

I like brownies. Anyone else here a brownie fan? How many of you guys are inside brownies? You know what I mean? The inside brownies.

You're an inside brownie. How many of you guys are edge brownies? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. You like them all. Edge brownies, you know, they make those pans where they're like zigzaggy, and you.

And you pour the brownie and they're. Everything's edge. Everything's edge. Well, we took that theme and we applied it to the seats. So here's what we've done with the seats.

We have increased the edges so that people who love to sit on the edge. How many of you guys are like, I want to sit on the end. I do not like being stuck in the middle. How many of you guys, when you order a plain seat, you go, you know where I want to sit? I want to sit in A, B, C, D, E, F. I want to sit in G. 23G is where I want to sit.

How many of you guys are 23G people? No, we all hate the middle seats. We all hate. That's death, taxes, and a hatred of the middle seats. If Benjamin Franklin knew that, he would have added that to the list.

That is certain. Certain. So what we've done is we've added some extra edge seats. How many of you guys care that much? Okay, well, get over it.

So you need just. You just need to get over it. Here's. Here's the reality. We're going to try it for a while, because what happens, no one sits in the middle, and then we have a bunch of empty seats, and we end up just stacking extra seats at the back.

And so we're going to see if we can't reduce the extra seats we have to add so that everyone gets to sit on a green, cushy seat if they want one. Yeah. Look at us. Look at us. We're doing our best, aren't we?

Yeah. Thank you. Hey, this past summer, through the summer months, if you've been with us, you know that we've been talking about how the gospel, the good news of Jesus changes our lives. And we've talked about, and we're very specific, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, the life, eternal life he promised. It's not just for the hereafter.

Someday in the future, we'll get there, and then we'll get to experience all the good things that Jesus promised. No. Jesus says the kingdom of God is near. In fact, some places he says the kingdom of God is here, which means that we can experience not just in the hereafter, but in the right now. And this changes everything.

We've talked this week, this month, about how it changes our relationships and our connections with each other. Andy Fish came and

spoke on that. We talked about how it changes our approach to guilt. How when we live in the kingdom of God, it affects how we. How we understand and manage shame and guilt.

We don't. We turn it over to Jesus. And it affects how we experience peace. When we are living in the kingdom of God, peace becomes not just something we strive for, but something we can claim because we're in Jesus. We talk through how we do that.

Now we're starting a new series, but it's sort of a continuation of the old series. We're calling it Block Party for reasons that will become clear later on. But we're shifting because that ministry, that good news of the kingdom and where Jesus begins to impact people's lives in the here and now, that ministry, that messaging began not with crowds of thousands. Those would come, those would come. But his ministry began in very small, unassuming towns, unassuming places, unassuming people, unassuming homes.

And this is where we're really going to dive into because all of us have a place that we call ours. Because Jesus does his best work with people who simply make room for him and for others. So when we open our homes to others, ordinary spaces and we've all got those can become places where people encounter the healing presence of Jesus. So as we work through the next several weeks, I want you guys to begin praying about how your home can become a place where people find Jesus. Let's pray once more, Heavenly Father, what a beautiful name it is.

There's healing, there's hope, there's power, and there's freedom in that name. And that name is the name that we are now known by. We are little Christians. We are. We are little Christ.

We are Christians. So we claim that name. We get the benefit, the blessing, the honor of introducing people to you as we do that. We do that in the places that we inhabit. And I think that's for a very good reason.

So instruct us from your word this morning, in Jesus name, Amen. Now I heard some little babies crying. I love the sound of babies crying. I mean, as long as it's not my baby, I don't care. Let that baby cry.

I don't know whose baby it is. Just let it cry. Let it. Just let it delight. What's the baby's name?

Cooper. Cooper. We're so glad you are with us in the service this morning. Can everyone say, hey, Cooper? Yeah, Cooper, you're one of us Now, Listen, as long as it's not one of those boys sitting back at the back table, I'm thrilled.

It was about almost four years ago now where I sold my house, and I

was looking for a new place. I saw this place online, and I called my realtor. I said, come and meet me here. Meet me here. Well, she says, I can meet you there in about 45 minutes.

Well, 45 minutes might as well have been 12 years to me. I said, no, I can't wait. I'm gonna go on up. I'll meet you there. So I go there and I walk up onto this house with this front porch.

The place I've been living had no front porch, had no back porch. If I wanted to experience the outdoors, I had to go out on the sidewalk and watch semi trucks drive by. It was not an ideal outdoor living experience. So I walked up on the porch and I walk around like I don't even care. I don't even care what the inside looks like.

I just love this front porch. Now, how many of you guys have been on my front porch? It's not that much to look at. It is not like you've seen the Hallmark movies of the front porches. It is not a Hallmark front porch.

It's not a Walton front porch. It's just a place where you step onto before you go inside. And it's big enough to put some chairs around, and it's got a solid roof to provide some shade and the in the heat and protection during a storm like we had last night, which is the best way to experience a storm on my front porch. Sorry, if you don't have my front porch, you're missing out because it's an amazing place. Now, I like to look around and see it all nice and organized because that's the kind of guy I am.

But I guarantee you, if you came by this afternoon, because this is how it looked this morning. In fact, we've got a picture of it that was yesterday. Okay, double the chaos and then double it again. And that's what it looked like when I walked off the porch this morning. There was some socks, there were some shoes.

I think there was some underwear because the shower. The shower last night became a shower for the boys. Literally, two of them brought their shampoo and hair out and stood in the front yard and took a shower. So if you drove by, you would have gotten an eye full. Now they were in underwear.

It was. It was not totally. I do want to run for public office someday, so we got to keep it. We got to keep some control there. But I love my front porch.

But it is a. It's. It can just get a little crazy at times. But. But that's all right.

There's usually a bike being worked on. There's a sweatshirt. There's shoes, there's fishing pole stuff. There's a Nerf gun right now that's sort of broken into three pieces. I don't know how that happened, but

it's all there.

It's all there. There's some plants that I really try to keep going, but the squirrels love them, too. And there's dirt. Every morning, there's dirt where the squirrels have gotten in there, but we try. And there's a trash bag where we try to get the trash in the trash bag to at least keep it.

What I would call tidy chaos. Anyone familiar with tidy chaos in your home? Tidy chaos. That's. That's what we aspire to.

But I'm telling you what, it didn't even matter, because in the mornings when it's cool, you take a cup of coffee out there and it's quiet, and you just sit there on the front porch. You just enjoy the peace. Or last night, you enjoy the storm rolling in. It's beautiful in the wintertime when there's a fresh blanket of snow again, hot coffee. Go out there in your little slippers, and you're bundled up, and you sit there and you just watch the snow and it's quiet.

It's an amazing. I'm not the only one who enjoys it. Yesterday, Shawna came by and came by for a little bit. My friends Nick and Nate came by for a little bit. We had a ton of kids on the front porch.

I welcomed a wide array of people on my front porch. Neighbors, friends, church people who've come over for lemonade. Remember those days when I had porch night and when you came over for porch night? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Our Saturday morning men's group.

Sometimes, if the weather is exactly to Ron Thompson's liking, we will sit on the front porch. Otherwise, we go into the ac. There's always these random kids that show up on my front porch. Kids I've probably seen a dozen times. But they grow up, you know, and they don't look the same.

And you're like, now, who are you? And they're like, I met you 20 times. Like, well, okay. Well, okay. I think I remember now.

The last time I met you. So you get the boys, you meet their friends for the first time there. You ask them questions to ascertain whether you fully trust them or not. And then after a few minutes you go, yeah, yeah, they're. They're good kids or they're just kids.

They're just kids and they need a place to belong, just like I need a place to belong and you need a place to belong. And my porch welcomes them on. I love my porch, but here's what I really like about my porch. It's not my porch, it's what happens on my porch. That, that's what I love.

Because Jesus shows up in the conversations and the moments and the shared confidences and watching these kids grow up together and learn

to, and learn to negotiate and learn to argue and discuss politely without using words like that we don't like to use. I love that. I love seeing maturity happen on my front porch. And I thought about my porch when I was reading through the scriptures for this morning because this is a church, so we will open the Bible at some point in time. I was preparing for this week's sermon.

And the scripture is from Luke 4, 38, 40. And, and, and when I was reading about Simon Peter's mother in law. Is anyone familiar with Simon Peter's mother in law? I know you. None of you met her personally.

Well, I mean, maybe Steve did. You. You raised your hand. So he's. He remembers.

She was a sweet lady, wasn't she?

Now we don't know Peter's mother in law's name. I like to call her Omah because that's like a, like a Yiddish name for grandma. So I call her Omah. But here's how Luke describes this scenario. Verse 38 of chapter 4 of Luke, Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon.

Now, Simon's mother in law was suffering from a high fever and they asked Jesus to help her. And so he bent over her and rebuked the fever and it left her. And she got up at once and began to wait on them. At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sicknesses. And laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Now Luke tells us this happened on the Sabbath. So Jesus has been asked to teach in the synagogue. So, so he's opened the scrolls and he's taught from the Old Testament. He's taught amazing things that people have listened and been inspired. But after that, something incredible happens.

Jesus walks out of the synagogue and there's a crowd of people. And if you Read Luke's account, you'll see this. There's a crowd of people there, the sick, the lame, the deaf, the blind. They all want something from Jesus. They all want to.

They all want a prayer, they all want a word. They all want comfort. They all want something from him. And he spends the time and does that. He stays there with them the entire time until the crowd is cleared out, till everyone's been addressed and healed or whatever.

But then Peter's like, okay, my mother in law lives close. My house. She lives at my house. It's close. Let's go there.

Put your feet up, Jesus. My mother in law will fix us a great little meal. Something. She's always got a little something cooking. We'll

have a little bite to eat, we'll rest up, we'll relax, and we'll just spend the rest of the Sabbath just chilling.

I love a Saturday nap. And I just picture Jesus going, that sounds great, actually. That sounds great. Let's do that. So, so they, they, they get back to Peter's house, and when they get there, Peter's mother in law, Oma Omah, the one who would otherwise be on the front porch saying, get in here, get in here.

Do you want lemonade? You want iced tea? You want to make some coffee? What do you want? She's not there.

She's not there. It's quiet. They go in the house, the screen door, hello. And Peter's wife comes out. Shh, shh.

Omah is very sick. She's very sick. She's in bed. She's burning up with fever. So what does Jesus do?

Jesus does what Jesus does. He goes into a room. And I picture Omah in that state of high fever, somewhat delusional, but aware enough that some. Someone has come into her room. But she's not in any condition to respond or welcome in any way.

She's there, weak and probably embarrassed to be seen in her bed where she's never in bed. She's always up and doing something. So she's a little bit embarrassed. She's vulnerable. She opens her eyes wide enough just to see this strange man walking toward her.

And he puts his hand on her and he says something that she can barely understand. The scriptures describe it as rebuking the fever. And there's probably a sermon there, but I'm not going to go into that. But somehow, some way she realizes, she comes to the understanding, she comes to consciousness and goes, I am. I feel great.

I feel great. And as soon as she realizes that, she sits up, she runs her fingers through her hair. Can you picture doing that? Getting her hair back in place somehow, so it looks somewhat, somewhat structured. She shoos them out of the room.

She pulls her apron on and she goes into the kitchen and prepares to serve her son in law, Peter, and this friend that he's brought home with him. I don't know what she fixed. Maybe it was fried potatoes and brown beans and cornbread and fresh garden tomatoes. Mmm, smells good, doesn't it? Maybe it's just bread and cheese.

Maybe it was brownies, some coffee. But she had no idea what she was doing. She just knew it was good to do. She had no idea that three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke would tell her story again in their gospel accounts. She had no idea that Ms. Anna and Ms. Ori would teach little Timmy Thompson and little Joby Jarrels about Peter's

mother in law in Sunday school.

She had no idea that the food that she was preparing was feeding the very bread of life. She just knew that, hey, I can cook food. I'm going to cook food and feed these amazing people that are part of my life. She knew it was right to serve others the way Jesus served her. And the Sabbath is winding down, the sun is setting, and they're sitting around the table and she's smiling, sort of embarrassed because they're bragging on her cooking, because you know, it's got to be good with a name like Oma, you know, she knows how to cook.

They're bragging on her. She's smiling, smiling. And as she's inside experiencing hope and healing and connection, her hospitality is laying the groundwork for others to find healing, hope and connection right out on her front porch where Steve was. Yeah, because at sunset when the Sabbath was officially over, it started up again. The crowds, the lame, the deaf, the blind, says the demon possessed.

Those who needed a touch from Jesus, who needed Jesus, began to gather where they knew Jesus could be found.

And they gathered on her front porch and filled that up. Then they spilled out onto her front yard and filled that up. And then they're out on 15th street, stopping traffic out there, and she goes out on the porch and just looks in awe and amazement at how Jesus is doing for others, what Jesus did for her. And I don't know, I can't get into her mind right now, even though I feel like I've done a pretty good job so far. But I can't help but imagine that she's thinking, who, who is this man with the power to heal me and then heal others who am I that he would choose my humble house, my front porch, to change the lives of other people so they could find healing too.

We have a saying here that we live like God owns everything. And we mostly mean when we say that we use it. When we talk about our offering, we put our tithes and offerings in the plate and we say we live like God owns everything. Meaning that we know our financial resources can be used by God to do amazing things. Not just here in our circles, in our neighborhoods, in our towns and communities, but all over the world.

But Peter's mother in law reminds me that my home is also a resource that God wants to use. For many of us, homes are the places where we get away from the world. Anyone identify with that. We try to keep the crazy out is what we're trying to do. And so we barricade ourselves in our homes.

And there are some places where you might need to do that.

But I don't think this was Oma's way of thinking. In fact, I picture a little bit like my Grandma Norma when I was a kid, if my mom and dad

were just demanding completely unreasonable things from me, like mowing the yard and making my bed and cleaning up my room, I would run away. I was a runner. I was one of those kids that I probably had a leash on me when I was 3 years old and I probably should still have one on me. I was a runner.

And where I would run to would be my Grandma Norma's, where I knew I'd be welcome and protected and loved.

Grandma would fix me a big plate of brown beans and cornbread maybe, or a bologna sandwich. Man, we thrived on bologna sandwiches when I was a kid. And Kool Aid. Kool Aid. Do people still drink Kool Aid now?

There's a whole generation of Kool Aid kids. We know our Kool Aid. But it wasn't just me who wanted to live there with her forever. I had some cousins who would have given their right arm to be living at Grandma's house. And it wasn't just the cousins and me, it was everyone.

Everyone was welcome. Sunday afternoons at Grandma's house was just chaos. So many people, people from church, people from the neighborhood, family and friends came over. When I had friends from all over the world where I'd lived or traveled and met. And they would come visit me here in Indiana.

One of my greatest joys was to take them to meet my Grandma Norma. She was the one really that I wanted them to see. And even when she was too frail to do much more than just wave us into the kitchen. There's coffee, there's persimmon pudding, there's Rice Krispie treats, there's brownies, or there's store bought cookies. I mean, some days it's store bought cookies.

You know what I mean? Store bought cookies. She'd wave us in and there's always coffee that's been brewing probably, probably for too long. But man, Sunday afternoons you need a good strong cup of coffee to keep you awake. You would go in there and you couldn't help but feel like you had come into your family home.

There was nothing fancy about my Grandma Norma's house. Nothing. Every Sunday afternoon. It was definitely too small for the people that were there. And yet Grandma knew something that I think Omaha knows and something I'm learning about my own front porch is that the God of the universe doesn't just show up in palatial and perfect houses with snowy white carpet.

Remember my snowy white carpet that used to be where dinner is served on fine china and long elegant candles? No, no. I mean, he shows up there, but he mostly shows up where things are a little messy and crazy, where the best you're going to get is probably a really strong cup of coffee and tidy chaos. But he shows up where we are willing to

welcome people and love them right where they are and right where we are. And that's where hope and healing and connection happen.

Now, I pray that you've had someone in your life who was that for you? Someone with a front porch. Someone who was an Oma or someone who was a Grandma Norma to you. But if you didn't, I pray that you will be that someone to someone else. Because we all need that.

And here's the truth. We all have front porches. Now none of you have one like mine. You can't have it. I'm sorry.

It's mine. It's mine. But we all have those places, those spaces in our lives, in our areas where we can invite people in. Maybe it's your backyard, maybe it's your deck. Maybe it's your family room or your breakfast bar, the kitchen table.

Maybe it's your living room or your family room. Sometimes it's the garage. And the garage door is raised up and you got a few of those plastic lawn chairs laying around with a cooler between them and a fan going on in the corner with the little streamy things going. Remember those in Sears? So streamy things, it's not a fan unless they're streamy things.

So if you have one, you don't have streamies get them today. You need Streamys. Those spaces become wonderful places where Jesus meets with people. Places where we invite people to come into our lives a little bit deeper and experience healing, hope and connection right alongside us. Because we're also learning to grow in hope and healing and connection together with Jesus.

Sometimes there's been people on my front porch that I know. The neighbors are going, who is that? Does he know who that person is? Does he know that kid? Sometimes the neighbors may raise their eyebrows a little bit at the company that's hanging out in your front porch or in your garage.

And you know what? That's all right. They raise their eyes at Jesus too. They can raise their eyes at you. That means that carpets will get dirty, glasses will get broke.

That's all right. That's all right. You can vacuum the carpet, you can buy new glasses. It means that the bikes and the books and the piles of shoes and underwear and jackets and coffee cups are just evidence that life is happening in this place and in this space. And you are welcome to come in and enjoy it and live it with us and Jesus.

Because the sick, the strays and the weird and the wounded and the wild, your home and opening your life up to them can be the difference between them knowing about Jesus a little bit and meeting Jesus.

There's a author, Ronnie Rock, and she writes this about Peter's mother in law. She says, Peter's mother in law is a beautiful picture of take, bless, break and give, where Jesus extends his life his hand to offer life. And she rose in gratitude and offered up the good her hands already knew to do. Did you pay attention to that phrase? She offered up what her hands already knew the good to do.

And bread and wine became a life giving feast worthy of the greatest love stories.

What do your hands know to do? What can you offer? A cooler full of a cold beverage. I don't even care what it is, just a cold beverage for someone in your garage. I tell you, I make pretty good country time lemonade.

I'm probably the expert on that around here. And my coffee either goes really strong or sort of weak, but you know what? It's always hot, so I'm pretty good at that too. But those are the things that my hands can offer. And in the offering, those things become bread and wine where people meet Jesus.

Transforming your home into a place where people meet Jesus is not about performance. It's not about perfection. It's simply about sharing his love through simple but genuine hospitality, compassionate relationships, and everyday grace. And it means making your front Porch, or whatever, your space is a welcoming, safe place where others can experience the peace and the truth of the Gospel. So this week, here's our challenge.

This week, invite someone onto your porch, whatever your porch is. A garage, a kitchen table, a backyard, a couple of lawn chairs in the driveway. But invite them in, give them a little something to snack on, and then talk about your lives together. Talk about their lives, listen to them, share a little about your life, let them hear some of your stuff, and then pray with them. And that's all it has to be.

Here's the deal.

The wounded, weird, wild people that show up that Jesus brings to us on our porch, we cannot fix them. We're not Jesus. We cannot fix them, but we can. We can provide a place where they meet the One who can. And that's what.

That's what this week is all about. As we share communion. This morning, we've been talking about porches and kitchen tables and ordinary places where people are welcomed and healed. But communion reminds us that before we ever opened our front porch, before we ever opened our front door to anyone else, Jesus has already opened his life to us. And he took the ordinary things, the bread and the cup, and he makes them instruments of extraordinary grace in our lives.

A bread that's broken for us, a cup that's poured for us. And he says, come to the table and eat. You who are weary, you who are weak, you who are wounded, you who are wasted. Come, come. Sinners and strays, anyone hungry for mercy, come.

Today as you come to the table, you don't have to worry if your house is absolutely immaculate. None of us come to this table pristine, do we? We come washed. Washed by Jesus.

Your house may be a little bit crazy right now. Your life may be pretty untidy, and your faith may feel like it's just all over the place. Nothing's organized about it. But Jesus welcomes us and he meets us here with healing, hope and connection. And having been welcomed by him, then we are sent to welcome others in his name.

I want you to do something with me this morning.

You're going to receive the cup and you're going to receive the bread. But before you take it, I want you to turn to the person beside you or behind you or in front of you, and just say these simple words. The body of Christ broken for you.

The blood of Christ poured out for you. Can we try that? The body of Christ broken for you. The blood of Christ poured out for you. And you just share that with someone before you take it yourself.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for meeting us in the places and spaces where the wounded and the weary, the strays, hang out. Because that was us. And you open your life to us. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

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