

Acts week 3 - Downtown

We are going to be looking at one of the longest narratives in the whole book of Acts this morning. An event where God helps the disciples realize that the Kingdom of God is bigger than they ever imagined. And we're gonna cover a chapter and a half together.

I was gonna trim most of it down and just read the highlights because it's a lot, but then I realized if you leave and say you didn't like the sermon because we read too much Scripture, that makes you look bad and not me.

Just kidding. Truth is, we've got a lot of ground to cover so we're going to jump right in.

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, In the 1st Century, Caesarea was a part of the Roman empire. And part of how Rome ruled was through military might.

A Centurion was a commander in the Roman military. Specifically, the commander of a 100 men. 100. And a cohort, depending on the location, was 600-1000 men with 6-10 centurions.

Only Roman citizens could join the military. And becoming a Centurion had to be earned. You had to prove yourself - your loyalty to the emperor, show competency in giving and receiving commands. You had to be fluent in Latin - the language of the military - so you had to be well-educated.

And for this centurions were paid very well - as much as five times the pay of an ordinary soldier. So centurions were somewhat wealthy and socially prominent individuals. And this would have been especially true in Caesarea since it was the Roman district capital for the region.

So all that being said, Cornelius would have been a fairly important person, and about as thoroughly Roman as you could possibly get.

Now, in case you're unfamiliar, Rome and the Jews did not have a great relationship at this time. For the early Jews - of whom many of the first Christians came from - Roman officers, especially Centurions were sort of this ever present reminder that they were a conquered people.

Roman soldiers were a tangible reminder of "the bad guy" for lack of a better way to say it. In fact, many believed that the Messiah was actually supposed to come and overthrow the Roman empire.

So there was often some tension between Jews, including some Jewish Christians, and Gentiles or Non Jewish people... a sort of "us - God's real people & them - the unclean, or unholy" mentality.

But, even though he was a Gentile soldier in the employ of Rome, we find that there's something different about Cornelius...

2 a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God.

Calling someone a "God-fearer" was a term for a non-jewish person who worshiped the God of Israel. Cornelius was not a Jew and had not undergone certain Jewish conversion rites, like circumcision - but he actually believed the God of the Bible was the one, true God.

He prayed to this God. He taught his family to follow this God. And sought to use his position of wealth and power - not just for himself - for the good of the community... which in this case was a particularly Jewish community.

Cornelius was a good dude. And God sees him with his devotion and faith and has a message for him.

3 About the ninth hour of the day That's 3pm. he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." 4 And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." 7 When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, 8 and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Spoiler alert. Peter is gonna tell Cornelius about Jesus and he's gonna become a christian. I just want to point out quickly here, the pattern all over the bible, of how much God likes to use his people to accomplish his purposes. It would have been much more simple for the angel to just say to Cornelius "Good job on the faithfulness to the old system, the old covenant. The promised messiah has come, his name is Jesus, he died for our sins and rose from the dead so you should place your faith in him to make you right with God." No need to seek out Peter or go to any trouble. He doesn't because God's primary strategy is to accomplish his purposes through his people and God also had something he wanted to teach Peter through the process too.

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. Around noon 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." If you're into hunting then that could be a good life verse for ya.

14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

So, certain Jewish laws said that God's people shouldn't eat certain animals. There were probably some health and safety reasons for that, but the primary reason for God giving these ceremonial laws was to give a picture of what sin does.

Eating an unclean animal would make a person unclean, and sin makes us spiritually unclean. It defiles us and makes us unable to enter God's presence. But now that Jesus has died, he has removed the defilement of sin for all who receive him, so these laws have served their purpose for God's people and are no longer needed.

So if you've ever wondered or heard someone ask why christians don't follow all of the laws that are given in the old testament but it seems like we pick and choose, this is why. We keep the moral laws, like don't murder. But the ceremonial laws about what to eat and wear and the civil laws about how the nation of Israel should operate we no longer keep. Jesus has come and he makes us ceremonially clean. Those laws were to show us our need for a savior and now we have one. And God's people are now more than one nation, so laws about Israel's government and customs aren't applicable. We aren't in the old covenant given to the nation of Israel, we are under the new covenant in Christ.

And all of this is what God is communicating to Peter here.

17 Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate 18 and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. 19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation] for I have sent them." 21 And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" 22 And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." 23 So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

30 And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." 34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

The word for acceptable there isn't the word the New Testament uses when it's talking about being saved or being made a christian. This is a different Greek word and the idea Peter is communicating is that God's favor, God's grace, God's forgiveness, God's salvation is available to anyone of any ethnicity, from any nation, if they repent and place their faith in Jesus. Jesus did not just die for Jewish men and women, but for Gentiles also.

36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised (or those who were Jewish) who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Tongues there is other languages, you'll remember the last time we saw this was at Pentacost, when the church was born. God is deliberately showing us here that the church is expanding to the Gentiles.

Then Peter declared, 47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" He's saying, can any justifiably exclude them from God's family if God is bringing them to faith and giving them His Spirit? And the answer obviously is, No!"

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Peter was just concerned about clean and unclean foods and people, but now he's staying with them for days.

Chapter 11

11 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, 3 "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

The Jewish Christians are initially perplexed and are like, "how can you do this with Gentiles?! They aren't circumcised?!" Essentially, "they aren't like us. They don't do what we do. They don't live like we live." Explain yourself.

4 But Peter began and explained it to them in order: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. 6 Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' 10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" If God was doing the same thing in them as he did in us, who was I to stand in God's way? I don't know if you mark or highlight in your bible, but you might want to underline or highlight that.

18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

It's a long story, but it's pretty crucial...you and I, unless you are ethnically Jewish, get to call ourselves God's people because of these events.

It turns out that God meant what he said to Abraham years ago, that he would be a blessing to the nations. Turns out Jesus meant it when he said he wanted to make disciples of all nations and that he wanted witness to the ends of the earth. So the promise of Acts 1:8 crosses a new threshold. Gentiles, non-jewish men and women, are invited into the church of God.

And all of that has very meaningful implications and instruction for us. For how you and I think about our church, how we think about the people sitting next to us today or in your LifeGroup. How you think about the people you work alongside, or live alongside, and the people God has placed you around with His good news....

And so for the rest of our time, I want to draw some of those out for us.

1- Everyone is an image bearer

What happens in this story is the natural progression of the doctrine known as Imago Dei, or Image of God. From all the way back in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God doesn't call anything else within the creative order as made in His Image. All of Genesis 1 is God creating a Kingdom on earth that is perfect and good and at the top, the pinnacle of His creation, He creates human beings as Image Bearers in order to act as ambassadors for Him on Earth.

In the Ancient Near East, an "image" was a statue or a symbol for the king that ruled in that area. When you saw the king's image, it served to remind you that this was their territory. The Egyptians were pros at this. They embodied their pharaohs into enormous statues in order to remind their people who ruled them. It's with this imagery that Imago Dei is used. Human beings are made bearing the mark of the King as a reminder over all of creation that God is in charge.

Anyone remember what the second commandment is of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20? The second command was not to make an image of God. Why? In part, because those already exist. Human beings are made in the image of God, we are in some sense his representation. Our presence as his image bearers indicates God rules and reigns over his creation.

Practically, what this means is that All people have inherent value and worth, and are worthy of being treated with respect and decency because they carry God's image. No matter who they are, where they are from, what they look like, how old they are, what they have done or have not done....because they are made in God's image they have value. That's not something that has to be earned or merited, and it isn't something that can be lost.

Now let me tell you why you should be a big fan of the Imago Dei, even if you're not a Christian. Because without the doctrine stating that human beings are made in God's image, you cannot argue that human beings have value and individual human rights.

You might be thinking, "that's ridiculous, of course you can believe in human rights without being a christian or believing in God." I didn't say you can't believe in human rights without God, I said you can't argue for it. "Well of course human beings have rights. It's obvious."

First of all, it has not been obvious to most people and societies throughout history and is not obvious to much of the world today.

Second of all, that's an assertion and not an argument.

And you need more than an assertion to combat things like racism, sexism, slavery or any other human rights violation.

I don't know if you've noticed, but for example, telling a racist that racism is bad tends to be unpersuasive.

"Racism is wrong" - I don't think so.

"Yes it is!"

Nuh-uh.

"Yes-huh!"

Why is it wrong? - "Because it is."

Says who?

"Well you're a horrible person." - I don't think I am. In fact, I think I'm a better person than that guy because he's a different race than I am.

See you don't have an argument, you have assertions. So you can't persuade.

Racism is wrong because every human being on planet earth, no matter who they are, where they are, when they are, what they've done or what group they belong to, is an image bearer of God most high. That's why racism is wrong. That's why human beings have rights.

It's wild to me, how many people will simultaneously argue that you shouldn't oppress the poor because of human rights, but then also hold the position that we are, in the words of secular philosopher Bertrand Russell, "accidental collocations of atoms" that no feelings, or acts, or whatever else can give eternal purpose or meaning to. Do we not see the inconsistency in that? Which are we? Are we just a random assortment of atoms or are we something worth preserving?

When a lion devours a gazelle, nobody cries foul. It's natural. So how can it be wrong for powerful people to take advantage of weaker people? It's absolutely natural.

And if you don't believe God exists but believe racism is wrong and believe that human beings have rights, you have a massive hole in your worldview. You believe in something for which you have absolutely no argument or reason to believe. And I don't want to call you a hypocrite but if I were you I'd be nervous that someone else might.

Let me say it in the positive. If you know that you know that you know that human beings have rights, and there is only one possible reason for it (the existence of God), then shouldn't you accept that reason to be true? Wouldn't that be logically consistent?

I know that was a rant, but the point is that the church of God is meant to be the place where human value is not just believed in but is lived out. There is no type of person that God refuses to love. He will not turn away from anyone who turns to him.

What we're seeing in this story in Acts 10 and 11 is the teasing out of this crucial biblical doctrine. Peter and the other disciples are realizing that when Jesus said he wanted the gospel to go to the ends of the earth he meant it. When he said they should make disciples of the nations, he meant it. This story of Cornelius and his family is the natural next step that has always been part of God's plan. He has always

wanted and had a group to represent him to the rest of the world. Beginning with the nation of Israel and in the book of Acts spreading to the ends of the earth.

Image bearers of all types and kinds, big and small, light skinned, dark skinned, medium skinned, tall and short, attractive and unattractive, funny and serious, up tight and easy going, rule followers and rebels, old and young, rich and poor, cool and total nerds, all are welcomed through faith and repentance to belong to the church of God. To be God's people. To be God's family.

No one is off-limits. It doesn't matter who they are... if they trust in Jesus for salvation they are a brother. They are a sister.

Our God is unbelievably inclusive. He accepts and invites in and welcomes people from every nation, every tribe, every language, every socio-economic status, every gender, race, and background. He welcomes people, no matter their past. No matter what awfully evil and heinous and abusive things they've done, if they place faith in Jesus and trust in Him as Lord and Savior, they are welcomed in.

And what Cornelius' story tells us is that we are to welcome them, too. To honor the image of God in those around us.

Every person who walks through our doors - whether that's here, or in your LifeGroup - every person you encounter at your job or in your neighborhood, or on the ballfield is an image-bearer of God... is a person to be loved, a person to be valued, and a person to be invited to trust Jesus, and become a part of God's forever family.

That is a truly beautiful thing about God's church. Everyone is welcome and everyone who repents and believes belongs.

Which leads me to the second thing. For this to be a reality in our church, it requires that we do not stand in God's way....to use the language of the passage.

2) Do not stand in God's way

This idea of welcoming no matter how different, it is beautiful. And I love that God operates this way. But my experience is that while we love the idea of this, we often do not love the reality of it nearly as much. We tend to like the idea but we don't like what it means. Because the reality of it is often very difficult and very complicated.

In fact, This inclusion of the Gentiles actually becomes one of the most difficult things for the early church. It causes one of the first huge theological controversies they have to tackle - we'll see that in a few weeks in chapter 15 - it's a subject approached in the majority of Paul's letters.

It's a big deal. And you can even see that in this passage.

In verse... 28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

Now, for what it's worth, this is not something God ever said in the Torah, or the books of the law in the Old Testament. This was about later developed customs of strict Jewish traditions about uncleanness. The Jewish traditions of purity made it virtually impossible for them to associate with Gentiles without becoming ritually unclean.

And when the disciples hear of it in Chapter 11, they're like "what are you doing?!"

Now, think about this... these people that you've thought of your entire life as unclean, unholy... people who live differently than you, who think differently than you, who have always been considered outsiders to your insider show up to your life group.

If there was a type of person that it'd be difficult to be in fellowship with for an ethnic Jew, this guy would be a leading candidate. If there was a type of person that would make them uncomfortable or uneasy or feel awkward around, a centurion would make it weird.

But had the disciples not embraced this idea then they would've been standing in God's way.

Ok, let's talk about us.

You and I are near constantly told that we couldn't possibly experience life and joy and health and wholeness unless we are getting our preferences. This is how people sell products and experiences to us. You might call it consumerism. And in a lot of ways, I enjoy it. I like getting my preferences way better than not getting my preferences. The point remains, we don't just all buy the same car. We buy the car that suits our preference, budget notwithstanding. We don't just buy clothes, we buy clothes that suit our preference. And I could do this all day with basically every single thing we purchase or own.

The problem is, if you try to baptize consumerism and spiritualize it, you will end up actively standing in God's way, to use the language of the passage. You will end up working against what God is trying to accomplish.

Here is what I mean.

This passage shows us that we will necessarily be in fellowship with people who are different from us. Maybe different in age. Different in gender. Maybe different in race. Maybe different in socioeconomic status. Do you know that those differences are not superficial, but actually contribute substantially to our preferences?

-Typically, do older people like to listen to their music at the same volume as younger people? Usually they do not.

-Typically would a group of black Americans like to listen to the same style of music as a group of white rural Americans? Usually not. Usually much less banjo is involved.

-You may or may not know this, but those differences also affect the way in which we like to have conversations. The amount of personal privacy we expect to keep, even with closest friends. These differences affect how much we like tradition. They affect what we think is appropriate to share in a group setting. They affect how expressive we are when we are singing together on Sunday. They affect your view on politics, on what is important and what is not important and how we should vote. And I could go on and on and on.

These differences are not superfluous. They are significant.

And as soon as you spiritualize consumerism and having your preferences met, we are doomed. Because you will start requiring things from people that God does not require, or you'll be unable to remain in fellowship with people who are different from you. Likely both. And You'll say things like -"I just don't feel like I can connect to God through this worship style." because it's not the style that you'd prefer, -"They don't parent like we do, so we can't really be around their family. And I think we need to be around like-minded families for our family to be comfortable." -"The teaching and sermons just aren't the right type for me. I need to leave to find my preferred style of preaching...so I can grow." -"I just need to be around people in my season of life or my level of maturity." and you'll leave in order to have that preference met. So instead of a group of different people being brought together in Christ, we break fellowship. And actually, you're just spiritualizing consumerism, and as a result, you're standing in God's way of what he's actually trying to do.

You may not believe this, but I have actually heard people say "I cannot possibly be in fellowship with people who vote for a certain person or party."

If you break fellowship with a person or group because of how they voted in an election then you have so missed the point I don't even know where to start.

I would rather you vote for the wrong person than break fellowship with a brother or sister in Christ because they voted for the wrong person. Do you realize how anti-Christian it is that you are breaking fellowship because someone sees political policy differently than you?

And the problem is, consumerism is not how you grow in Christ. Spiritualizing your preferences does not produce sanctification. And in fact, it stands in God's way of what he is trying to accomplish on the earth in bringing different people together.

You didn't know that person in your LG was gonna bother you, but they absolutely do not know when to be quiet and it's driving you crazy. And it doesn't matter how clearly they are asked to only give the highlights of their problem at work, they walk you through the whole situation with shocking detail. and you cannot shake the thought that you cannot thrive in this environment.

And in that moment I am not considering the beauty of the fact that God shows no partiality and all are welcomed and I sort of wish there were some qualifications.

Like, just a couple of social awareness aptitude tests before full admission. That's all I'm saying.

Later the Apostle Paul would say it this way...

Philippians 2:3-7

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

That's not just an individual moral command. It's also a prerequisite for any church to be able to function. The more addicted you are to getting your preferences, the more quickly you will separate from people who have different preferences and therefore the more you are standing in God's way.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

We tend to think that the only way I can thrive is to be in a place or around people that make me comfortable... often, though, especially with God, thriving happens in the space that it is challenging... where we're not comfortable, but where we're pressed in ways we didn't know we even needed to be pressed. And this passage says that when I take the form of a servant and set my interests and preferences aside, I am actively becoming more like Jesus...who did this very thing in order to accomplish our salvation.

As strange as it sounds, the difficulty can be God's gift to you. Just like God had something He wanted to do in Peter's uncomfortable situation, he wants to do in you, too.

I'm saying all of this because I want us to start seeing not getting our preferences not as a bug but as a feature. When you willingly set aside your preferences for others you become more like Christ and you increasingly show off what Jesus came to do. Bring different people together.

So when that person is rambling in LifeGroup again this week. Because apparently they didn't get the message from the sermon today, I want you to smile to yourself as you remember that by setting aside your preferences you are growing more Christlike. And I want you to marvel at how powerful the gospel must be to have you sticking it out with someone that annoying.

And when we come together as a group and you think to yourself, that decision, this music, this teaching whatever, ...I didn't really like it. I want you to see that not as a problem but as an opportunity. To grow, as you set aside your preferences. And an opportunity to show off the power of the gospel and beauty of gods church. Where all different types of image bearers are welcomed and figure out a way to get along with the help of gods spirit.

Whenever God's word is opened and taught, the expectation is that we respond as is appropriate. We want to be doers of the word and not hearers only. We want to be good soil, so that Gods word produces good fruit in us.

Let me invite you to stand up and we will have some time to respond.

1 - prayer - if you need to spend some time with God in prayer and reflect on what was taught, this is a great opportunity to do so

Optional

1 - if you'd like someone to pray for you, we have people up in the front marked with blue lanyards who would love to pray for you, whatever it is.

2 - and in keeping with the Spirit of Acts and mission, if there are people in your life you'd like us to pray for, maybe someone who you care about and want to see God work in their life, our prayer team up front would love to pray with you

2 - singing - The band is going to lead us in worship, where we remind ourselves through song that Jesus is Lord and we worship God for who he is and what he's done for us in Christ.

3 - generosity - We can respond through generosity, where we remember that because God has given so much to us, we're freed up to be generous so that God's mission can go forward. We have a giving station in the auditorium and in the lobby and if you'd like to respond in that way.

And then finally...

4 - communion - We take communion. this is where we remember who Jesus is and what He's done for us - that His body is broken for us, His blood was spilled for us - and because of that, we are forgiven our sin, we're adopted into His family, and we're called to follow Him. So if you're a follower of Jesus, we'd invite you to participate in communion now. And if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, this is the one thing we'd ask you refrain from doing, only because it's not true of you yet, but by placing your faith in Jesus even now, this can be true of you this morning.

So at this time, let's respond.