

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Sticks & Stones
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The Weight of Our Words
Matthew 12:33-37

As a communicator, I have a love/hate relationship with hot mic stories. A hot mic is whenever someone is off the stage, whenever they think they're off air, and their mic is still on, but they think it's off, so they end up saying something they think that they'll regret. I simultaneously love those stories and am terrified by them, because it could happen to me. Back there before I come out here, I'm checking this mic pack three or four times just to make sure it's off, because I don't want in the middle of Drew's prayer for me to be going to the bathroom and you guys hear all that. I don't want that. That's my fear.

So, I have a love/hate relationship with hot mic stories, and there have been a couple of them in the news recently. Some staff members and I were discussing them. One specific staff member brought up the most shocking hot mic story I had ever heard and probably ever will hear. HBO was doing a documentary series called *The Jinx*, and in this documentary series they were investigating three separate murder mysteries.

One man was connected to all three of them. This one man named Robert Durst was affiliated with all three of these murders. Somewhat surprisingly, he was willing to come in and be interviewed by HBO, and all throughout the interview, he ducked and dodged and avoided any criticisms against him. He came out from the interview looking innocent. He had done a great job of proving his innocence in that interview.

But as soon as the interview was over, he got up, and he relaxed. He went over to the other room and got all by himself, and when he was by himself and his mic was still on, he said, "What did I do? Man, I killed all three of those people." A few days later, Robert Durst was arrested. He would have gotten off scot-free if it wasn't for his words. He had proven his innocence until he started speaking.

So often, what we say shows who we are. What we say shows what we've done. When we get all alone and we think we can let our guard down, what we say proves what's going on in our hearts. I think that's why I find hot mic stories so interesting, because someone can have a stage personality... Like, I can be *this* person onstage, and I can be a different person offstage. What I'm more interested in is who you are offstage. Who are you when the cameras are turned off? I think those are the moments when we find out who you are.

A couple of weeks ago, a Cincinnati Reds baseball announcer was caught saying a slur on mic when he thought they were still in a commercial, and a couple of innings later he was asked to apologize. In his apology he said, "Fans, I'm so sorry. That's not who I am." The only issue is in that moment, you were showing us exactly who you were. When you didn't think anyone was

listening, when you weren't being your announcer personality...you were just being who you were...you showed us exactly who you are.

In those moments when you let your guard down, your words show what's going on in your heart. Aren't you glad you're not always mic'd up? Aren't you glad your words aren't always recorded? But if they were, what would we hear from you? Think about it. Even over this past week, if your words were mic'd up and we could hear what you said, what would we have heard? What would we have heard when you were parenting your kid?

Like, in that moment when they got their math test back, and you were so incredibly disappointed you couldn't help but say, "It's so frustrating. You should have done so much better than this. I don't know why you can't work harder. If you keep getting these grades, you're not going to impress others. You're not going to get into this school. I can't believe that would happen." Is that what we would hear when you're parenting your kids?

What would we hear if you were mic'd up and were hanging out with your fraternity brothers? Would we be impressed about the way you speak about women? Or what would we hear if you were mic'd up at your office? Would we be surprised by how often you gossip about everyone else around you and how you can't stop complaining about your boss? What would we hear from you if you were mic'd up?

I think, for me, if you heard the words I said every single day, you would learn I can be careless with my words. I'll just say whatever comes to mind. I'll say whatever is on the tip of my tongue, and I am more than willing to risk hurting someone's feelings for the sake of a laugh. I think if I were mic'd up, you'd hear that my words can be self-centered, because in my heart I'm a self-centered person. What would we hear if you were mic'd up?

I'm just glad we're not. I'm so glad our words aren't recorded for everyone else to hear. But they are. You see, every single syllable you've ever said is heard by God. He cares so deeply about your words, and he hears every single word you say. He cares about your words because your words have power. It's said that however great something's potential for good is it's equal to its potential for evil.

This is true with words. Our words have tremendous amount of power for good and for evil. In a moment, our words can uplift and encourage and bring comfort, but in a moment, they can also tear down and discourage and leave scars that last a lifetime, because our words have power. It's almost like Solomon knew what he was talking about when he wrote in Proverbs 18:21 that the tongue holds the power of life and death.

What we speak is important, because our words have power. That's why we're in this new sermon series called *Sticks & Stones* where we're going to be talking about what we talk about. We're going to be talking about our words in this series called *Sticks & Stones*. We named it *Sticks & Stones* after that phrase you heard growing up: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

Humor me for a moment. Think about three of the most painful, emotionally hurtful, scarring moments of your life, whether it was this year or 20 years ago or 30 years ago. Think about the most emotionally painful moments of your life. I'm willing to bet that one, if not all three, of those moments had to do with words.

Maybe it was that moment when a dream died or maybe it was that moment when someone made fun of your weight and it turned into a years-long struggle with food or maybe it was that moment when your parents simply told you, "You're not good enough." Whatever it is, we have all experienced this. Our words have the power of death.

But we've also experienced that words have the power of life. Some of the most important moments in your life also probably had to do with words. That's true of me. In fact, I might not be here today if it weren't for words spoken over my life. When I was a tenth grader, there was a guy named Victor. No one really wants to hang around tenth graders, but he chose to hang around tenth graders and invest in us.

There was one day he just put his arm around me, and he said, "Nate, you're going to be an amazing pastor one day. I can already see it in you, that God has gifted you to teach his Word, and I can't wait to watch you do it." He said that 10 years ago, and I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember exactly where I was standing. Our words have the power of life and death. Our words are powerful things.

Before we go into our sermon series on Philippians, we wanted to camp out here and talk about our words for a bit, because we've had so many questions come in from our conflict series about "What should I say in *this* situation? What should I say in *this* situation?" So we just figured now is the time to talk about our words, because our words are going to be the things that either get you into or keep you from conflict.

Today, as we talk about our words, we're going to be learning from the words of Jesus. He speaks these words to us in Matthew 12:33-37. Before we read those verses, I just want to set it up a little bit and give you some context of what's going on in this passage. Jesus has been traveling across the countryside, healing the sick and teaching people about how to follow God, and on this day in particular, a man who was blind and mute was presented to Jesus, and Jesus reached out and healed him. So this man could now see and speak. It was an amazing miracle.

This miracle required one type of response: rejoicing. That's the only thing you could do to respond to something if you saw that happen, yet there was this group of people... There were these Pharisees, these pastors, these religious leaders, who had their own hot mic moment. They thought they were just talking to themselves, but Jesus heard what they said. In the corner, after this miracle happened, they looked at each other and said, "Man, it's only by the power of Satan that this man is driving out demons."

Jesus overheard what they said. He had to stop everything and address their words, because their words were important, because their words showed what was in their hearts. They had so much animosity toward Jesus. They doubted his power, and they were jealous of his authority. Because they had so much bitterness and resentment welling up in their hearts, they spoke these words

that they would one day surely regret. So, Jesus stops everything and addresses these words, because these words show what's going on in their hearts. Here's how he responds to them, starting in verse 33:

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him." In other words, what Jesus is saying here is...

1. *What you plant is what will grow.* The Pharisees didn't have anything godly to say because they didn't have anything godly planted in their hearts. They only had anger and bitterness and resentment, and what came out was a gross insult of the God they claimed to serve. They could only bring forth out of what they had already stored up in them.

I think our relationship with our words is similar to our relationship with our bank. I couldn't walk over to TFNB right now and ask them for a million dollars from my account. I couldn't do that because I haven't stored up a million dollars in my account. I can only withdraw what I've deposited. It's the same with our words. We can only say what we've stored up. We can only withdraw what we've already deposited.

To put it another way, I couldn't go to the gym right now and bench press 250 pounds because I haven't stored up muscle within me. I haven't been in the gym since tenth grade. I haven't stored up muscle in me. I would have no chance of bench pressing 250 pounds. If I tried to do that, I'd be trying to write a check my body simply can't cash, because I can only give out of what's stored up in me.

This is what Jesus is saying about our words. We can only produce what has been planted in us. We can only produce good things if we've had good seeds planted in our hearts. Jesus says it better than I ever could. Verse 34: "Out of the overflow of your heart, the mouth speaks." Or in other words, what goes down in the well is what will come up in the bucket, because you can only draw out what is already stored up.

Honestly, this passage is somewhat embarrassing for Jesus. Looking back 2,000 years ago, he just didn't have the same scientific knowledge we now have. He didn't have the same type of information we have today. What he says in this passage is, "If you make a tree good, its fruit will be good." In other words, he's really just saying, "If you plant this seed, you're going to get this fruit." It'll always correlate.

But what scientists now know is that there are some instances where you can plant one seed and get a different type of fruit. It's fascinating stuff. In one example, if you take an apple seed and plant it in late March or early April, and if you plant it five inches deeper than normal and if it's an especially dry season, what will actually happen is that apple seed will grow into an orange tree. No! It does not happen that way, because what you plant is what will grow.

If you plant an apple seed, you're only ever going to get an apple tree. If you plant an orange seed, you're only ever going to get an orange tree. Yet some of y'all don't live that way. Some of y'all are surprised by this, because some of y'all have been planting bad seed. You've been planting junk in your heart, and you've been speaking bad fruit. You've been speaking junk, and you're confused.

You're like, "Why have I been struggling so much with my words?" It's because you've been putting bad seed in your heart. Every single day, whether you know it or not, you're planting seed. Everything you do plants good seed or bad seed. I went to Lowe's and tried to get the biggest seed bags possible. This is good seed, and this is bad seed. Every single day, you're planting seed in your heart.

Whenever you listen to that music... It's filled with cusswords. It's filled with lyrics that insult women. Whenever you listen to that, you're planting bad seed in your heart. Whenever you hang out with those friends who only complain, who only gossip... You know they never bring you closer to Jesus. Whenever you spend time with them, you're planting bad seed in your heart.

Whenever you watch that Netflix show or that HBO show and it's filled with nudity, it's filled with cusswords, it's filled with a plotline that you know you shouldn't be watching, you plant bad seeds in your heart. Those bad seeds don't just stay there. They will grow into something. They don't just leave you. They will grow into bad fruit from your lips. That's just what happens.

Conversely, every single time you spend time in God's Word, every single day you open up the Bible reading plan and spend time in Scripture, you're planting good seed in your heart. Every single time you have a deep conversation with a brother or sister in Christ, every single time you're in Life Group, you're planting good seed in your heart.

Every single time you listen to worship music, every single time you're listening to a sermon, you're planting good seed in your heart. What you plant is what will grow. And you can't fake it. Whatever is planted, that's what's going to grow. If you've planted good seed, there will be good fruit. If you've planted bad seed, there will be bad fruit. You simply cannot fake it, but as a pastor, it is so funny to watch people fake it. I have a hundred stories like this.

Recently, I was golfing with a friend, and it was the two of us. We got paired up with two other guys we didn't know. After a few holes, I had heard more cusswords than I'd ever heard in my entire life. I was hearing words I didn't even know existed. I was having to ask my friend, "What does that word even mean?" After a few holes...it was like hole four or five...they looked at us and asked the awkward question. "So, what do you guys do?" I'm like, "Well, I'm a pastor."

Here's the thing. I didn't care. I genuinely didn't care about what they were saying. They don't know Jesus. They're supposed to live that way. I genuinely don't care. But as soon as I said, "I'm a pastor..." Man, I have never seen a greater miracle in my life. The Red Sea parted, and they never cussed again. It was amazing. I healed them. (I didn't. I'm sorry. JP is not here. I can say whatever.)

They changed their speech because of who I was. They wanted to trick me into thinking that they were someone else. But I was like, "Bro, you already showed me your cards. I know who you are. You're not the guy who's faking it around a pastor. You're the guy who's cussing with their friend. That's who you are. You can't fake it." Yet I think that's what God sees from us. I think he sees us faking it.

I think he sees us walk into church and hang out with our Christian friends. We speak one way. We put on a mask, we put on a face, and we speak one way. But he also hears what you said to your wife last night. He also hears how you parent your kids. He also hears what you said to your roommate. He also hears what you said in your office. He knows the real you. The you when you're not faking it? He hears all that.

He's like, "Why are you trying to fake it over here? I know the words you say, and I know what's in your heart." The question is... *What is he hearing from you?* What are the words that he says display about the state of your heart? What does he hear from you? If you really want to know the answer to that question, ask some people close to you. Ask your husband about your words. Ask the people in your Life Group about your words. Ask your coworkers about your words. They know what's going on in your heart because they hear the words you say.

Some of you right now might be thinking, "I'm actually doing pretty good. I'm not prone to slander. I'm not prone to lie. I'm not prone to gossip or complain. I'm actually doing pretty good with my words." That's awesome. Let's celebrate that. That is an amazing thing. But there is a difference between not sinning with your words and actually advancing the kingdom with your words.

Look at what Jesus says in verse 36. He continues by saying this: "**But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.**" Jesus doesn't just care about our sinful words; he also cares about our empty words. I love this verse because of that one word, that word that's translated as *empty*. If you have an ESV Bible, it's translated as *careless*.

I love this verse because that one word is the Greek word *argos*, and it's literally translated as *lazy* or *inactive* or *unemployed*. Isn't that interesting? What Jesus is saying is that you're going to have to give an account for every single word you spoke that didn't have a job to do, every single word you spoke that was a lazy word, that was an unemployed word, that didn't have any purpose. You're going to have to answer for that.

2. *Put some purpose behind your words.* Think about your conversations from this past week. If you're like me, you probably won't remember many of them. Does that happen to any of y'all? I don't remember any of them. I think it's because, so often, I'm filled with empty words. I can so enjoy to sit with you and talk about Fantasy Football for an hour. I could break down the last Minnesota Vikings game.

Like, our cornerbacks are so young, and Aaron Rodgers just picked them apart last week. We're playing the Colts in 30 minutes, so I have to speed this thing up. I could just talk with you about the NFL all day long, but then we leave that conversation, and no one is better off for it. No one

remembers it. It's because those words weren't thoughtful. Those words weren't said with a purpose. Purposeless words are forgetful words.

Brian Regan is a comedian, and he has a bit where he said, "One day, I went golfing with my friend named Gary. We had a great time golfing. I came home and talked to my wife, and my wife was like, 'How's Gary doing from his divorce?'" He's like, "Wait, Gary got divorced?" She's like, "You just spent four hours with him! How did that not come up?" He's like, "I don't know. We were just talking about golf."

If we're not careful (I think this is true for all of us, but especially us guys), this will happen to us. We won't speak with purpose, we won't speak with intentionality, we won't speak with thought, and when we do that, our words won't have purpose. They won't be memorable. I think this is why Jesus is so passionate about our words. The words we say are some of our greatest opportunities to impact the people around us. Our words have the power of life and have the power of death.

I think Jesus sees some of us, and he's going, "You're not using your words for life. You're not using your words for death. You're just kind of in no man's land. You're not saying anything at all. Your words don't have purpose. They don't have a job to do. They're empty words." Parents, I hope you're locked in right now. I hope you hear this right now. What are the words you want your kids to hear? When's the last time you spoke with intentionality and purpose to your kids?

After their basketball game, are you just going to get in the car and kind of break down the game and move on or are you going to speak with purpose? After that game when your kid scored zero points, they had 10 turnovers, they lost the game, and it was a nightmare, will they remember that game because you got in the car after and said, "You know what, son? You know what, daughter?"

I just so enjoy watching you play. There's not a single thing you could do out there that would make me love you more or less. I don't care if you score 50 points or 50 points for the other team. There's nothing you could do to make me love you any more or any less, because I'm just so proud of you because you're my son or daughter."

I tell you what. If you do that, those words will stick, because purpose-filled words have a long shelf life. I'm just speaking from experience. Senior year in high school, I received a certain scholarship from Baylor, and when I did, my dad started getting a little emotional. He's not an emotional guy, but he started getting a little emotional.

He said, "Nate, I don't care about the money. I don't care about the money at all. What I care about, what makes me so emotional right now, what makes me so joy-filled right now, is that someone else sees in my son what I see in my son." I'll never forget it. I'll never forget that moment, because he said those words with purpose. He said those words with intentionality. Purpose-filled words have a long shelf life. They're sticky words.

What words have you said recently that stuck? When's the last time you spoke with purpose-filled words? You know that roommate, you know that friend who needs encouragement. When's

the last time you intentionally encouraged them? You know that coworker who's struggling with their marriage, who's struggling with their faith. When's the last time you asked them how they're really doing? When's the last time you asked them about their walk with Jesus? When's the last time you've used purpose-filled words.

Friends, you can keep talking about the weather. You can keep talking about current events. You can keep talking about sports. You can keep staying on the surface. I really do think there's a place for all of those things, as long as they're done with thoughtfulness and intentionality. Y'all can do that all day every day, and do you know what will happen? Your words won't make an impact. Nobody is going to remember them, because you didn't speak with a purpose.

But if you're going to speak with a purpose, you're going to see some lives change in the lives around you. If you want to speak with a purpose, here's where you start: you start with prayer. Before any conversation you have with someone, pray about it in advance. Pray about what you're going to say. Before you go on that date with your wife, pray about your words and ask God that she would hear words that make her feel loved and lovely.

Wives, pray about your words before you go on that date with your husband. Pray that he'd hear words of encouragement and support. Pray about your words before you go in to work. Ask God that your coworkers would hear Jesus in your words, because when you pray about your words, your words will have purpose, because when the Holy Spirit is planted in you... What is planted is what will grow.

Now, some of you are probably uneasy right now. You're like, "I'm not a words person. I'm not a words of affirmation girl. I kind of feel weird whenever I have to be too intentional or purpose-filled." I get it. There are some moments when I say some things with intentionality, and I'm like, "I don't know if they need to hear this or not. This makes me feel a little awkward." But I tell you what. I'll take feeling awkward any day over what happens if we don't speak with intentionality. I'll take feeling awkward any day over what happens if we don't speak with a purpose.

Look at what Jesus says happens when we don't speak with purpose. He says this in verses 36-37. **"But I tell you that everyone..."** He says *everyone*. Not just non-Christians...everyone. **"...will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."** Those are weighty words from Jesus.

3. *You will pay for what you say.* Honestly, I didn't want to put that on the screen. I wrestled with this all week. I went back and forth. I was like, "Man, you will pay for what you say? That sounds harsh. That sounds un-sympathetic. That sounds unloving. You will pay for what you say? Do I really want to put that in front of our church?" But the more I prayed about it, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that's exactly what Jesus is trying to say.

I think the most unloving thing I could do is not put that up there, because what Jesus is saying is you will pay for what you say. Again, look at verse 37 if you don't believe me. Jesus literally says this. **"For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be**

condemned." That should haunt us. As we're driving home today, as we're about to go to sleep, we should be thinking about that.

Those words should haunt us, that we will pay for what we say. What Jesus is saying is at the end of your life, one day, all of your words will have been heard. Every syllable you've ever said will have been recorded and heard by God. One day, whether that's today or 50 years from now, you'll stand before him, and your words will have proven who you really are. Your words will have proven what was really in your heart.

Over the course of your life, your words will have either proven you to be a complainer who will refuse to let God open your eyes to all of the gifts around you or your words will have proven you to be so filled with joy because of the joy Jesus has planted in your heart. Or your words will have proven you to be so full of anger because you never allowed the kindness of Jesus to soften your heart.

Or your words will be so filled with faith because you've seen what Jesus did time after time after time. Or your words will have proven you to be a complainer and a gossiper who only talked about everyone else because you never allowed God to deal with your own heart. Or your words will prove you to be filled with compassion because of the incredible grace poured out to you through Jesus Christ.

What you say proves what's going on in your heart, and you will pay for what you say. This is the seriousness with which God takes our words. At the end of our lives, we're going to hear one of two things from him. We're going to hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come and share in your Father's happiness" or we're going to hear him say, "Depart from me, for I never knew you, because your words prove that you never knew me."

Our words are important. Our words have weight, because our words prove what's going on in our hearts. So, how have you been doing with your words? What have your words displayed about what's going on inside of you? In summary today, what you plant is what will grow, put purpose behind your words, and you will pay for what you say.

To close, I want to do whatever I possibly can to hit home on the power of words. Our words are so important, because the words we say can literally change the world we live in. Our words have power. Our words have the power to change history. Let me prove it. In 1963, a man named Martin Luther King Jr. had the gumption and the audacity to stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and say, "I have a dream." When he spoke those words, he helped ignite the movement for racial equality in our country. Those words still have impact today.

Or Maya Angelou. You might not know that she said it, but you'll know these words. She said, "I've learned that making a living is not the same as making a life." Those words have created midlife crises for people. Those words have changed careers. Her words had an impact. In 1987, Ronald Reagan stood in West Berlin and said these words to the president of the USSR: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Soon after, because of his words, that wall was torn down. After 26 years of division, the wall was torn down.

These words changed history. These statements literally changed history. They impacted history, but those words can't hold a candle to the most important words ever recorded. Those words changed history, but these words that are written down have the power to change your eternity. The most important words ever spoken, John 3:16: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

These words, for 2,000 years now, have been bringing hope to the hopeless; they've been bringing peace to those who are in pain; and most importantly, they've been bringing life to those who are dead. The question is...*Do they have your heart? Do you believe these words? Are these words planted within you? Do you love them?*

Do you believe that God so loved you he was willing to do whatever he possibly could just to get to you; that he was willing to send his Son from eternal paradise into this earth to speak words of life over you and to tell us that he's going to live the life we should have lived and die the death we should have died, and by doing that, everything you've ever done, every sin, past, present, and future, every word you've ever said is gone. It's wiped away as far as the east is from the west.

Do you believe that? Do you love it? Are those words planted in your heart? If they are, they can't help but change us. I think we have some people in this room today who have never had words of life spoken over them. You didn't have parents speak words of life over you. The only words you can remember from your parents were words of death.

I know we have some people here today who have never had a group of friends who were willing to encourage you and speak words of intentionality around you. You've never had words of life spoken over you. Can I just tell you that right now God himself is speaking words of life over you? In fact, I don't think he's just speaking. Zephaniah 3:17 says he's singing over you. That's how much he loves you.

I can't help but think that based on Scripture he's singing words over you like, "I have never once forsaken you. Daughter, I have not once forgotten you. In your isolation, I saw you. Son, I've forgiven you. I've forgiven you for what you even did last night. You're forgiven." He's saying, "Daughter, I loved you, and there's nothing you could ever do to stop me from loving you."

Those are the words Jesus is speaking over you. Do you hear them? Do they have your heart? Are they planted within you? If they are, they will change the words you say, because what is planted within you is what will grow. Do you love God's Word? Do you know his Word? In a minute, we're going to sing, and we're going to remind ourselves of the words God has said over us.

Don't you dare leave this place committed to willing yourself toward better words. Don't you dare leave this place committed to behavior modification and washing your mouth out with soap. That will never change your words. The only way you can change your words is if you change your heart. So right now, would you just let the words of God be planted in your heart? Because when they're planted in your heart, they will produce from you a good and godly fruit, and when

that happens, the words we say will change the world we live in. Let me pray that it would be so of Harris Creek.

God, we believe your Word does not return void, because that's what your Word says. When your Word is planted in our hearts, it will produce a good and godly fruit. I just ask that you would plant your words in us today, that it wouldn't be my words that are planted but it would be your words, that all throughout the week we wouldn't stop thinking about "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Would you plant that within us?

God, even now, would your Holy Spirit be at work, and would you change our hearts? Begin a restoration process of our hearts, so that you would change the words we speak, that we would be known for speaking words of life. Father, use our words. Even now, may the Holy Spirit prompt us with people, with faces that need encouragement, that need your love, that need your gospel, and would we have the courage and the gumption to say words filled with purpose.

God, would you overwhelm us with the words you've spoken over us? Would we believe what you say about us, because those are the only words that matter, that you love us and that you're for us and that we're your dearly loved children. Father, we love you, we adore you, and we're desperate for you. Plant your Word in our hearts right now. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.