

## **LIVING FREE - Week 1**

### **Monday, June 7**

Our study this summer is planned for the Old Testament book of Numbers. This book tells us what happened among the people of Israel during an in-between time. The Jewish people had been freed by God from their Egyptian slavery. They knew a liberty they could only dream of before. But they were not yet in the land God promised to give to them. You might say that there is a freedom going out of bondage, but there is also a freedom of going into a new life. They stood between these two freedoms. And, in many ways we do as well. Jesus has saved us from bondage to sin and death, but we haven't inherited the fullness of the kingdom as yet. We live waiting for the good land God promised us in Christ. We also live in between. Now it was said that Israel was in the wilderness. The wilderness is a place, but it is no particular place. It is just out there somewhere. There is no city there. No structure. Yes, the wilderness is the place between. This is the place the people will be formed and shaped according to God's purposes. It is in the silence of the desert that people can hear God. They will come to know the God that saved them and come to experience life under his Lordship. This is a place where God can have the people to himself. They can learn his ways, his covenant, and his love.

Our reading this morning is taken from the opening verses of Numbers chapter 2:

*The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, <sup>2</sup> "The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side. <sup>3</sup> Those to camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah by their companies, -Numbers 2:1-3*

Now, this chapter is given in its entirety to explain how the people were to camp and then in what order they were to march when they set out from the camp. Really, did the Lord care about this? They were camping out, not making a permanent settlement anywhere. Why would the Lord give instructions about this? First, God was to be before his people and in the midst of his people. Before they enter the land, they must become a people that has God with them. Their camp symbolized this. The tribes were divided according to the birth mother of the original tribal heads, the sons of Jacob, and also put in four groups based on the main compass headings, north, south, east and west. The Lord did this to show that he himself, his presence, forms them into a people. It is his love and the redemption they received in him that binds them together. Otherwise, why not go separate directions? Why not live their own individual stories? Because they belong to the Lord, there is a cohesion that binds them together, even in the wilderness. The unity comes from the Lord dwelling in their midst. Again, camping out is when God taught them this deep truth. They are a nation because of the presence and love of God. How can you be a nation without land, a people without a place of your own? How is that possible?

As Moses stated:

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. -Psalm 90:1-2*

Yes, our dwelling place, our identity comes not from a piece of real estate, but from the Lord himself. This is why this time in the wilderness was so important for the people of God and why the Lord did not lead them into the land right away. This is also why Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness at the very start of his ministry. He needed this time alone with the Father. Yes, he met with temptation and testing there, but he lived in between, just like Israel did. Just like we are now. Here's part of what we are to learn: We dwell in and through the Lord. Now, the Lord did not remove the tribe or family names, but instead by unifying the tribes under his Lordship, he actually established the tribes and helped to retain their distinctive features. God brought about a deep unity, not a uniformity. I am not sure we see the way this works. We are feeling during this day pressure to be like everyone else. Indeed, we are pulled in this direction when we do not have a basis for unity greater than ourselves. It is as we are joined together by God that we find the freedom of differences. We can be different and not be threatened by that because we have oneness apart from those differences. This is the power of having God dwelling

at the center of the camp. That was the layout for the tribes. In the center, the space uniting the diverse tribes was the tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Lord. It was here people met together to worship the one Lord that saved them and guided them. Ok. So now you may feel like you are living in an in-between time, or in the wilderness. Perhaps COVID-19 has heightened our awareness of being in an in-between place. We are not where we used to be but also not where we want to be. This time is not wasted time. It is meant for you to come to know the presence of the Lord and that your life rests with him. It is not meant to strip away the unique features of who you are but to give you freedom to live as God created you to live because you have the Lord himself as your point of reference, your dwelling place. And also, just as the presence of the Lord in the midst of Israel made them to be a united people, so it is the presence of Christ that causes us to be a people together. We don't create unity and this bond. Jesus already has. It is up to us to learn to enjoy the connection that we have in him.

Let's pray:

Lord, we do not like the wilderness. We wonder what good came from being caught between this world and what you have prepared for us. But we know that you meet us in the wilderness. It is here we can come to know you and look to you for all things. Enable us to know your presence in our midst by your Holy Spirit. Indeed, you are our dwelling place for all generations. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### **Tuesday, June 8**

Whenever you take a commercial flight there is an interesting process that must take place before the cabin can be closed and the plane pushed back. The plane must have a manifest naming each of the occupants of the plane. Yes, they need to confirm each person that is on board. Perhaps you have seen a flight attendant moving through the plane checking for empty seats. This is more than looking for space for stand-by passengers. It is required of all flights.

Here is our text for today...

Numbers 1:1-2

*The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head.*

As we open the book of numbers, we find God asking Moses to number the people. Indeed, the book of Numbers takes its name for this first action in the book. Why does God order this? Though there is strength in numbers, the Lord is not counting the fighting men for that reason, nor really even trying to establish a number, though that does take place in this book. He wants every family counted because everyone counts. Each person is dear to the Lord. For each of us, there is an equality and dignity in knowing you matter. This is the way this book begins. The Lord takes responsibility for each person, and each person is valued. The name of each person is on the manifest. It is communicated in a beautiful way. The word for taking a count in Hebrew means to lift the head. As each family is recognized and called by name, they lift their heads. They are acknowledged. You see their faces. Think of where they came from. They had been slaves in Egypt. They were unnamed masses. Pharaoh didn't care about individuals. They were his work force. On farms, the workers were simply called hands. As in, “how many hands do you have in the field today.” They weren't people. They were treated like machines. They were expendable and replaceable. We often find ourselves recorded in statistics, grouped with others and not counted as the unique people that each of us is. But the Lord was different with his people. Each person is made in his image and bears a value we can't estimate or quantify. God cares for us, not as a mass of unnamed people, but as the individuals he made us to be. Yes, he will form them into a people, a nation, but individual people are never lost in the mix. By the way, in the Nazi concentrations camps, the prisoners' names were of no importance. A number was tattooed on each person counting them but making them nameless in the system. They didn't matter as individuals. There were quotas of them for this and that. But the Lord never treated people in this way. Though there were roughly 600,000 people in the wilderness, yet he takes time to hear their names and to record their presence among the people. Of course, this all comes from God

who made us. He is the one that has a name. He is not a nameless, impersonal force, but one we can call by name. This significance of each person is carried throughout scripture and into the ministry of Jesus. Jesus took interest in each person, making a special effort to treat people with dignity and value. We don't need to wonder how Jesus looks at us. He took the children in his arms and blessed them even though children were not highly thought of and valued at the time. He invited himself over to the homes of sinners so that he might show that the Lord cared for them. People were often overwhelmed by the grace and love with which he treated them. As we read in scripture, God has recorded the names of those that belong to him. This book is the ultimate manifest for his people in the Lamb's book of life. We have become so used to being reduced to a number or a statistic that we have a hard time seeing the truth. God knows you by name. This is the nature of his love. It is personal. We read in the New Testament that God is love, and that he loves us. This is not an idea. He loves us as individual people. He loves each of us personally and uniquely. That is his way because that is who he is. He also commands us to love in this way as well. Whoever loves in this way knows God and is born of God. Because God is love.

Let's pray:

Thank you, Father, that you know us by name, and that we matter to you. I pray that you would teach us your way. Help us to treat others with the same grace with which you have treated us in Christ. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Wednesday, June 9**

Recently when sorting through photographs my father took across his lifetime, I came across an assortment of pictures from our family dinner table. Family reunions, dinner parties, Christmas and Thanksgivings celebrations. It was sweet to see these special moments captured. My mom's fine china and silver adorned the table. Flowers and candles. And, of course the food. A roasted turkey. Sweet potato casserole, green beans and creamed corn. Not to mention the salad and dessert of freshly baked pound cake. Of course, the most cherished part was the time together. Usually, three generations and sometimes four were present. Seeing the photos made me wish for those days. I share my memories to provoke your own and get us thinking about feasts. Passover was the first and most important feast day of the Jewish people. It was not made up of sober refection but joyful celebration. Families gathered in the early spring as the Lord commanded. They butchered a lamb or goat, opened the family's choice wine and sat together for a few hours. They savored the food and retold the story of their salvation. The children had one of the best parts. They got to ask questions and challenge the adults to explain what happened when God freed their people from Egyptian slavery. The dinner was punctuated by the drinking of four full glasses of wine. The family drank the wine as they shared each of the four promises that the Lord gave to his people at the Exodus.

Here is the text of those promises from Exodus chapter 6:

*Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. -Exodus 6:6-7*

Did you hear those promises God made to his people? They are simply: I will bring you out. I will deliver you. I will redeem you. I will take you. Those are the words spoken each year at the choreographed Passover Seder or dinner. In between these reading of the promises, other symbolic foods are shared. Such as an egg, a sign of hope and that new life is coming. Bitter herbs, the reminder of the bitter toil of their slavery, a shank bone of a lamb, reminding them of the lamb that was slain. That lamb became the main course of the meal that night. But what was more important was that the blood of the lamb was spread on the doorframes of each home to protect the family inside from the angel of death. The first night the Lord told the people to eat in a hurry because they would leave Egypt right away. For this reason, bread was not given time to rise. Instead, unleavened bread was served at the dinner as well. This practice is retained to this day. The Passover meal is interrupted often with prayers of gratitude and praise to the Lord who

saved them. Being together and hearing the familiar words was like looking in on a wedding ceremony where you hear once again the vows you shared with your spouse. The memories were deep and wide, and gratitude flowed freely like the wine did. Yes, it was indeed a celebration. You can imagine what drinking four glasses of wine would do to the guests. It was a joyous and heady affair for sure. Now, we need to remember this when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Indeed, we know that our Passover cost the Son of God his life, but God invites us to join the feast. Now, as we learned on Sunday, the Passover was all about God's promises and God's doing. The people did nothing but celebrate and enter into their new freedom. This is what the gospel tells us Jesus has done. He has done it all. Finished the race as the author and perfecter of our faith. Think about this: The Jewish people repeated the promises for over a thousand years, setting the stage for a salvation that would spread to the whole world and a lamb whose sacrifice would liberate people from every tribe and nation on earth. This is what we rejoice in when we celebrate this meal at Granada. Let me tell you a little about the way Jesus celebrated it with his disciples. No doubt they followed the plan for the feast. John, as the youngest disciple, would most likely have been the one asking the questions, and Jesus, the host of the meal, would have provided the answers. Of course, we remember that Jesus greeted the disciples when they arrived with a towel around his waist. After the disciples got over the shock of seeing Jesus take the task of a slave, he washed their feet and the dinner began. As he shared the unleavened bread, he said, "This is my body given for you." Then Jesus was sharing the third cup, the cup of redemption, and after speaking the words of God:

*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment...*

Then Jesus said, "*this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" -Matthew 26:28

Yes, Jesus is the outstretched arm of the Lord sent to redeem his people forever. Now, we will pick up tomorrow with the rest of the story from the ending of the Lord's Supper.

Let's pray:

Lord God, you have told us that by faith in Jesus we are joined to the promises given to Abraham. Thank you for revealing your plan to redeem us and give us life. Help us to enter into the joy of our salvation knowing that you have accomplished all that is needed in Jesus to bring us home. Fill us with the joy of knowing we are yours. In your name we pray. Amen.

### **Thursday, June 10**

Yesterday, we left off before the end of the Passover meal in the Upper Room with Jesus. The disciples knew the Passover meal all too well. As Jesus spoke about his body and blood, his words must have been surprising to the disciples. Jesus' body? Jesus' blood? They didn't know Jesus would hang on the cross the next day. After the disciples saw the cross, the meal and Jesus' words made sense. They understood that Jesus became our Passover lamb. Now, as the Passover concluded that night, Jesus changed the end of the meal. Normally, the last of the four cups would be raised and these words would be spoken:

*I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God...* Exodus 6:7

But instead of ending the meal in this way, Jesus refused to finish the feast. He did not drink the last of the cup of wine. Instead, he said:

*I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*" -Matthew 26:29

Why did he say this? He was explaining to them that the Passover Feast would be completed in the kingdom of God. Yes, the promise of God to take them as his people, to be with them, would be fulfilled then, at the end of the age. Of course, this is the time we long for. We look forward to the return of Jesus and the great feast in the kingdom of God. Yes, we are learning that the

Passover, the Lord's Supper, is also filled with expectation for us. Even as we eat it, the words of Jesus should echo in our hearts. He's waiting for the Father's kingdom for the completion of the feast and the fulfillment of the final promise. The Passover also ended with expectation for the Jewish people. To this day, they end the feast saying: *Next year in Jerusalem*. They too are looking forward to what lies ahead. It is the book of Revelation that explains to us the fulfillment Jesus says is coming.

Here is the Apostle John explaining what happens:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. --Revelation 21:1-3*

Yes, the day will come when heaven will come to earth. There will be a grand wedding as heaven and earth become one. God's will shall be done here on earth as it is in heaven. It is then, we are told, that God will live with his people and take them to be his own. We will be gathered together and forever be with the Lord. These are the words we are to use to encourage each other. We should not say, "Hopefully, next year we will celebrate in Jerusalem." Instead, we say that we look forward to being gathered into the kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem. Then along with Jesus we shall drink from the last cup of wine of the Passover Feast. Our salvation will then be complete. Now, as we are in our study of Numbers, I think this is also part of God's purpose. The people are free from their slavery, but they haven't reached their destination. They are in the wilderness, the empty place. God wants to nurture in his people a deep desire for fellowship with him, and the fulfillment of that last promise. Now, one point we haven't looked at is that when God gave his promises at the Exodus, the ones remembered in the Passover, the Lord said even more.

He also said:

*I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord."* <sup>9</sup> *Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery. --Exodus 6:8-9*

Yes, God said more. I will bring you into the land. Now, the teachers of the law disagreed over whether there should actually be five cups in the Passover meal. Should there be a cup with the words: I will bring you in? I have no doubt that God plans to bring us in. As we celebrate the Lord's Supper it is with the reminder that our salvation is secure, and that God will finish the story of our redemption. He will take us to be his own, and he will bring us into the land he promised to provide to us. The new heaven and the new earth. His kingdom. Yes, Jesus will serve to his people the cup and remind us of the promises made and now fulfilled completely in the purposes of God.

Let's pray:

Faithful and loving Father, there are days when we wonder where life is going. We wonder what is coming next and how things will turn out. We need to hear your promises again and again. Help us not to forget your plan, or doubt your goodness. Thank you for what you have planned for us in Christ. In his name, we pray. Amen.

### **Friday, June 11**

Years ago, when I was still in college, I was hired to be a youth director of a church in western North Carolina. The church was a mid-sized Baptist church in a nice southern town. The people were amazingly friendly and gracious to me. But something I did not know going in was that the church pastor had been unable to get along with any of his staff people. He was an unhappy and controlling man, and by taking the job I became the next target. One of the other leaders in the church explained to me after I had already accepted the job, that I would not likely be there for long. He was right. As the ministry to youth began to flourish, the pastor took this as a threat. I remember the night the leader who had warned me came to me with tears in his eyes to let me

know I had been fired. How could this happen? Now, my story was not a new story. I've heard it repeated many times, as it has happened since sin first came into the world. Leadership is a dangerous thing. It can easily be misused rather than used for the good of people. There can be immense envy among leaders. Some think they should have the position or the success or the status that others have. This even happened among the disciples of Jesus. Early on in his time with the disciples, we are told:

*Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. -Luke 9:46*

Indeed, this seems to happen among all groups of leaders at one time or another. So, the early chapters of Numbers set the stage for a brewing problem that will cause trouble to the people of God for years to come.

Numbers 3:11-13

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>12</sup> "Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, <sup>13</sup> for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the Lord."*

Now, this may not sound like a big deal, but here is what happened. Among the people of God, the oldest member of each family had the job of guiding the family, being the family leader, really sort of the priest for the whole family. God always worked among the members of the family to preserve the family structure. The eldest member called the others to prayer. The eldest made sure the members of the family were taken care of. The eldest stood before God on behalf of his family in prayer pleading with God for them. But in the wilderness, God shifted the burden and place of leadership to the tribe of the Levites. Now, there were many problems that arose from this. First, with the new leadership role there were many benefits. There was a greater access to the Lord and a trust with the resources of the people. It was a high honor for sure. This honor was taken away from the first born in the tribes and families and given to one tribe. The second problem was that it was given to the tribe of Moses. To some it seemed like nepotism, though the Lord himself commanded that it be done. Add to this, the priesthood was formalized and given not only to the tribe of Moses, but to Aaron from the family of Moses. Aaron became the high priest and was given even more authority and responsibility among the people. Because his was just a family among the tribe of Levi, you can see how and why envy would creep in. Why did he deserve this place more than the others? Why could there not be a shared leadership? This just did not seem fair. And, it wasn't. But God is not concerned with fairness in the way we think about it. God often has purposes we cannot see and will not know right away. This is what the Lord wanted; it was not Moses' idea. Now, this text challenges the way we look at leadership. We think the brightest or the strongest or the wisest should be the one in charge. Remember how the prophet Samuel made this mistake? The Lord sent him to the house of Jethro to find and anoint a new king over Israel. Jethro brought in his sons. They were all fine specimen, strong, bright and ready. Samuel mistook these qualities for God's calling, but he was wrong. It was the youngest, the boy still out tending the sheep that the Lord had chosen. Why? David had walked with the Lord. He knew deep communion with God from his time in the wilderness with the sheep. God knew his heart. You see, our way of approaching leadership is not God's way. The Lord had a purpose in selecting Aaron to be the high priest. God had a purpose in shifting responsibility from the firstborn to the Levites. This was a lesson I had to learn all those years ago when I was let go from the church that I loved. The pastor had not been a healthy leader. But he was there by the plan of God. God used this time to help me submit more to him, and to trust that God is working, especially when I cannot see or understand what he is doing. God taught me to support leaders around me, that the weight of leadership can be overwhelming. Moses faced what seemed like unending criticism, and all he was trying to do was be faithful to the Lord. Jesus was dogged by those that opposed him, threatened and challenged at every turn. But he remained faithful to the end. You might ask God to show you how you can support the leaders that are around you, and how you can pray for them. I know all those years ago, I could have done a much better job supporting my pastor.

Let's pray:

Sovereign God, there are times we see leaders, and we wonder why they are in charge. Why did you choose them? Remind us that your thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts and your ways than our ways. Show us how to support and encourage the leaders you have surrounded us with. Even now, we pray for them, for wisdom, for courage to lead, and for their communion with you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Saturday, June 12**

Living in a small community in New Jersey for over a decade taught me a lot about the way society is meant to work. Our little town had everything of its own. City leadership, a mayor, commissioners, a school system of its own with a school board. There was a parents and teacher association. There was also its own small library with a number of book-reading clubs. Then in the community there was an active elks club, a woman's club, a German-American club, the American Legion, a few small churches, and a whole host of other small clubs and associations. The city looked like a quilt made up of a myriad of interconnected relationships. Researchers tell us that the fabric of relationships can best be built in small groups. One person can be connected to only about 150 others in a truly meaningful way. But, in smaller groups the bonds have the chance to tighten. Why is this? It takes time, and you only have so many people that you can spend that much time with. There is only so much of you that can be spread around. We have been compared to LEGO building blocks. Our kids had thousands of them when they were growing up. The most basic LEGO block has either six or eight connectors on its surface. That is the maximum number of other blocks it can be connected to. For us, these connections are our spouses and children and then our closest friends. This is why you have only a handful of closest friends. Why does it work this way? This was God's design. He made us for relationship, and he also put limits on how many and what kind of relationships we can manage. We can try to have more, but we will run up against a wall of time. Now, in Israel, the people were held together by family and also by their tribes. While the book of Deuteronomy makes almost no mention of the tribes, the book of Numbers is filled with discussions of the tribes of Israel. Why is this? As they were learning to be a free people, they needed the power of community, the fabric of relationships to sustain their lives. They needed more than the top-down leadership of Moses and Aaron. They also needed the grassroots connection of families, clans and tribes.

Numbers 34:16-21

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>17</sup> "These are the names of the men who shall divide the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. <sup>18</sup> You shall take one chief from every tribe to divide the land for inheritance. <sup>19</sup> These are the names of the men: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. <sup>20</sup> Of the tribe of the people of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud. <sup>21</sup> Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon.*

Now, they gained membership in a tribe through birth and by blood, but the tribes of our lives are chosen for social connection, because of values we share, or interests we have in common. You find a book club, others in your age bracket that like to read science fiction, or you join a walking group that gets together every week, or you join a service organization and regularly meet to serve in the city. You get the idea. These small groups are where life happens and are critical to the health of communities because this is where we connect and form strong bonds that support one another in times of stress. This is an underlying teaching of the book of Numbers. We need to share life in a tribe and a clan and a family. This is where we learn life together and share life. This is why we form community groups at Granada, and why people meet for discipleship and for learning. Friendships can form at a deeper level. We can come to know and support each other, not as anonymous individuals, but as the spiritual family we are. Now, here's the problem in the US right now. Our community connections are disappearing. The elks club is no longer meeting. Kiwanis club has declining membership. Americans are more isolated and alone than ever according to the studies. We used to have bowling leagues that met each week gathering people together for fun and friendship, but now we are bowling alone. The fabric of community has been unraveling for decades, and there does not seem to be any letting up. Indeed, the opposite seems to be happening. Movements that divide us are springing up, keeping us apart, and further

isolating us. Life together just cannot be sustained without healthy community. This is where we have an immense opportunity. First, in Christ we have received a bond making us brothers and sisters, joining us into his tribe and including us in the family of God. We can enjoy the new relation given to us as we gather for worship, meet in our homes, and also in classes and small groups. We can be intentional about building community because we know God made us for this. We can also invite others to join us, tearing down the walls of isolation and expanding the fellowship of the people of God. Right now, the body of Christ is needed more than ever to oppose the unhealthy separation of people and to invite people into the living community of faith. This is one of the most powerful avenues to faith in Christ. People see the life and love of a community, and they can understand the gospel and see what Jesus has done. But I really do think we must be intentional about forming healthy tribes and clans, and always be looking to make room for more.

Let's pray:

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, your ways are so much higher than our own. You made us, and you know what we need to thrive as a people. Thank you for sending Jesus to restore the bonds of community, and even more to join us to your family. It is here we can give and receive love, where we can know the height and depth of your love for us in Christ. Teach us how to weave others into the life of community rather than tear apart the fabric of our life together. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.