety. We should be living lives that cause people to question, but not those kind of questions. And it's 1st Peter 3:15 says, in your heart, revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an it's here to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. Now that command implies that we have a hope and that that hope is gonna be so evident that people will know it. They'll see it. Now in nature, God helped some creatures to be able to imitate other creatures or other things. So that they would have a benefit.

They'd be able to survive or they'd be able to eat. And sometimes their their stuff was so close, it was hard to tell them apart. So I have a few of those for you as you're going through. One of the the Just gonna scroll through these really quick and see if you can spot the animals in each photo. And the photo that looks like a bunch of leaves, there that is a copperhead snake that's nestled in those leaves.

The one that, looked like a piece of moss was a lizard. They are so close that it's hard to tell the difference. We are called to be imitators as well. We're supposed to imitate not a tree or an animal. We are called to imitate someone.

Ephesians 5:1-2 says, imitate God therefore in everything you do because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us. A pleasing aroma to God. Those 2 verses can change our lives this morning if we'll believe and apply them.

Whenever you see a therefore, remember we want to see what it's there for. And so in this case, God is reminding us about all the incredible blessings that we've been given because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. He said, you have been adopted. That you've been given wealth and an inheritance. You've been given a new nature and our eternal life.

And as we learned last week, he told us to throw off our old sinful nature. To wrap ourselves with Christ like a new robe that we would put on covering all our old sin and shame. Our old nature, our old sinful self was not just not godly. It was at war with God. We were his enemies.

But God rescued us. Even though we were his enemies, he sent Jesus to come and to give his life on the cross. And so now, he says, when he looks at us, He sees Jesus. He sees the one that Jesus bought. Jesus took our sins and we are given his righteousness and we've been made new and now God is saying, therefore, because I've done all of this, I want you to imitate me.

We all recognize God is referred to as our heavenly father. And we understand when we believe in Jesus and we call on him, we are given a new nature. We have a new relationship with God the father, but so many families are dysfunctional. So many families have become harmful or toxic. So many people are imperfect including our our earthly fathers, that we distance ourselves.

We we shut off ourselves from a intimate close relationship and as a result, we can find ourselves feeling a little bit like orphans at times. We feel a lack of intimacy. We can become defensive. As orphans, we're anxious. We're we're worried.

We're worried over relationships, over health, over money. We work to gain approval from people around us and feeling like orphans can cause us to live in fear. It can cause us to live feeling unworthy with a lack of faith, trying to work our way home. And those feelings from a earthly father can transfer to our heavenly father. We can feel like spiritual orphans at times.

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People struggling so badly for acceptance and self worth, and still acting like orphans. But God is not our earthly father. God is perfect. He is our perfect heavenly father and he doesn't just call us his children or his relatives. We're not just part of God's family.

Listen again to what he says as he speaks words that should cause us to just worship. When he says, do this because you are his dear children. His dear children, when when we trust in Jesus and we follow him, our relationship is not just a servant. It's not just A boss and a and a worker, our relationship is his own dear child. Loved and precious.

He refers to you and I the same way he referred to Jesus when he said, this is my beloved son and whom I am well pleased. He refers to you as his beloved child. Warmth, tenderness, compassion, all those things from God flow to us. We can we can have that incredible Insurance that God's not just a father in heaven. He is our father and we are his beloved children.

When we grasp that thought, it can take us from being orphans to being loved children and understanding what that means Russ. And we can imitate him just like children imitate their parents. If you watch children, they watch and they try to do what you do as a parent. No matter what their age, they are paying attention. And as children of God, we all start off as kind of spiritual infants.

You've seen all those new posts from new parents when they've had their first baby and and it is, it's it's almost comical because it doesn't take anything to make a new post. If that baby smiles, it's a picture. If the baby, turns over, it's a picture. It's an event and and the parents are so proud that, Look, he turned over. Look, he he sat up.

Look, he fell down. How cute. And, they said a word, they're trying to stand even drooling is cute for new parents. A 1,000 pictures are recorded Because those memories are special to the parent, even if the child's not aware of it. Parents don't wait till their children are in the Olympics before are proud of them.

They began being proud of them at that moment. They celebrate every tiny success, every tiny improvement. And God is not just the father, he is our father. And he looks at us imperfect, falling down, making messes like a loving father recording every moment. Loving all the hurts and celebrating every success.

And along the way, we learn to imitate him. Then we're told to live a life filled with love. Following the example of Christ, he loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Being offered as a sacrifice reminds us of the the system and refers back to that system that we had in Leviticus. 3 offerings that are reflected there, the burnt offering pictures Jesus's complete devotion to God.

And the meal offering is perfection of character. The peace offering, the fact that Jesus made peace between sinners and God because of love, Jesus became the scapegoat in the Jewish sacrificial system, where they would take that goat and they would place their hands on him and on on that goat, they would place all the sins of the people and they would send the goat out of the city into the wilderness. Jesus became that scapegoat. He had all the sins of all of us placed on him and he was led out of the city and gave his life. That was love.

And we are to learn to love like Jesus. 1st Corinthians 13 is famous for being used the weddings as the love chapter, but it was written to you and I, to the church. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy or boast.

It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. So you and I, because of his great love for us, should spawn with with love. And that kind of love as we imitate God impacts a lot of things. The first one I wanna talk about is our attitude. You know, our attitudes are are changing, aren't they?

It only takes one slow driver in front of you to destroy the illusion that you are a nice, kind, friendly person. Lee pers. It takes one person, one event and suddenly we've lost our joy. Do you ever feel like you're walking around grumpy, discouraged, hopeless. You know, the world's watching us.

God has given us riches that the world can't steal. He's given us an inheritance so vast we can't even grasp it. And He's brought us in and calls us his own dear children. We should walk around like, we've won the eternal lottery and Not like Eeyore, the the sad little donkey off the Winnie the Pooh. One of his lines was, I was so upset I forgot to be happy.

Start in the morning before you even climb out of bed. Good morning, God. I can't wait to see what you have planned for today. Be so happy in Jesus that you forget to be upset. The second thing it impacts is our choices.

What would Jesus read? What would Jesus listen to what would Jesus watch? Do you really believe Jesus would listen to that radio station? Do you believe Jesus would stream that series? Our choices can be made for ourselves or our choices can be made for the Lord and for others.

Every choice reveals our love. It reveals our obedience and our response to imitating God. Our choices reveal our desires, and if when those choices are to imitate God, then our choices reflect that. The next thing is our actions. What would God do today if he was living your life?

Well, how would Jesus treat the people in your home? Do you believe Jesus would drive hoping a cop wouldn't catch him? Do you believe Jesus would work at your job like you do? This is practical stuff. And it's calling you and I to live lives so different from the people around us That it causes people to ask why.

Now when I was doing that play and I did that silly thing riding though flying whale through the city. I got a lot of questions. People were questioning me, but they were questioning the wrong

things. My actions cause them to question my safety or my sanity, not my hope. You and I to live lives That reflect the love of God so much that people ask us.

The next thing is it impacts our words. We're imitating God and walking in love. It should imitate God in such a way that we ask ourselves, how would Jesus speak to his parents? How would Jesus speak to his children? How would Jesus speak to wife, family?

How would Jesus speak to the co workers, friends? Our words are supposed to be caring, uplifting, building others up. And if necessary, when those rare times when we need to do it, when theory. When those rare times when we need to do it, when there is correction, it is the truth wrapped in love. This was convicting for me.

This part, I have been wrestling with all week because I'm upset at the direction our world's going in. I'm upset at the political spectrum. I'm upset at the economic spectrum, and I'm looking at all these bad actors in our world who are doing things intentionally wrong. And I find myself talking about that a lot. But Jesus didn't spend his time talking about Caesar.

He didn't spend his time talking about the evil King Herod. He spent his time talking about his father, about his father's love, about the kingdom in God. Next one is our faith. We have a constant stream of negative news every all day. If we keep drinking from that stream every day, it will poison our faith.

It will cause us to be anxious and worried about all the things that are completely out of our control. What is in our control is our faith. If we imitate God, if we live for Jesus, we understand this, that all things work together for the good of those that love God and are called according to his purpose. So, love God and are called according to his purpose. To do this, we need to realize our constant need for Jesus.

We need our church family to come around us, to mentor us, to help us grow. We need to be in the word of God constantly. And one of the reasons we're reading the new testament together is so we can be in the word. And so I wanna encourage you to keep doing that. Keep reading in that chapter a day and pray.

Take time to be with God every day. And when we understand, our world is falling apart. When you're in the word, you find out that's what God said would happen. And so instead of depressing us, it can encourage us that our God already knew all of this. That our world rushing toward one world religion, our world was rushing toward one world government or one global currency is not a reason to panic.

It's a reason to rejoice. The words of God are coming true all around us. God told us all of this would happen. It's not a surprise to him. It shouldn't be a surprise to us.

All this is proof that our faith in God is well placed. Rejoice. Don't whine worship. Our Jesus is coming back. He is going to get us and rescue us and he's gonna take this home.

So let our faith be in him and be at peace. We imitate God and love like Jesus. And when we do, it looks like Jesus came to our house. When we start imitating God and loving like Jesus, it looks like Jesus came into our marriage. It looks like Jesus came to school with us.

Jesus came to work with us and it would look like Jesus lived in our neighborhood. It would look like joy lived out in hope. When we live like we are imitating God, when we love like Jesus, The world will ask why. So fan the flames of your faith. Be filled with faith and joy and count it all joy.

Rejoice. That should be our tag word, our our theme for 2024 rejoice. Because when we rejoice, We stand out from a world that's full of anxiety. When we rejoice, we stand out from a world that's that's full of worry and and stress. When we find ourselves being worried and and distressed and confused, start singing a worship song.

Remember who is in charge. If you wanna stand out, start quoting a bible verse. If you wanna stand out, start laughing And rejoicing when things are crashing around you because ultimately, our God is in control. We have no reason to panic. We have no reason to worry.

And when we act like this, when our faith is so evident that even in the storms we can worship, then people will notice. Your husband will notice, your wife will notice, your children will notice, your friends will notice, your coworkers will notice. Everybody around you will start asking, Why? And then we are prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have. When the news tells us things are falling apart, Turn it off and praise God that he's in control.

In other words, when people let us down, we praise the God who never lets us down. When when things are out of control, we praise the God who's in control. When when things look terrible, we praise the God who told us that all this would happen, but it's not the end. And it ends well. Let's live 2024 differently.

Let's live it like Jesus would with hope, with joy, rejoicing Because we have a wonderful God. Pray for others. Meet them where they are. Tell them about God. Invite them to church.

Pray for them and ask God to show them the hope that you have. Imitate God, live like Jesus, in such a way that people ask you, why? Because when we sing, when we praise, when we love, when when we imitate God and we live like Jesus, the world will start asking questions. And our reply is, because of him. Thanks for joining us.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you so much for the hope we have in Jesus. Thank you that although this world is headed in the wrong direction, according to the way we think, it's heading in the direction you told us it would. And so father, it is rushing toward the time when our joy will be be made full. When Jesus Christ will come back and get us and take us home.

Father, when you will rule and reign and evil be punished and vanquished from this earth, and father, we have so much to be grateful for and thankful for, let us live this moment like we will

wish we had when that moment comes. May our faith and our hope be evident to those around us. Father, may we rejoice because of all you have done, all you are doing, and all you have promised to do. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Remember Jesus loves you. So do I. See you back in person next week.