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00:00

It's my privilege this morning to introduce Landon Saunders, who has been the voice of heartbeat for over 30 years and in this work, heartbeat guess if I could describe the central theme of this work, it's meant to communicate to the world, the passionate love of God in an authentic way. And he has a unique way of making that presence real through the gift that he has. And a personal note would say about Landon. And you know, sometimes they'll ask you the question, well, who in your life has impacted you. And he would be in the top five over the last 33 years, his life and the way he lives his life has led me to discover the joy of living every day, to the fullest. No matter what happens. That's a difference. joy of living life. to the fullest every day, no matter what happens. Landon, we're delighted to have you, thank you for coming to join us.

01:44

Thank you very much. It's first time it's ever happened in a church of Christ.

01:52

Someone asked me where I was going to be this weekend, and I told him I was going to the hills. They said I hope you get some good rest. I'm really delighted to be with you this morning. And for lots of reasons. One of which is my great nephew attends here and Bart. And I think he may not be good this morning. He may be with his grandmother. But I love Barth. And so it gives me a little extra special feeling and closeness to you this morning to know that BART comes here, and that you nurture his life and encourage him and edify him to be the man that he wants to be. And I think he is one of the best. So if you haven't met Bart, why one of these days look him up and give him a pat on the shoulder. On the airplane, as I landed, I heard a conversation just behind me. And a woman said to a stranger that she was meeting and who asked if this was home and

03:21

so forth. She said yes. She said I have just a few more days. And then I'm going to be home and try to find my life again.

03:41

To which the man replied, I had a life once about 20 years ago. The passage that's before us this morning, if we if we could think of what one of the great, greatest questions that we could ask that we would like to have an answer to. That question upon reflection might be how can I know that I'm really living? What is real life? And for those who are among us who are 15 What is real life? It's different from just breathing. Jesus makes that clear. But if it's different from breathing, what is it? And where can I find it? To those of you who are rearing children greatest thing you could know is what is real life. What is human In life? And what is it about this existence as a human being, between birth and grave? What is it that makes one fully a human being fully a creation of God, a fulfilled individual, what is it and to know that clearly, and to be certain that my daughters and my son knows that above everything else, that somehow that would make soccer better, and piano lessons better, and it was make schoolwork better, and it was make dating better. And it was make the the coming into the recognition of what my own life is about in my own sexuality, and my own thinking and my own actions. If I could just know clearly what life is, then I would give that gift to my children. It's all we have. And if I, as approaching one who is beginning to age a bit, someone said, when I came in, oh, I didn't hadn't noticed your gray hair before. And I said to them, I'm just thankful I have a little bit left to get gray. But as an aging person, entering the sunset years of life, oh, deliver me from the pain of coming to the last day. And wondering if I really have lived? And so one of the greatest questions revolves around what is it to live. And throughout this entire time, we've been singing and praying about the bread of life that comes down from heaven. And it suggests that, that all those things that we call life might indeed not be real life. And yet, I must find my life in each one of those things. I somehow don't have the liberty to suspend going to work every morning. I don't have the liberty to suspend paying taxes, I don't have the liberty to suspend buying clothes and providing shelter. I don't have those liberties. And so the woman says, I want to get back to life. What what's what's going on in this interim? Surely when Jesus says I am the bread of life, if you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you. But if you eat my flesh and drink my blood, then you have life. And you and I will raise you up in the last day. What is that? That's so often life just moves along, like the processionary, Caterpillar processionary caterpillar, noted by a great entomologist, who watched them as they just went one after the other. And they would just go and follow in a procession, one after the other. And he was intrigued by that. And so we got a big urn, and he coaxed the processionary caterpillars up on the rim of that urn, thinking that they would go around and around. And indeed they did one head following the tail of the next one around and around and around that lip of that urn. They went around and around, and one hour passed, and they were still going around and around. And two hours passed, and they were still going around and around and three hours became four hours. And he kept thinking, surely, they will do something else. But no, they just kept going round and round. And he puts a little food down here thinking, well, I'll coax them sort of down off this around and around. But no, the little caterpillars went around and around day one ended and they were still going became day two and day three and day four. And they kept going round and round until they died. And each morning you and I get up out of our bed. And we go to the bathroom and we get ready. And we go on our own. We start our little journey. And we go to work and we do that and we're going round and round. And we meet the same people every day. And we go around and around. And then we come back that evening and we might stop off on our way and get a few groceries and we come back and watch a little television and we get back in that same bed And then we get up the next morning. And we begin that little procession again. And we go around and around and come back and get to that bed. And we do that over and over and over and over again. It looks like we could get that right, doesn't it? And then one day, we die. So how, how in the midst of that procession, how do we live? How can I most extract from this experience life itself? The complication of the text arises at this point. Because after Jesus feeds the 5000, asking the disciples, Where can we get bread, saying this to test them? And they said, why six months wages wouldn't feed this crowd. But Jesus knew what he would do. And he moves along. And finally, somebody has a suggestion. They

said, Well, there's a boy here that has five barley loaves, and fishes. And so Jesus says, Bring him and he starts, and he feeds, the 5000. And people are quite amazed at that. And then quickly, the people because of the signs that they saw, they immediately went and wanted to make him king. And he disappeared from their site. And then the next thing, they're in a boat, and the waves are raging, and they look and suddenly, it's this Jesus who had taken these loaves and had scattered them, and they just kept going until they fed the whole crowd and the fishes. And they were terrified. And Jesus said, Don't be afraid. It's just me. And then there comes this discourse about I am the bread which comes down from heaven. And it's suggested to them their minds went back to their fathers, who had manna in the wilderness. And Jesus said, Yes, but they died. They ate that man and died. But I am the bread, the living bread come down from heaven. And if you eat me, you won't die. And yet we do. And then comes the difficult passage, read at the passing of the bread and the fruit of the vine this morning that we ate, in which Jesus says, when they in response to the question, how can this man give us his flesh? I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no wife, and those who eat my flesh and drink my blood, have eternal life. And I will raise them up on the last day for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. What does that mean? No wonder a little later, the disciples came to him and said, This is difficult. That's the understatement of the year. Certainly, it's not an advocacy of cannibalism. The disciples that this teaching is different, is difficult, who can accept it?

13:37

And Jesus says, Well, let me clear it up for you when you say the Son of Man is sending some clarification. But even that is not the issue before us this morning.

13:50

Here's the issue. Jesus looks at those who had been with him. And it's almost like he says to them, you're with me when I'm feeding you with Loaves and Fishes. And you'd be with me forever.

14:15

When I come down to what is the real crux of the matter, the real essence. When I get down to what I am really about, then do you understand that I must ask you, my closest friends will do to go away. And we remember that this passage occurs two generations after Jesus's live some 60 years later, after he's died. The group is sitting there And it's the church. It's like Woodmont, hills may be in at 90. And they're removed. And they've heard the stories of Christ. And they've worship dislike we worship. And yes, there was someone, John, who thought, These people still must understand and see this gospel. And so this gospel is written to the church. This gospel is written to those who are on the inside, not on those on the outside. And in the midst of that we have this difficult saying, in which Jesus is saying, If you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood, and people find it difficult, and many go back and walk no more with Him. And He says to them, now, I must say to you, my closest friends, my brothers, and my sisters, those who have pledged their life for me, I must ask you, and you must tear it, Will you also go away? The great issue in our society, and as I think, over months, and years, and would invite you to think over the months, and the years of your own lives, and all the human intersections that you've made, that we must somehow enter the prisoner and, and sit with the one who is on death row, and we must hear this question to us. Will you also go away? Our answer has all to do with the hope that that prisoner on death row as if we miss it, the prisoner will be missed. And

the little child in your city who gets up every day in fear, great fear, because it was born into a family that didn't know how to love to a father into a mother who didn't know how to love and instead of love, it bears in his little body, deep gashes and marks where it's been whipped, or hid. And Jesus says to us, the hope of the child, will you hear me? Or will you go away the essence and to the one who may be in our midst who's going through the divorce, and feel that calamity that collapse, that the airplanes of September 11 have flown suddenly into your life, and the towers of your life have collapsed.

17:54

And whether we here in a group like this, a fellowship of faith believers, people who have been taken to a new level, who have entered a higher plane, people who know that the things of the world are not what they appear, people who have learned that all the places that people look for life, they look in vain, that life must be found another way that life somehow is to be found on in a different sphere. And for those who might be going through that tragedy, the question comes to this group, will you go away as the boy who is 14 years old, who somehow swirl has become so call it whatever you will.

18:46

That he gets his weapon and puts it in his backpack and goes to the school and opens fire and with his classmates dead and bleeding, and the policeman break in and they find him over in the corner boys restroom. And when they call out, the plaintive voice says it's just me. It's just me. And this powerful question comes to a group like this, gathered this Sunday morning

19:32

that says, Will you go away it's one thing for Texas legislators to say. Let's lower the age for capital punishment. So we can put to death. That boy

19:52

I understand. But it's something else. When a group of people like this cares Enough about the boy to find out what in the world went wrong? Because you see, what went wrong with that boy is part of our culture. And if I know what went wrong with him, it will help me to know what I should do with my son. It's such a different, it's such a different kind of thing. Will you go away? And to have Jesus to look out over an audience like this where where we come and where we are the worshipers, we're the followers of Jesus, but it is to us he asked it is not to the 14 year old boy that he says, Will you go away? It is it is not to the child that's abuse that he asked, Will you go away? It is not to the prisoner on death row that he asked, Will you go away? That somehow the great disturbance is that he would there? What is it that makes them have to come to us who sang and who pray? And who worship? What is it about this Jesus and the life that he offers that makes him have to come to us over and over 60 years later, 2000 years later, and ask us, Will you also go away? What is it? What might we miss? It's one thing to show up here on Sunday morning. That's easy. But Jesus asked, Will you make me into some kind of political figure that somehow makes religion, something that you invoke when you need to justify some action? He has to ask us, when he asked us, will you go away? Will you take this this radical revolutionary idea of what it means to be a human being? And will you bring and

make it over? Will you make me over into just a white seven? Or will you take this something in which I come down from heaven, and I go to a cross and I stretch my limbs and I bleed and die? Will you make me into some sort of religious radical, some sort of fanatic. I am in your hands. What you do with me is what the world will know. You will make good the life that I've lived or it will be in vain. And you must understand that sometimes the most comfortable place to be can be in church. So we asked of the church, will you go away? Will you leave? Will you make me into something that are not? Will you use me to justify your end? Will you make of my church simply a place to do networking? Will you make of my church simply a place where I can enjoy a greater social have more friends? Or will you let me be alive in my church? When I say to you, if you love those who love you? what reward have you? Will you go away? When I say to you, love your enemies, those who persecute you? Will you go away? When I say when you're reviled and abused, revile not again, will you go away? When I announced and give you the great gift and Triple H of forgiveness, a progressive forgiveness that knows no bounds. That is over and over 70 times seven Will you go away? When I asked you that the way to where your religion is not to be seen of men. Will you go away? When I asked you to pray and to go into your closet, where nobody can see and nobody knows they're to pour out your soul

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to God. Will you opt for Public Religion? Will you go away? When I asked you not to lord it over those who are inferior,

24:40

lesser Will you go away? When I asked you to do good to those that spitefully use you and persecute you where you go away I wish we could take the question and take it out of our myths. Jesus once said, You come to me, and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. And yet, Jesus you, you tell us that it's that your yoke is easy and your burden is light. And yet, you make things harder. We know about divorce with us come along and tell us that even if we look at a woman to lust after her that were guilty of adultery, this is easy. How can you tell us it's easy, when you say we know about murder. But you come along and say, if you're angry with a brother, that you're guilty of murder, how can that be easier Jesus?

26:03

Will you go away. And the only way to record silence, the only way for us to come home to Jesus,

26:17

again, and again, to be lifted up out of our worlds Sunday by Sunday, to have the narrowness of our hearts challenge, Sunday by Sunday, not to hurt us. But the openness to the greatness of what it means to be a human being like Christ. To awaken us again and again, to somehow challenge us against getting too easy and too comfortable. And particularly, and somehow insulating us from recognizing the September elevens that go on in the lives of the people who are neighbors and the people at work. And people across town that we come together like this. And we asked Will you go away? Will you go away? The resolution is it would be hard. We're it not for the new heart that He gives us. The new heart that is no longer hard hearted. The new heart that is no longer heavy

hearted. But Jesus, that the life that he described, indeed, is a radical view of what it means to be a human being. What it means to go to work, what it means to live beside those and work beside those who are our neighbors. A whole new way of thinking about what it means to be a human being and to love a wife. A whole new way of thinking about what it means to be a human being and love the husband, a whole new way of being a human being to love a son, and to love her daughter a whole new way away that has and it says her forgiveness over and over of each other and by God so that instead of wrongs piling up on us and making our hearts heavy, washed in the blood of the lamb forgiven every hour and every moment where we are free always to grow and to become bigger and better. So that our hearts extend to all of those that we described earlier, whether it's an abused child or someone going through a divorce or somebody on death row, or whatever it is that today, this people called upon to be a special people. Not special in the sense of being more divine than everybody else. But special in the sense of being more human, maybe than others have discovered. And then this, we find this bread that comes down from heaven. And so this morning, the question comes to the church. Will you go away? And Peter comes back and says, Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life. You are the Holy One. Jesus became flesh So that flesh could become the living word. All says you are our pistols written in our hearts known and bred of all men. And so this morning, as we as a church, we can hear the question, Will you go away? We can understand what the question means. And we will say, one by one, beginning on one side of an auditorium moving through the center to the other side, we will come back in full awareness of what we're saying, and say, Lord, we will not go away. We believe that you are the Holy One sent from God, because we all say it to get together, Lord, we believe that you are the Holy One, sent from God, and we will stand and we will be there. And so with that all the citizens of your city can be saved. I like to end with just this. It's easy to send money to New York City. But if we sent billions of dollars, it will not have changed the nation. But if it causes us to see the same tragedy in our own community, our own neighborhood and our own city. And if we become involved with the tragedies in our own city, in the same way that we are moved to become involved with those who have suffered such loss in more distant places, then it will be a positive answer to the question. No, we didn't go away. You have the words of eternal life. Let all the church say amen.