

Sermon Transcript from November 27th, 2016
Humility & Unity
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This is Romans 12:3-8. Here's what it says:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it to the proportion of his faith; if it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; and if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

This is God's Word for us tonight. Will you pray with me?

I thank You, God, for Your Word that is living and active. That we, as a family of God, can gather tonight together. And Lord, You can do things that are impossible for us to do outside of You. And so, we come tonight in faith, believing, Lord, as we sit under Your Word, as we sing songs to You, as we open our hearts to You, that we will become more like You, God. More of Your grace and Your love and more of Your generosity would bubble up in us, Lord God, and we would become these Kingdom people in the city of San Francisco for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, we have been in a series we've called "A Moral Vision of the New Testament." This is a pretty exciting title, isn't? "Moral Vision of the New Testament." We've been going through The Year of Biblical Literacy since January; starting in Genesis and moving all the way through. We're getting close to the finish line with the start of Advent here. And we've been trying to get a bird's eye view, a big picture of what Paul is teaching to the early church about being the people of God and what it means to be the people of God.

In week one, Tim Mackie talked about the inclusive Paul. Everyone was welcome to the table of God. Everyone was welcome. And Paul pushed against the power of class systems and ethnicity boundaries and gender boundaries. He blew all of that up in this really remarkable way for his time and culture. This was the inclusive Paul.

In week two, Tim Mackie was back again and he talked about the exclusive Paul. That there was an expectation that the people of God, as they lived in this family, as they began to know who they were under God's care and law, that they would begin to treat their bodies, their relationships and their worship radically different than what the culture was doing at the time. It was radically exclusive.

Last week, Dave Lomas taught on the beginning of Romans 12, which we're in tonight. The first two verses. And he taught about the way God transforms people; transforms us. And He starts with the renewing of the way we think about ourselves and the way we think about the world around us. Paul is outlining how the Gospel is lived out in ancient Rome.

This week, tonight, we will continue to look at this letter from Paul to the Roman church and particularly focusing on a few points. Three main points. One, Paul's concern for the humility of the early church. That they would be a humble people. Second, Paul's encouragement for unity in the early church. And third, to see the way God's humble people use their gifts, use the tools God's given them to bring the Gospel into the world.

So, looking at the people of God being humble, the people of God being unified and those people using their gifts, using the tools God gives them to bring the Gospel into the world. This week, yesterday, my family kicked off Christmas. I don't know how your family does it, but my kids are ready when the turkey is in the trash can. They are ready for Christmas to start. Probably before that. So, we went and got a tree and we started decorating and the Christmas music was on and we told them they could each invite one friend over. I have three daughters. They each could invite one friend over to kind of join the party.

So, they're doing their thing and we have lots of traditions. We have certain ornaments that belong to certain people and a certain way that things go on the tree and certain

songs. A whole deal. So, this is all going on and we've got these strangers in our house and they're kind of observing and trying to take part in what's going on. And my wife hears my middle daughter, Reagan – I think it was like Mariah Carey's Christmas album was going. So, she hears my daughter Reagan say to her friend, who is much more subdued, much more quiet, much more soft spoken – which none of my girls are at all. So, she's just reserved and I hear my daughter Reagan say to her, "No, no, no. Use your own dance moves to this song. Don't use mine. No, no, no. Move your body to the music. You've got to get loose. You've got to get loose."

And for our kids, this is what you do. This is Christmas. You get loose. Like, Mariah Carey's playing, the lights are going up, this is what we do. For these other kids, they were having a hard time acclimating. But, if you're a Dealy, if you're in the Dealy family, right after Thanksgiving, this is what you do. This is what you do. And in the same way, Paul is telling the early Church in Rome, in this passage we're going to go through, "If you're in God's family, if you're one of God's people, this is what you do. This is what you do. It's how you live and should become normal."

Paul starts with the premise that if you're in God's family, you view life as a gift. You view life as a gift. For, by the grace given me, Paul says, I say to each of you – this is the introductory statement. And if you remember Paul's story, he was a pretty gnarly guy. In the early part of Paul's life, he actually exterminated Christians. Like, literally hunted down people in the early Church and killed them. This is what he did passionately. Then he had this incredible encounter with Christ and what we see in Paul's address to the early Church is we see that Paul knows that his past does not disqualify him from the future he has in Christ. Paul's past, all that he lived through, all that he put other people through, does not disqualify him for the future he has in Christ. I just feel like there's a few of you that need to hear that tonight.

Because of God's grace, because of His loving kindness extended to Paul, extended to you and me, Paul can begin to urge the Church, begin to admonish them in a really humble way. And he instructs them to do the same with each other in the way they speak to one another. If you know someone or you are someone who has lived through intense suffering, intense pain, or if you're someone like Paul who has caused deep suffering or pain in other people, then this experience of coming to know Christ, of receiving His grace and His forgiveness and new life in Him, reorients who you are. The Bible says you are reborn and that you have a new life.

And Paul acknowledges this when he enters into this life of Christ and he's extended love and forgiveness and grace and healing. When God does this in your life, you begin to see life as a gift and it humbles you. So, Paul can say, "For the grace given to me, by that grace I say to you..."

In other words, Paul is leveling the playing field with his audience. Paul acknowledges God's grace in his life and in light of that grace, he begins to speak to his brothers and sisters. I think we should take note of this in our cultural climate today. Speaking to others in light of the grace given to you and to me should soften our posture, should soften our words. The world doesn't need more arrogant blowhards. We've got plenty. There are some in the Church. I can be one sometimes. We don't need more of those. That's not what the Church should be. In light of the grace given to us, we should speak gently to others.

In fact, Paul tells the Church how they are to even think of themselves in this light in Romans 12:3. He says, **"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment."**

Now, I think we can agree that humility doesn't come naturally to most of us. Some of you, God bless you, it comes to you. Most of us, it doesn't come naturally and it certainly was not a virtue in Roman culture. Commentator Michael Bird said this about humility or the lack thereof in Roman culture.

He says, "Humility was not an ancient virtue. Humility was for inferiors, for slaves, plebs, and retainers. Social life in Ancient Rome was fiercely competitive and consumed with pursuits of honor and status. Raising yourself among others was the aim of the game. Yet Paul, Paul expects Christians to do the opposite, to think of themselves with self-modesty and not self-promotion. The Roman world was one where everyone was scratching and clawing to make their way up the social ladder. And quite honestly, 300 years later, not much has changed. Our culture does not celebrate humility. We celebrate a lot of things. Humility is not one of them."

This should be a healthy reminder to us that we are predisposed to think well of ourselves. We are predisposed to self-aggrandizement. In our nature, in our blood, we think better of ourselves than we ought to. This plays out for me when I get into arguments with

anyone. I tend to think that my point of view is the only one that makes sense. It's the only one that makes sense. And this happened to me with my father-in-law over the holiday. I love my father-in-law. We have a great relationship. But, I could not for the life of me understand his points of view around this whole political process thing that we just went through. I could not understand where he was coming from. And quite honestly, as I began to unpack this friction that we were having, I could figure out that not only could I not understand where he was coming from, I realized I didn't care very much to understand where he was coming from. That was the truth of it. My ego in the way.

I think of myself, my moral high ground, my education, my life experience to be the end-all and be-all. That is the measure of what is right. And Paul says I need to be sober minded, meaning I shouldn't get drunk on my own arrogance. I shouldn't get drunk on pride, on myself and how I think of myself. Instead, I should be aware of my own limited view in understanding God, in understanding the world and sports and politics and add in everything else. If I take my myopic life experience, this little, tiny piece of humanity, and I make that the end-all and be-all, it is an incredibly arrogant place to stand. And Paul warns us to be people that don't act that way, that don't think that way.

This is something we talk a lot about in our community groups. That humility is a realization that I don't have all the answers and, God forbid, I may even be wrong about some things. So, we practice ways of being sober-minded. A couple ways we do that. One, seek to understand before you're understood. If you go in genuinely into a conversation seeking to understand before being understood, you'll have a better chance of having at least some sober-mindedness in your conversation.

Secondly, seek to listen first before you speak. Listen first with a hope of understanding before you speak to be understood. This is what we try to practice. Paul says that this has to be our posture. We have to be a humble people if we are going to function as the body of Christ.

He says, **"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."**

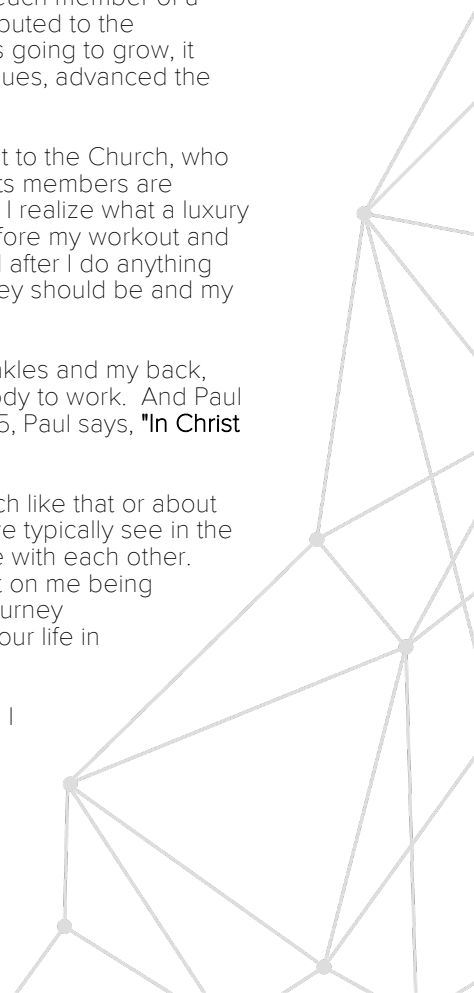
This theme of "the body of Christ" is one that Paul uses multiple times in his letters to the early Church in different places, probably because it's a metaphor that Rome used within its own empire in its budding political movement. The body politic that Rome was espousing was this concept that each member of a society, each member no matter where you fell on the hierarchy, each member contributed to the flourishing of the empire in some way. If the empire was going to stay healthy and was going to grow, it required that each member live within the laws of the land, paid their taxes and their dues, advanced the ideas of the empire. This would keep things thriving.

Paul takes that concept of this body, interconnected, interdependent, and he applies it to the Church, who is the living and active body of Christ in the world. A healthy body is one where all of its members are working in full function and, as I'm getting older – I turn 40 in 3 weeks. Lord help me – I realize what a luxury a functioning body is for the quality of life. I'm at this stage of life where I take Advil before my workout and after my workout. It's pathetic. It's totally pathetic. But, I can feel it as I'm limping around after I do anything pretty much. Sore knees, ankles, back. My members are not all functioning the way they should be and my body feels it. The whole body suffers.

Paul is reminding us that each member of the body of Christ, just like my knees, my ankles and my back, have a specific function that is necessary for the whole thing to work; for the whole body to work. And Paul even takes it a step further in that last sentence that I tried to emphasize. In Romans 12:5, Paul says, **"In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to the others."**

Each member belongs to all the others. When is the last time you thought of the Church like that or about your community group that way? This is a whole new level of interdependency than we typically see in the Church. Not just that we have to tolerate each other. Not just that we have to play nice with each other. But, Paul is saying that I am dependent on you being fully you and you are dependent on me being fully me. Both us growing in our redeemed and restored nature in Christ and this journey together. This should shape the way we think about Church, about community, about our life in the city. "I need you." That's a powerful statement. "I need you and you need me."

If God is going to do all the things He has planned to do in this church in this city, then I need you and I'm dependent on you. If God is going to do all that He has planned for this church in this city, then you need me. We are interdependent. We belong to each



other. I must seek your health and your wholeness and your redemption and your healing, because it's good for you and I need you and you should seek the same thing for me.

If we really let Paul's word sink in, they're profound. Profound. And they'll change the way we live. What are some of the ways we can live more interdependently? Conveniently, Paul gives us a few examples.

He says this: **"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, the prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; and if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."**

These are just some of the examples of the Church living interdependently. Paul says that we all have gifts. Each of us. Different gifts. Maybe you haven't found yours yet. Maybe no one has ever shared what they see in you as your gifts. I think this would be a really healthy place to start living as if we belonged to one another if we did this. If we would tell each other the good that we see in each other. If you would call out in the people around you the good, the giftings, the blessing they are in your life and in the life of your community, that could be a really helpful thing to some people.

I meet too many people who are still trying to figure out what their gifts are and why they're here. They're just wrestling with that. This should be a primary function of living in community, that we would take notice of one another, we would see each other's good and not so good and we would have courage to speak into those places. Isn't that what a healthy body would do? A healthy body directs nutrients and blood cells and oxygen to the members that need it most. And that's not even thriving, that's just survival.

So, I want to challenge you to do a couple things. One, take notice of the people around you. It's healthy for us to take our eyes off our self for a bit and to notice the good we see in those around us. Too often, our insecurities and our fear get our eyes just trained on our self. How is everyone seeing me tonight? How is everyone hearing me tonight? What are they thinking of me? It's healthy for us to get out of that mindset and begin to see the good in others and elevate that and encourage that. So, I want you to, as you go into this week, take notice of the people around you in your workspace, in your apartment, in your family. Notice the good.

And when you see someone doing good, when you see someone being an encourager, when you see someone serving, when you see someone teaching well, go and tell them. Say something. Say something.

Noelle and I, my wife and I, we do this all the time in our parenting. We have to just to stay alive. Is that dramatic? We need each other as parents. We cling to each other. So, I might say to Noelle, "I saw you being really patient with the girls tonight. Good job. You're just a good mom. You're so patient."

She might say to me, "I saw you encouraging one of the girls when you were out in the yard playing. Good job."

And that is just a simple thing. But, if I hear that enough times, I begin to see, "Yeah, I am pretty good at encouraging the girls. That something that actually comes naturally to me."

And that's a good thing. It does a few things when you begin to foster this. One, it encourages the person you're talking to who you're uplifting. It encourages them. Two, it helps the person realize their gifting. To see the things that people are bringing up in their life. And three, it's a win for everybody. If we're all living in our gifting, if we're all functioning in those and we have confidence in those, that's good for all of us. We all win. It's good for the body. And this is what it looks like to live as one body with many members, many different giftings; each unique.

Of course, gifts have a dark side to them as well. As an exercise, I just want you to look at the gifts on the screen that Paul gives to us. And this is, again, not an exhaustive list. This is just a sample. I want you just to look at these gifts and maybe say it to yourself, say it in your mind, say each one and go down the list. Just sit with it for a second, each one of them, and go down through the list.

Now, how many people are hoping for the gift of serving? How many people signed up for showing mercy? Okay. Here's the point. The dark side of gifts doesn't have to do with the gifts themselves. But instead, it has to do with our heart towards them. Not all gifts are judged as equal in our world. Not all gifts are judged as equal in our world. Chances are

that if you have a gift of prophecy and you know how to use it rightly, if you're a gifted teacher, if you're a gifted leader, then you are viewed more highly, generally speaking, than someone who's an encourager or someone who is gifted at serving or showing mercy.

And this is why Paul starts with humility. He's a smart guy. This is why he starts with humility, with not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to and being sober-minded. In our context, I think Paul would not be so concerned about those who serve and encourage and show mercy as needing to be humble. Typically, those people who live in that gifting are humble people. I think, instead, Paul would direct his instruction of humility square at those who are celebrated publicly for their gifts. Those are the ones who tend to err on the side of pride, self-aggrandizement. And Paul would warn them to not think too highly of themselves. And quite honestly, to not let others think too highly of them either. We need to be sober-minded about ourselves.

Finally, as we close, why is all of this so important? Humility, unity in the body, seeing and speaking into each other's gifting. Why is this so important to Paul? God is on a rescue mission; on an active, working redemption and restoration project for the whole world to bring it back to peace, righteousness and justice in the right order that He first intended it to have. And we are called to be His people; God's people. And God's people are those who love God and realize His grace in their lives everyday, who realize life is a gift, who have experienced God's grace, and in it live gracefully with others. People who walk in humility, not thinking of themselves too highly, who live interdependently with one another, who use their God-given gifts for the mutual benefit of everyone. These people, God's people, living this way, this is God's rescue plan. It's crazy. This is the way God intends to redeem the world through His people. And this goes way back to the beginning, to the candle that we lit tonight.

This evening, we lit an Advent candle, and each week we'll be lighting another candle as we remember the story of the people who have gone before us in the faith, those who trusted God and waited in anticipation for Christ to come. The first week, this week, is focused on hope. Hope for the world. And it remembers the patriarchs – a great word. Patriarchs. We don't use it enough. The patriarchs of our faith, specifically a man named "Abraham." Abraham was a nobody; a herdsman. He didn't know God and certainly was not worshipping God when one night God revealed Himself to Abraham and He gave him a promise. He said, "I will bless you and through you a nation will come and will be a blessing to all nations."

This is God's active redemption plan. This is the seed. Abraham is this seed that gets planted and he's a man of faith. See, what we live into tonight, what we live into in this time, is the fruit of Abraham. Abraham was like a seed planted in the ground and he becomes this tree of children and offspring that become tribes that become a nation that become many nations. It's like a tree with many branches that reaches out its branches over all of humanity. And it's supposed to offer good fruit to the world that people would taste and see that God is good through His people. Us. That is God's plan from the beginning with Abraham.

And there are just four parts of Abraham I want to just throw out there, because this is our DNA. This is what is passed down through the family tree of generations in the faith. One, that Abraham was loyal to the Lord. He was loyal to the Lord. God told him to leave his people, to leave his family, to leave his country and just go and start walking and Abraham said "yes." He was loyal to the Lord.

Abraham trusted the Lord even when it made no sense. Do you guys remember that God gives Abraham a promise when he's seventy-five years old that he would be a nation? And at that point, Abraham doesn't have a son. He doesn't have an heir. Seventy-five years old and God makes this promise. "You will have a son. You will be a great nation."

And Abraham trusts the Lord when it makes no sense. Seventy-five years old. Did I say that? Seventy-five years old. Fifteen years later, God comes and restores the hope. Son still hasn't come. Restores the hope. At ninety-nine years old, Abraham has a son. At ninety-nine years old, I hope I can even find the toilet or find the bed. I'm not thinking kids. Ninety-nine years old. God fulfills His promise. It says that the whole time Abraham trusted the Lord. This is our DNA. This is what's been passed down to us.

Thirdly, Abraham kept the Lord's way of righteousness and justice. He understood that God was giving him and his family a way to live, a way to be that was going to bring justice, to bring righteousness into the world. So, the Israelites had these crazy ways of living. They had this Year of Jubilee where they just cancelled all debt. Cancelled all debt not matter where you were in the payment plan. Cancelled. If your land had been bought years before, your land was given back to your family. Who does that? How do you get ahead if you're

giving stuff back all the time? This was a way of living, just one example that brings righteousness and justice and order and peace to the world. This is our DNA.

Fourth, Abraham looked to the Lord for provision. He looked to the Lord for provision. When he didn't have a son, he trusted that the Lord would do something radical to bring a son into his life and He did. When God tested Abraham to take that son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to Him, to use his son as a sacrifice, Abraham trusted. And they have this great dialogue in Genesis 22, Abraham and Isaac, when they're going up the mountain.

Isaac's like, "I see the wood. Okay. I see the stuff we light it with. I see everything except the animal. Father, where's the animal?"

And Abraham, knowing what God's called him to says, "The Lord will provide. My son, the Lord will provide."

And He does and Isaac is spared. I say all these things because this is what Paul is getting at. This people of God, this way of living. This is the DNA of it; this is the seed where it starts. It's why we light the candle tonight, to remember where this began. And I want to just share with you what happened in Rome. When Paul writes this letter and the people of God begin to live in this way of interdependency as the people of God walking in humility, bringing the Gospel into Rome, check out what happens. It's amazing.

Sociologist Rodney Stark, he wrote a book – he wrote several great books – called "The Rise of Christianity." It's from a sociological perspective. He's not a theologian. And listen to what he writes about the effect of Christianity in Rome.

He says, "Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms, new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems."

What's he talking about there? He's talking about that way of keeping righteousness and justice. That way of living differently. That's what was happening in these cities. He goes on.

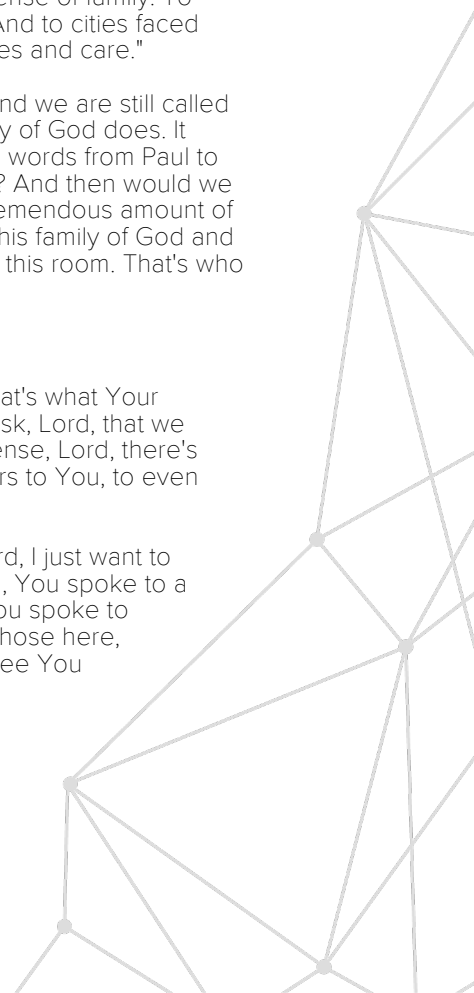
He says, "To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachment. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics and fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services and care."

The early Christian Church literally changed the most powerful empire on the planet and we are still called to be those people. It's who we are. It's who we were created to be. It's what the family of God does. It started with Abraham and it lives in us, God's people. So tonight, would we take those words from Paul to not think of ourselves too highly, to be sober-minded, have a healthy dose of humility? And then would we encourage one another? Would we live into the realization that God has given us a tremendous amount of gifts in this room? Just in this room alone, if each of us lived into our gifting, lived into this family of God and way of being, restoring righteousness and justice, what could happen in this city? Just this room. That's who we're called to be. That's what we do.

Let's pray.

I thank You, God, that You restore hope. God, that in You is our only hope of glory. That's what Your Scripture tells us. So tonight, God, as we move into this time of responding, I want to ask, Lord, that we would humble ourselves. Humble ourselves even to the way we worship You. I just sense, Lord, there's many of us that have a hard time even expressing our love to You and maybe our fears to You, to even have open dialogue with You.

Tonight, God, I pray we'd move into that place a bit more of security with You. And Lord, I just want to pray for those in this room who may not know You at all. I'm sure there are a few. Lord, You spoke to a man who didn't know You, who didn't worship You, who had no connection to You. You spoke to Abraham, Lord, and You revealed Yourself to him. And I just want to ask on behalf of those here, God, would You do that tonight? Would You reveal Yourself in the way they need to see You and the way they need to hear You? I pray this would be a safe space.



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So, as we worship You, God, it is our hope that we put in You that I pray would rise up from our worship. Our hope in You. Your Word says that You inhabit the praises of Your people. So, come, Lord Jesus, and have it this time. Amen.