

Hanukkah

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, this morning we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read.

The Gospel according to John, in chapter 10, page 1081, if you're using the Pew Bible. And we're going to read again at verse 22.

John chapter 10, at verse 22. At that time, the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon.

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

Now, last Sunday evening, it marked the beginning of the Jewish festival known as Hanukkah.

[1 : 00] And out of all the Jewish festivals, you could say, I suppose, Hanukkah is one of the most well-known festivals, not because of its religious significance, but because it's celebrated so close to Christmas.

In fact, most people think that Hanukkah is a sort of Jewish Christmas because the Jews gather together, like many of us do around Christmas. We gather together. But the Jews, they have this eight-day feast where they exchange gifts with one another.

But, you know, the truth is, Hanukkah is about celebrating Jewish freedom. It's about dedication and commitment to the Lord. And Hanukkah begins every year on the 25th day of Kislev, which is the ninth month in the Jewish calendar.

And the Jewish calendar is quite different to our calendar, which is why the date moves all the time. But Hanukkah, it's known as the feast of dedication, which is what we just read there.

Or it's known as the festival of lights. But it's known as the feast of dedication because the word Hanukkah means rededication. But it's also referred to as the festival of lights because on each evening after the sunset, during the festival of Hanukkah, one candle is lit on this special lampstand.

[2 : 22] I'm sure you've probably seen it before. It's called a menorah. And it's got all these different candles on it. There's nine candles and eight of them are lit, one every night.

And the center candle, the middle candle, it's known as the helper candle. And that's always to stay lit. But Hanukkah, it's a feast of dedication because it's all about rededicating the temple in Jerusalem after the oppression of a foreign king.

And I say this because Hanukkah, it celebrates an event that took place 164 years before Jesus was born. So 164 BC.

And during that time, 164 BC, the Jews, they were under the power and oppression of a Syrian king called Antiochus IV. But in December of 164 BC, this small band of pious Jews who were called the Maccabees, you've probably heard of them, the Maccabees led this revolt against the Syrian army. And the Maccabees, they succeeded in driving the Syrian army out of Jerusalem and out of their nation. But when the Maccabees came to find the temple, when they came back into Jerusalem and found the temple, they saw that the temple had been defiled and it had been desecrated by the Syrians.

[3 : 39] And so the Maccabees, they cleansed the temple and then they rededicated the temple on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. But after rededicating the temple, they came to relighting the menorah that was inside the temple, this lampstand.

And when they came to lighting it, they couldn't find any of the candles. And so the Maccabees, they searched the entire temple for candles, but they couldn't find anything apart from this small jar of oil.

But that small jar of oil, they say that it miraculously burned for eight days without being replenished. And eventually, after eight days, they found more candles.

But from then on, because of this miraculous event, the Jews have observed this festival called Hanukkah. This eight-day festival that celebrates freedom from oppression and rededication to the Lord and to the temple.

And you know, that's the context into which John writes here in chapter 10. John is telling us what time of year it was and what was going on. He says in verse 22, at that time, the feast of dedication took place at Jerusalem.

[4 : 55] It was winter, it was December. And the Jews were walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. And you know, for John, he's very good at telling us what Jewish festival was being celebrated at that time.

So that, he tells us all this so that we'll understand what was going on in the mind of the Jews. And in this case, Hanukkah was about dedication and commitment to the Lord.

And you know, John, he's so clever in the way he writes his gospel. Because as he highlights the importance of being dedicated and committed to the Lord, all the time he's pointing us to Jesus. He's pointing us to Jesus and he's saying to us, that's who you are to be dedicated and committed to, the Lord Jesus Christ. But you know, for many of the Jews, as they gathered for Hanukkah and the feast of dedication, as they gathered together in the temple, and as we'll see here, for the Jews, there was confusion about the Christ.

There was confusion about who this Christ really is. And that's the first thing I want us to note. I want us to note that there was confusion about the Christ. Confusion about the Christ.

[6 : 08] Where they're gathering in the temple. We'll read again in verse 22. At that time, the feast of dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter. Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. And so as many of the Jews, including Jesus, as they gathered in the temple in Jerusalem, they all gathered to celebrate Hanukkah.

They gathered to worship the Lord. They gathered to light one of the candles on the menorah and enjoy the feast of dedication. They all gathered together to enjoy this feast together.

But for many of the Jews, because Hanukkah was about rededication and the renewal of worship, because Hanukkah was all about being dedicated and committed to the Lord, it often caused the Jews to think more about the arrival of the Messiah.

Because by restoring and rededicating and renewing the temple and its worship, many of the Jews started thinking about the arrival of the Christ and thinking, well, it must be imminent now.

[7 : 21] If the temple has been rededicated and the worship has been renewed, then the Christ cannot be far away. Which is why we see the Jews here, when they're walking in the temple, they start gathering around Jesus.

They start gathering around him. Now, when John says that they were Jews, he means that they were Jewish leaders. They were the Sanhedrin. They were the Pharisees.

They were the elders, the chief priests. They were the churchmen of the temple. And verse 24, it's very interesting because when it says they gathered around Jesus, it wasn't like an audience that was gathering to listen to Jesus preach.

No, they were encircling Jesus. They were ganging up on Jesus. They were trying to stop Jesus. They're surrounding Jesus in the temple and they're crowding around him so that he can't go any further.

And they don't want Jesus to go any further because they want to ask him their burning question. And the question the Jews ask Jesus is interesting because they ask, how long are you going to keep us in suspense?

[8 : 32] How long are you going to make us doubt? Literally, their question is, how long are you going to let our souls bother us? It's an interesting question, isn't it?

How long are you going to let our souls bother us? I wonder, does your soul bother you? It's a great question, isn't it?

How long are you going to let our souls bother us? Does your soul bother you? Do you have a concern for your soul? Do you ever think about your soul? Do you ever have a thought towards your never dying soul?

Do you ever wonder what Jesus says to us in the gospel when he says, what shall it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for a soul?

Does your soul bother you? My friend, I hope and pray it does. I hope and pray your soul bothers you because a dead soul to the gospel and a dead soul to the truth of Jesus is in a very dangerous position.

[9 : 43] How long are you going to let our souls bother us? That was the question the Jews were asking Jesus. But the question was then followed by this demand. If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.

If you are the Messiah that we should be waiting for and looking to, tell us plainly. Just explain it to us. And you know, even that statement, it's so interesting because the Jewish leaders, they were saying to Jesus, if you are the Christ, give us confidence that you are the Christ.

If you are the Christ, give us the assurance that you are who you say you are. If you are the Christ, just tell us plainly. Don't let us go on wondering who you are and questioning your authority and speaking against your miracles.

If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. And you know, there was confusion about the Christ. They came to Jesus and they're almost pleading with Jesus to tell him, tell him who he really is.

And you know, there was nothing new. Because for long enough, public opinion was divided over the identity of Jesus. You remember, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus and the disciples, they're walking together and Jesus turns to his disciples and he says to them, who do people say that I am?

[11 : 03] Jesus was asking, what does public opinion say about me? And of course, Jesus, he wasn't worried about what public opinion thought of him. He just wanted to know what people, who people thought he was.

Who do people say that I am? And the disciples answered Jesus. They say, well, some say that you're John the Baptist. Others say that you're Elijah. Some say you're Jeremiah.

But in any case, they're adamant that you're just one of the prophets. And the disciples, they say to Jesus, public opinion is divided over your identity. No one is really sure who you are.

No one is really sure about your identity. They don't really know who you are or why you've come or what you're about. But it was then that Jesus, you'll remember, he turned the conversation on its head and he made it very, very direct and very, very personal.

And Jesus asks his disciples, but who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And you'll remember that it's then that Peter steps forward and he identifies himself with Jesus and he confesses openly and publicly.

[12 : 15] He says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Who do you say that I am? You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. But you know, my unconverted friend, maybe for you today, you're not confused about the identity of Jesus.

You're not confused about the Christ because you know who Jesus is. You've heard about Jesus all your life. You know that he's the Son of God. You know that he's the Savior of sinners. You know that he came into the world to die upon a cross and he rose again the third day.

Maybe you're not confused about the Christ, but maybe your soul does bother you. Maybe your soul bothers you and your soul bothers you because you know that you're still not a Christian. Maybe you thought that by now, in the stage you're at in your life, that you would be a committed Christian. Maybe you thought that by now you would be following the Lord openly and publicly, committed to him and his cause, but somehow, along the way, you've not taken that step.

You've not made that commitment. You've not come out on the side of the Lord. And maybe you think you're too late. Let me tell you, whilst you're on mercy's ground, you are never too late.

[13 : 34] And I know that for many of you here, your soul bothers you because you know that you need to be saved.

You know that you need to wholeheartedly commit your life to the Lord. And it has to be wholehearted commitment. You know that. But for some of you here, your soul only bothers you on a Sunday morning.

You come to church only to be reminded that you're still lost. You're still without Christ. You're still without hope. And you hear it again and again. You acknowledge it.

You acknowledge the fact that nothing has changed since last Sunday, since you sat in the same seat. But you do nothing about it. And you do nothing simply because you don't see the need.

And you don't see the urgency. Your life is hanging by a thread. The Bible says that there is but one step between you and the great eternity.

[14 : 33] And you do nothing about it. You do nothing about it. You just let your soul continue to bother you and you do nothing about it. But you know the truth is, my friend, in your life, you have confusion about the Christ.

You have confusion about the Christ. And what you need, like these Jewish leaders needed, what you need is clarity from the Christ. You need clarity from the Christ about your condition. You need clarity from the Christ about your condition. And that's what we see secondly. We see clarity from the Christ. Look at what Jesus says.

It says, in verse 24, So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you and you do not believe.

The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me. But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. And so as the Jewish leaders, as they are all encircling Jesus, they have all ganged up on him, they have stopped him from going any further in the temple and they have all surrounded him.

[15 : 50] And they are asking their burning question, How long are you going to let our souls bother us? They are saying, If you are the Christ, just tell us plainly. If you are the Messiah that we should be waiting for, tell us.

If you are the Christ, give us confidence, give us assurance that you are the Savior of sinners. Do you know, as we said, the Jewish leaders, they are almost pleading with Jesus to tell them who he really is.

But you know, the truth is, my friend, they weren't genuine. They weren't genuine. The Jewish leaders, in their heart, they weren't really bothered about their soul.

They weren't really looking for confidence and assurance that Jesus is the Christ. They weren't really wondering who Jesus is and what he's all about. All the Jewish leaders wanted from Jesus was this confession that he is, that he is saying that he's the Christ so they could kill him.

And so for the Jewish leaders, their interest in Jesus, their questions about Jesus, it was all a front. It was all a facade. It was all about putting up appearances.

[17 : 02] There was nothing genuine in their interest in Jesus. There wasn't really a desire for dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ. And you know, that was the great irony about these Jewish leaders.

Because they had come to the temple. They'd come to the temple to celebrate this feast called Hanukkah. They came to partake in the feast of dedication. They'd all gather to celebrate this historical event in their Jewish calendar which speaks so clearly of their dedication and their commitment to the Lord.

And yet when they actually have the Lord stand before them, they let him pass by. They pass by a perfect opportunity to dedicate and commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And my friend, what we're seeing here is that they came to church. They came to the temple. They came to church but they passed by a perfect opportunity to dedicate and commit their life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And my unconverted friend, nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. Because like these Jewish leaders, I sometimes wonder if your questions about Jesus and your interest in Jesus, is it only superficial?

[18 : 29] I sometimes wonder if your attendance in church isn't there to dedicate and commit yourself to Jesus but it's just this religious form that you have and this religious facade that you hold on to where you're putting up appearances and having a form of godliness but denying its power.

And you know, there's no doubt about it. Your attendance in church it would seem to make me think that you love being in church. You're interested in the gospel. You're being drawn to Jesus.

But with your lack of commitment I sometimes wonder. I sometimes wonder if you're more like these Jewish leaders where you come to church. You're given this perfect opportunity to dedicate and commit yourself to the Lord.

God. But maybe in your heart you have no real interest. You don't have a genuine concern for your soul. You don't have an earnest desire to be saved and it has to be an earnest desire.

But truth be told it's not number one in your priorities. You know it should be. If you're honest with yourself you know it should be but it's not. And yet when you come to church you're given this perfect opportunity to make your dedication and commitment to Jesus Christ but you let it pass by. [19 : 50] You just let it pass by. And it's not an accident that it passes by. It's intentional. Because you hear the same message every week and you do nothing with it.

And like these Jewish leaders who came to church and they passed by this opportunity to dedicate and commit their life to the Lord Jesus Christ you're doing exactly the same.

You come to church. You sit in church. You read the Bible. You sing the Psalms. You hear about who Jesus is. What Jesus has done. What Jesus can do in and for you.

And then you go home. And you have to ask yourself has it made any difference? Has it caused you to seek the Lord? Has it caused you to repent of your sin?

Has it caused you to turn to Christ pleading for him to save you? Has it caused you to make a commitment to Jesus? My friend are you doing anything with what you're hearing?

[20 : 55] Are you doing anything with what you're hearing? Or are you just going to let all these opportunities of dedication and commitment just pass you by? Just pass you by.

And maybe let's be honest just for a moment. You've already decided in your mind and your heart that you're going to let today's perfect opportunity pass you by.

You've already decided that. You're going to let this opportunity pass you by like all the other ones. And why is that? Because like these Jewish leaders you do not believe.

You do not believe. And you might say to me yes I do believe. I do believe. You do not believe. Belief is a commitment.

It is not just an intellectual ascent. It is a movement. It is a commitment. And you know that's what Jesus says here. He says in verse 25 Jesus answered them I told you and you do not believe.

[22 : 09] The works that I do in my Father's name they bear witness about me. But you do not believe because you're not part of my flock. You do not believe he says.

And the thing is Jesus had told them. And my friend Jesus has told you. Jesus has told you that he's the son of God. Jesus has told you that he has the power to the kingdom of God.

Jesus has told you that unless you're born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus has told you about the urgent need to repent and believe. Jesus has told you that he alone has power on earth to forgive sins.

Jesus has told you that you need to believe in him because whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. but you do not believe.

You do not believe. But more than that more than that like these Jewish leaders who've witnessed in the Gospels the works that Jesus has done in the name of the Father.

[23 : 14] You've witnessed them all too. You've witnessed Jesus cast out demons. You've witnessed Jesus heal the sick make the lame walk the deaf to hear the blind give in their sight.

You've witnessed Jesus calm storms forgive sins raise the dead feed thousands of people. You've witnessed Jesus die upon a Roman cross and then see an empty tomb where he's risen on the third day.

You've witnessed it all. My friend in the Gospels you've witnessed all that Jesus has done in the name of his Father and yet you do not believe.

You do not believe. and why do you not believe? This is the point. Why do you not believe?

Because you still haven't claimed the Lord as your shepherd. You haven't dedicated and committed your life into the care of the good shepherd.

[24 : 19] and you know Jesus says about you you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My friend I've said it before and I'll say it again and I'll keep saying it until my dying breath you need commitment to the Christ.

You need commitment to the Christ. And that's the last thing I want us to see here. Commitment to the Christ. We've considered confusion about the Christ then there is clarity from the Christ but lastly there's a call to commitment to the Christ.

Commitment to the Christ. Jesus says in verse 27 My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

As Hanukkah and the Feast of Dedication gets underway Jesus and the Jewish leaders they're all discussing the importance of dedication and commitment to the Lord. But in these verses Jesus

explains what it means to be committed and dedicated to the Lord as your shepherd. He says My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. Now this metaphor of the sheep and the shepherd it follows on from what Jesus said earlier in the chapter of chapter 10. [25 : 51] Jesus declared in verse 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And then again in verse 14 Jesus says I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

But you know what we have to understand about these statements in verses 11 and 14 what we have to understand is that these statements were actually said two months earlier. Jesus had claimed to be the good shepherd at the Feast of Tabernacles which is in October. But this statement that Jesus says in verse 27 and 28 it was said at the Feast of Dedication in December. But John he brings both these statements into one chapter or one area in scripture. He brings them together so that we will understand that Jesus is Lord over his people and that he alone is the shepherd of his flock. And what John wants to highlight to us is that this Jesus he is so unlike any of the other shepherds that Israel has ever known because he's such a good shepherd that he's willing to lay down his life for the sheep. But you know as the Jewish leaders as they question Jesus at the Feast of Dedication and they're questioning about the importance of dedication and commitment to the Lord Jesus says as the Lord he says to them as the good shepherd my sheep hear my voice. [27 : 25] and I know them and they follow me and I give to them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. And with this Jesus says that being part of the flock of God it's not about having a superficial facade of religion it's about having a personal relationship with a good shepherd.

It's about being dedicated and committed to the Lord as your shepherd. and this personal relationship this dedication and commitment that Jesus requires from us it's emphasized because Jesus says my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. Jesus says that being dedicated and committed to me it's not a pretend religion it's a personal relationship. relationship. It's a relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. And you know the beautiful thing about a personal relationship with a good shepherd is that Jesus says about his sheep my sheep are purchased. They are my sheep. As every shepherd knows you can only call a sheep my sheep if you have paid the price for it. And that's what Jesus did.

[28 : 50] The good shepherd gave his life we're told for the sheep. The good shepherd went to the auction mart of Calvary to bid for his sheep to buy them back.

And when we trust in this good shepherd we can say that we have been redeemed we've been bought back he's paid the price not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but by his own precious blood. And so Jesus says about his sheep my sheep are purchased but more than that he says here to us my sheep are protected. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. My friend when you're dedicated and committed to having the Lord as your shepherd when you have a personal relationship with a good shepherd you will respond to the voice of the shepherd. And that's always the test of a shepherd. My sheep hear my voice. You will respond to the voice of Jesus. You will respond to the invitation when he calls you to come and repent and believe. [29 : 57] And you know the wonderful thing is that the purpose of listening to the voice of the good shepherd is that it's for your own good. It's for your own good. It's for your protection. Because as you know as we see all the time sheep are the most helpless and harmless of animals and yet they're dependent upon their shepherd.

They depend upon the shepherd to protect them and to feed them and to guide them and to keep them. But it's by listening and responding to the voice of the good shepherd that his sheep are called away from all the dangers of the world and they're called to live within the boundaries that the shepherd says.

It's by the voice of the good shepherd that the sheep are reminded that their shepherd is still with them. He's still by their side that he'll never leave them. He'll never forsake them. Why? Because he knows them and he knows you.

This is the wonderful thing. He knows you so intimately, so personally, individually and lovingly. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

But Jesus, he not only says my sheep are purchased and my sheep are protected, he says my sheep are privileged. My sheep are privileged. My friend, Jesus says to us here that when you're dedicated and committed to the Lord as your shepherd, and you have this personal relationship with a good shepherd, he says you are purchased by Jesus, you're protected by Jesus, and you're privileged because of Jesus.

[31 : 34] And you're privileged, you're privileged, he says. It's not only the gift of eternal life, it's not only the promise, as Jesus says, that you'll never perish.

Your privilege, it's not even that nothing or no one is able to pluck you or separate you from the shepherd. My friend, your privilege, your privilege when you trust in this good shepherd, when you're dedicated and committed to him, your privilege is that he is dedicated and committed to you, dedicated and committed to you.

And you know, this is what the Jews heard at the Feast of Dedication, that when you dedicate yourself to the good shepherd, the good shepherd dedicates and commits himself to you.

And you know, that's what David discovered in Psalm 23. When David confessed, the Lord is my shepherd, when he said he is mine, when David dedicated and committed himself to the good shepherd, he discovered that the shepherd had dedicated and committed himself to David.

That's why David could say, I shall not want, because the shepherd has dedicated himself to me. I lack nothing. I have the green pastures, I have the still waters, I have the promise that he's with me, even through the valley of the shadow of death.

[33 : 11] He anoints my head with oil, my cup, it overflows. But more than that, goodness and mercy, all my life. The goodness and mercy of the good shepherd, they will follow me all the days of my life, until at last.

he will bring me to his own house, where I dwell there forevermore. My friend, this is what the shepherd is promising to us.

This is what Hanukkah is all about. That's what Jesus made it about. The feast of dedication. Because it was at the feast of dedication that confusion about the Christ met with clarity from the Christ.

Christ. And it all became a call to commitment to the Christ. And that's the call that we're being issued with today. That's the call that you're being issued with today.

The call to come and make a commitment to the Christ. Because when you're dedicated and committed to having the Lord as your shepherd, when you have this personal relationship with a good shepherd, Jesus says about you, my sheep are purchased.

[34 : 23] my sheep are protected. My sheep are privileged. You know, my friend, I urge you today, I urge you today to earnestly ask the Lord to be your shepherd.

Ask the Lord to be your shepherd. And when you have asked him, do as David did. Confess him. Confess him as your shepherd.

Say to the Lord, make me your shepherd. Make me your sheep. Be my shepherd. And when you've asked him, confess the Lord is my shepherd.

And when you do that, you will have the promise that goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me and in God's house forever more.

my dwelling place shall be. You make this good shepherd your shepherd. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

[35 : 33] Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we marvel at how good the good shepherd is. That he is so good to those who do not even realize how good he is.

and we pray that each and every one of us would see this good shepherd as one who laid down his life for the sheep. That he says to us in the gospel, my sheep hear my voice.

And Lord, that we would hear his voice today. That we would respond in obedience. That we would respond by following after him and confessing that he is our shepherd.

Lord, we thank thee, Lord, for the shepherd and what he does and what he continues to do for us. That he promises us goodness and mercy to follow us all the days of our life.

Bless us then, we pray. Keep our eyes firmly fixed upon the shepherd and keep our ears firmly listening to him. Keep us then, Lord, we ask. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously.

[36 : 36] For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter, page 229. Most of you probably won't need your psalm book to sing this psalm.

You know the words of by heart. But it's one thing knowing the words of the shepherd psalm. It's another thing altogether knowing the shepherd of the shepherd psalm.

And you know it's good for us to confess the Lord is our shepherd. The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want. He makes me down to lie. In pastures green he leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again. And me to walk doth make. Within the paths of righteousness. e'en for his own name's sake. We'll sing the whole psalm to God's praise.

[37 : 45] Amen. Amen. The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want.

He makes me down to ride. shlong Bethany zung parulek My glory doth restore again, and heed to what doth make Within the hearts of righteousness, in all His own name's sake

Yea, though I walk in death's dark veils, yet will I fear none ill For thou art with me on thy rod, and staff me come for sale My table thou hast furnished, and present so my foes My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows

Roodness and mercy all my life Shall surely follow me And in God's house forevermore My dwelling place shall be The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.