

Father God, we thank you so much for the opportunity to be here today. We are so grateful, the brothers and sisters, that breaking through the cold, we came to church. We're so grateful for the technology that allows our brothers and sisters from now, Grandma, to join us as well in song and in prayer and in your Word. We're here to praise you, to glorify you, and we simply ask that you take your rightful place as the pastor and the teacher of this church and of your Church Universal, Lord. May we all be ready when the time comes, when we see you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen. The opening word is 1 Peter chapter 3 beginning with verse 8. Next Sunday was a very intricate kind of preaching and teaching as we tried to weave a couple of things together. Remember when we talked about how there are parts of Scripture that are descriptive of the culture at the time, but even embedded in those things that aren't around, well, it is around today, but you know what I'm saying, not part of our modern consciousness. And embedded in them is the meta-narrative, is the story, is the meaning, is the purpose of the Scripture. So we weave the meaning and the purpose and the message of the Scripture in with the husbands and wives and slaves and couples and congregation. We're going to start with this part of congregation. I'm going to try to get my mic when I do that. Finally, this is after all of that from last week, after all of that from last week in the various categories that Peter addressed, now he says, "Finally, all of you should be of one mind, sympathize with each other, love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do and He will grant you His blessing. For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life, see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace and work to maintain it." Now again, we emphasize that last thing. There's a lot of verbs in there for the Christian. A lot of verbs, right? The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right and His ears are open to their prayers but the Lord turns His face against those who do evil. Now who would want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it, so don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Bigger picture, that was one of the original teachings of the whole 1 Peter. Instead you must worship Christ as Lord of your life and if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. And that is what we have really taken to heart here over the past few years, being able to explain it. And I will often say to you, if someone had said, "What is the Gospel?" What would you say? If you had to sit down with somebody who had no clue, how would you answer that? As a disciple of Christ you should be able to answer that. So we work on that constantly. It's a very good, solid, simple question. But having that answer and having it correct is very important. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be shamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember it is better to suffer for doing good if that is what God wants than to suffer for doing wrong. Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned but He died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death but He was raised to life in the Spirit. So He went and preached to the spirits in prison. Those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building His ark, only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. And that water is a picture of baptism. I left this passage in here because there's always a bigger picture. There's always a teaching embedded in any aspect of scripture. And we learn from that, okay, the flood and Noah, eight people saved. And then the Holy Spirit says that is a picture of baptism. And now we're talking about cleansing creation. We're talking about dying and reborn, but it's a picture of baptism. And that water is a picture of baptism which now saves you not by removing dirt from your body but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Christ. This is 1 Peter 4 now. So then, we just talked about all of that, loving one another and understanding and suffering and still loving and all of those things. So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude He had and be ready to suffer too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will

be anxious to do the will of God. You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy, their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties and their terrible worship of idols. The main point being that if you have suffered for Christ, you have gone that far and you have endured that pain, whatever it may be, maybe not persecution but dealing with people, whatever the case may be for you, then you have put a little skin in the game there. You suffered for Christ, you are willing to do the verbs that are listed here and live a life worthy. So if you come across suffering for Christ or even people making fun of you, you say, "Well, there's nothing like this. I'm allowed to hear." Chances are you're not going to be following in the will of God from that point on. So that is something that we all deal with as we are set apart from the wicked world. Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things. We just sang that in that very powerful song. So they slander you, they despise, forsake me. We just sang that. But remember that they will have to face God who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead. That is why the good news was preached to those who are now dead. So although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God and the Spirit. This is something that I have grown into as a preacher, particularly maybe at gatherings like weddings and funerals and that sort of thing, when I'm not preaching to the choir, so to speak. I used to kind of dance around the gospel. I used to present it, but you know, you wanted to not really upset anybody. Now I just blast it out. If you were there Friday, you'd blast it out. There it is. You know what? Because if I'm looking at somebody who is a dear saint and I'm looking over here at somebody that I know hasn't given any time, how much must I hate that person to not share the gospel with me? I love you because you're a Christian. I hate you because you're not. I'm not going to even tell you about Christ. That's a realization that comes to me as a preacher and that's why it's called preaching, not teaching or lecturing or anything. It's proclaiming. It's proclaiming the good news till Christ returns. You would have been proud of me, Ryan. I think I used the word repentance four or five times Friday. Right there in front of that crowd. Now word from first Peter chapter four, and then we'll make a little bit of commentary regarding what has been taught here today through the word. The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other before love covers a multitude of sins. Everybody share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. God has given each of you a gift from his great bride of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. You have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. And everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever. Amen. It sounds like an Advent sermon when you put all of that together. Everything that we talked about, the relational aspects of men and women and even slaves and marriage and congregation and church of believers, non-believers, everything and all of the verbs that we're taught, all of the verbs, do this, right? Seek peace, all those. And all of the power behind it is what? Love. You hear much about that today. Much so for some, somehow some way, the concept of God's love has divided the church. Somehow some way, the concept of God's love is controversial. It's tossed around willy-nilly to the point where, and this is what Satan loves to do, takes a Christian teaching, take a Christian word and just use it so much in so many ways that it doesn't mean anything anymore. So God is love, love is love. What is God's love? God is love. So there's the foundational piece of understanding. God is love. So when we say we are empowered by God's love, we are empowered by God's Holy Spirit. And what does that mean for the individual? Well, if we move past salvation, right? So God's love, repentance, salvation. Now what does that mean for the individual Christian? It means that you're living and breathing and doing and saying and speaking in love by the power of God and that looks differently than anything else. So church, when we all gather together for that, should look and sound like that. There's a big emphasis on those who are gathered. Love one another. Love covers a multitude of sins. And what that means, you know, it can mean a variety of different things, but anytime I love you guys, you know that you can, anytime you get people together and you're gonna be like rubbing each other the wrong way, saying the wrong

thing, doing something, but there is a bigger, there is a bigger thing that we are all involved with and all involved in and empowered by. And regardless, just like I teach, regardless of circumstance, you walk in the will of God, right? Those two things are mutually exclusive. Your circumstances don't dictate your salvation. They don't dictate the joy, the love and the peace and the hope that's in your heart. Nor do the circumstances of congregation. Because love, God's love rules. God's love is in our hearts and we first, of course, love by our relationship with Him, now our relationship with those closest to us, empowered by God's love. Now our relationship is congregation empowered by God's love. Now what? Now we walk out of here in God's love and if you have the gift of speaking, speak about God clearly. If you give the gift of helping, you are exercising the gifts that you have been given as a Christian and you're going where God tells you to go and you're doing what God tells you to do and you're saying what God tells you to say because He is sovereign and He wants you there saying this, doing this, speaking this, acting this way. And when somebody sees that, and we've talked about this before, when somebody sees that and they say, "Why are you so..." This is all I said about when I first became the bastard here, when I first became a Christian. When I first became a Christian, teaching in Cumberland Valley and teaching alternative education, I thought that I was a believer. I thought like a lot of people do, especially men, I'm better than the average man. I help people. I do good things for people, for kids. Like I try and move through them. I know about God, I've researched God, I've prayed. But when I left that environment, which is rather toxic, much like the rest of the world, I'm not poo-poo anymore, but it was rather toxic. And then I moved over and the Lord put me here and in order to get our feet on the ground, He had been teaching at Carl Christian Academy for three years. Interesting story, if you ever want to hear it. And that is when I first experienced Christians and Christian youth. And I was so suspicious and I was so leery of the people who were so nice and always wanting to be helpful and wanting to make sure that I was okay and not wanting to steal any of my work or stab me in the back. I was like, I know people like this don't exist, so what's the catch? There was no catch, but the Lord gave me three years to grow in that. I remember sitting at lunch, and if you know me, I won't have my back to a group of people, probably, for 14 years of teaching alternative ed. So there I am and I'm turning around and we're eating lunch and we all eat together. And when the kids were done, they had 15 minutes to throw cheebaskets or whatever. And I remember these two girls just screaming. And I'm up out of my seat and I'm ready to go break up that fight. They were laughing. They were laughing and they were playing. And everyone was like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Sorry." I'm not used to that sort of thing. So this is what it's like. And that's why I love that song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Because it tells the story of coming into faith as a believer and going through all of the good stuff and all of the rough stuff. This speaks of this. Peter is speaking. And the people that you once knew, you now are different. And of course, you want to be present to those individuals and share with those people what has changed your life. But they may be very unwilling to hear it. Now you're going to have to deal with that as a Christian and work through it and decide what is toxic and what is not toxic and where you need a boundary. And where you maybe don't need a boundary, you're still working. But those are the points of discernment that you need to make because you're different. In a good way. Well, most of you. No, I'm kidding. You're in a good way. You're different. And Peter is trying to convince the church of this. And like I said, he's spinning into the time at that time because persecution is beginning to happen. But he's really, this letter is going to be presented and it's going to be canonized. Sorry. I don't have that clip. And so it's in my pocket. It's going to be canonized for the edification of the church during some horrific persecution and the ages to come. So we don't know what's around the corner and when this letter, we will need to turn to it as a church again and take edification from it, take strength from it. You realize our foundation, all of those different things. That's why it's here. And there's one last piece that I want to say. The last reading said, and so he died in the flesh. And this is what we must realize because this is the foundational tenet of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is fully human, fully God. When he died in the flesh, he died in the flesh, but God did not die. He did not die in the spirit. His divinity was untouched by this. Oftentimes you will hear folks from different religions, you know, they'll get

that check for you believe in God. I believe in God. You believe that God can never die. Yes, God can never die. Well, do you believe that Jesus died on the cross? Yes. Then you believe that God died. No. God didn't die. What you're doing is ignoring a very primary tenet of what we believe. That, Immanuel, God became flesh and dwelt among us. God became flesh. God didn't die. He died in the flesh and was resurrected. The first of many.