

971206 The Christian & Warfare HLH Con Prk CA

Even though most of our young people are out of earshot, I do appreciate the remarkable zeal of a larger than expected group.

I hadn't realized how many young people are contributing to our congregation when we're looking as a whole and don't see them as a unit.

Sometimes we only count one here, one there.

As a proofreader and editor, I would like to make at least three corrections on our services for today.

My first name is spelled wrong twice.

There is a Mount Hermann in the Lebanon.

But the meaning of that is quite different from the German personal name Hermann.

I was named after my uncle, and that is spelled with an A, having the sense of M-A-N as in English.

Warfare is Lord, Sir, and M-A-N or Man is man or a group and army.

Then the next line after the subject of the sermon, it says the Christian and warfare, I should like to suggest that warfare is one word.

I do this because sometimes little mistakes creep in, you know, I can type and make mistakes too.

But we want to be sure that what we see is not the new standard, because we're here and not to alter Webster.

We are here to be careful how we type things, how we express ourselves.

I wanted to say especially the peoples of Austria over time have contributed a great deal to the music of Europe as far as the heartland of the continent, perhaps worldwide the most remarkable contribution in terms of music that has spread has come out of Spain because that music has gone to all of Latin America, from Argentina north to Colorado and further north, depending on where people of Spanish cultural history are.

But without any question, the musical contribution of Austrians has been far above the numbers of people in the country.

I suggested when I was asked to present a topic today, since our pastor would not be able to be here, I felt it advisable that we take some time and address the question of the Christian and warfare, and in a sense, even though our young people are not here directly to listen, I hope that parents here will exercise responsibility in thinking the subject through carefully.

I would like to give a little background with respect to the history of this century and Christians in the church, for that matter, the last century.

In terms of our own fellowship, this work of the church is simply one of the phases of the work of the Churches of God that came to be formed in the early 1860s, in fact, by the second year of the American Civil War.

The congregations had assembled together in terms of general cooperation.

The church had already been developing from the 1850s in a direction different from Seventh Day Adventists, First Day Adventists, or other groups, all of which were called out at one time or another, beginning around 1831 to 1845 by William Miller, who died in 1849.

William Miller called many people from different groups to think about the return of Jesus Christ in an age that had essentially begun to look in other ways at the world around us.

The 19th century, the 1800s, is an age in which things seemed to be getting better and better with the Industrial Revolution.

America was being reached in a way that had not been before by the contacts of Europeans, some of whom by the time of William Miller had declared slavery a very great error.

The British were among the first to stop modern slavery.

It was a gigantic struggle within Britain, but they did it without a civil war.

Not that the question of slavery was the immediate cause of the civil war in this country.

And when the people that were called out began to look in the Bible, they had a message that in fact had dried up in the mainstream of Christianity, whether Catholicism or Protestantism.

The ultimate judgment to come was known, but in terms of why Jesus Christ should return and what the world tomorrow might be like, that was a question that had essentially disappeared.

As the world seemed to be getting better, more prosperous, as we were reaching to the nations of Africa and Asia in a way that many of them had lost contact since earlier centuries or Islamic influence, we necessarily came to the very serious problem in this country of the question of the continuity of slavery and of the rights of the states to make decisions.

And this led, of course, to a dividing of the country, the confederation of the South, the Confederate states, and the federal states of the North, the federation.

The confederation implies the states had a much looser union.

War broke out in 1861, Fort Sumter in South Carolina, and in 1862 the churches of God were faced with the question of participation in war.

It was their conclusion that they would petition the government of Abraham Lincoln to be permitted the right of conscientious objection to war, as it is understood in the historic church.

You may not know, but books have been, of course, written.

Some of these have been written by Mennonites, some by Methodists, but from the beginning of Christianity, the Christian world did not enter in to the armies of the Roman Empire until the end of the third century.

They simply functioned as conscientious objectors.

The end of the third century is the end of the two hundreds, so that at the beginning of the fourth century, or around 300, we began to see Christians in the Roman army for the first time, and the whole of Christianity took an entirely new view after approximately two and three-quarter centuries, at least two and a half centuries.

And now we have, of course, a history of Christianity and warfare from the days of Constantine to the present, but the Mennonites and other groups of that cultural environment in Germanic Europe from

Holland, Northern Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, took the same view under Pastor Mennon and also Pastor Hutter, after whom the Hutterites are named, and the churches of God's seventh day also took this view in the last century and were granted such permission.

The same was granted in World War I, and in terms of our own fellowship in World War II, along with the churches of God's seventh day.

There was, of course, the need, as this work grew, to know how to handle matters in the Republic of South Africa, in Rhodesia, where, in some of these areas, conscientious objection was not legally permitted and indeed in East Germany.

But we had members in East Germany who were granted such permission beyond any rational conclusion that you might have drawn from the policies of the communist government of the German Democratic Republic.

I'm not here to tell the whole story, but I do want to at least say that during a period of time of World War II, I cannot say anything with respect to the church of God because I did not know there was a church of God until 1947 when I came to Ambassador College.

I've heard of the broadcast, the Radio Church of God, the ministry that came out of Eugene Oregon, but in the Korean War.

I was quite familiar because I was not of age at the time World War II was occurring, essentially only missed it by months, but at the Korean War, I was my younger brother, who was never a member of the Church of God, but a person of his own religious convictions was also a conscientious objector, but since he was not a part of a group, when he was asked to cross the line and did not, they threw him in jail, and for 30 days in prison, he was simply forgotten about. None of us had any idea, nobody had any plans and ever thought of anybody being a conscientious objector, and there were no real provisions at that time for what we might call community service. Only after the Korean War did this happen, so he was sentenced to two years in prison, and of course coming out, he had to deal with the question of being a felon because he was a conscientious objector, but I would like to explain how some of our men and women handle matters. In Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, there was no question you had to go into the military service in one way or another, and we worked out arrangements where our young people could in fact be responsible, shall we say, for the police protection of villages and towns rather than in the army itself. Our men who were in that capacity, of course, were required to have weapons, but the most important one was to be sure you prayed about it, so there would be no conflict in the village while it was their duty, and happily all of our people were responsible in young people of military age during the time of the Civil War in Rhodesia Zimbabwe. 1951 might be quite different in prison life in 1991, but my brother was in the prison yard when two fellows got into a fight.

He, by nature, had a certain presence of mind. He simply walked over to them and said, no more than, break it up, fellows, and they stopped.

In other words, sometimes you can solve problems without also getting into the fight, and how you handle it and your presence of mind and your personal presence would be very important.

I was privileged not to be responsible for counseling people on this topic specifically, but I was in any meeting when there was a general discussion that Herbert W. Armstrong called, and a number of us were there, so I'm quite familiar with all of the discussion. I'm familiar, of course, with the Friends Church and all the literature they have published since the days of William Penn. That's available, and

we had to know about it. The Church of God Seventh Day circulated that material in the 1930s, going back, of course, to World War I.

So it is possible to say I have some understanding of what it means to be a conscientious objector.

So let me explain that I had, as a responsibility, certainly by the 1960s, and I think it went back to the 50s. Later 1950s and 1960s, the FBI came to Pasadena every time any young person made any request for conscientious objection. This was a requirement of the government, of the federal government of the United States, to come to our church headquarters and to inquire of our knowledge of said person. We were given warning in advance, warning in the proper sense, that they were coming so that we would have information, and since we all met at one festival, in most cases, I was familiar with every person in the church coming of military age at that time.

You know we had a festival site only in 1961, elsewhere than in Big Sandy.

So I was privileged to meet the gentleman who represented the FBI. He was the most common caller to our office, and we discussed questions about the person. I want to mention something that I think is very important for your understanding. The churches of God have never taken the position that we are pacifists. We are conscientious objectors.

Now there are people who do not know the difference. Some people who cannot imagine there is a difference, because they never have understood what it means to be a pacifist, as distinct from a conscientious subjector. So I think you should be aware of that distinction. I don't necessarily want to dwell on that at the moment. I have reasons, because this topic is a much larger one. A book could be written on this subject that we are thinking about briefly. But since this was youth day, I felt it important for us to realize that it won't be long that many of our young men will be coming of military age. In an age when things are still voluntary, you can do what you wish.

You can volunteer. But we don't know how long this stage may continue. From the days of President Nixon until now, it has been comparatively quiet. That is some 20 plus, just a little over 20 years.

It will soon be a quarter century. What will happen in the next century as it unfolds may be quite a different matter. In any case, I would like you to be equipped in terms of children or grandchildren to explain some things in the Bible, because the reading of the Bible clearly is not the story of people who are pacifists. But we do have evidence of conscientious objection.

And that is most important in terms of the clarification. So I would like to go back to the early part of the Bible. You are familiar with the story of Cain and Abel.

There we have a man who murdered his brother. We do not know the background of the immediate cause.

Was it premeditated? Was it a fit of anger? Was one lying in wait, presumably not? The other seems to have known of his presence. But Abel was slain by Cain by one means or another.

Now, what is the consequence? Why was Cain sentenced to an experience quite different from capital punishment, certainly not prison? I want you to ask yourself a question.

How this act was developed, you should be familiar with the penalty, and I won't turn to it at the moment, but in contrast to what was said after the flood, when God said to Noah and his sons and their wives, by man shall man's blood be shed. It may even be required at the hands of animals, beasts as penalties, little beasts that spread disease or big ones that pounce on you and kill you.

Why was it that we read after the flood, by man shall man's blood be shed? No specific further statement regarding government. But Cain did not have to have his blood shed. Let me ask you when the statement is made at the close of the flood, by man shall man's blood be shed? By man, meaning when a person is a murderer, there is the requirement of a death penalty if that was premeditated. Then later in the Law of Moses, you have that clarified in detail. That is, there can be accidents that are not premeditated. The axe head that flies off and hits somebody in the head and that person is dead. Murder is a capital offense in biblical law, but I want you to notice under what circumstances. There are certain circumstances set out clearly.

It is under human jurisdiction. When God said that man shall shed man's blood, he was saying, I no longer am intervening in the affairs of the world directly as I did in the days of Cain and Abel. Now, what is this unusual distinction? First, all people who have looked at the question recognize that the punishment of evil doers in human society is in one sense or another administered by responsible authority. When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, in the letter to the Romans, he addresses the question, let everyone be subject to the higher powers. And in this case, I do not take the incorrect explanation of Jehovah's Witnesses. If I'll be blunt, if you have ever read it, it is simply erroneous. They say the higher powers are those who are in the Jehovah's Witness movement. This is talking about civil government. This is not talking about anything else. Now, to be subject to is quite different from to obey. That is, the church has taught consistently that if we are subject to government and our conscience or the Bible revelation forbids us to do certain things or requires us to do certain things, then if human government takes another point of view, we must be willing to be subject to the consequences that follow. We are not asked to obey that which the Bible forbids us to do or cease to do what the Bible requires when we are free people. So in this sense, the church is a church that emphasizes a distinction between conscientious objection, which I have yet to define, and pacifism, which means you take no role whatsoever and recognize that no government has such a right even to exercise such a role as warfare. So we cannot be pacifists by that definition in the same way we make a major distinction between the requirement, let's say, of the German government under the National Socialist Labor Party, where you were expected to obey orders. It wasn't a question of submitting and paying the penalty. Everyone was ordered to obey.

The church does not take that view, and Paul did not take that view when he wrote to the Romans chapter 13. We are to be subject to the higher powers and obey what they ask within the sense of subjection so that when you recognize there is a conflict, you must be willing to be obedient to the consequences of the penalty. If you have to go to prison, you go to prison.

If you go to work service, you do that. But before the flood in the human family, you notice something interesting that hasn't been happening for most of the rest of human history.

It did for a period of time when the biblical record was written, but the Creator, the Lord, talked with Abel and talked with Cain. He was then, if you please, the judge.

He was the judge. He was making known that government was his. After Cain was the murderer of Abel, the Lord asked him about his brother. Where is he? The answer, of course, betrays his attitude. Now, I want you to note the most unusual situation.

God did not say that Adam and Eve should stone Cain who had just killed Abel.

You would have been asking an irrational question of parents. It would have made no sense.

And you will note that as God ministers justice, he chose not at that time to execute the penalty.

It's very important. And he sentenced Cain to consequences that would make him realize what he had done. And he had to live with this problem as a marked man.

Now, this was the direct government of God. God had not said at this time, I am turning this responsibility over to human authority. And this is what is overlooked.

When we come to events after the flood account, some 16 and a half centuries later, we are in an entirely different situation. We are in an age in which human governments and authority will rest on human shoulders. And we do not find that God talked to the children, the grandchildren, and the great grandchildren for a long time after the flood, as he did to Cain and Abel.

In other words, he spoke, interestingly, at least in the early stages of the human race.

He spoke and appeared and exercised authority. And in exercising authority, when Jesus of Nazareth appeared, Jesus said, judge righteous judgment.

And in God's mind, the best thing for Cain was not to die on the spot. The best thing for him was to live with the consequences of what he's done. A marked man in his generation, the first one whose crime, not merely sin, whose crime is recorded.

Imagine coming up ultimately in the resurrection where everybody reads about you. It's there.

So God did not say in his judgment that every act of murder, which may involve what we would call temporary anger without necessarily premeditation. You understand? Because some people murder others in a fit of anger without ever having intended to.

So God examined clearly the state of mind of Cain. And he is not looking at the letter of the law.

Here, he's looking at what is good for the victim, and that family, and what is good for the perpetrator of a crime.

After the flood, God did not intervene. And we have early on the person who took revenge.

And later on, we have tribal government, and then we have royal governments, usually in the form of city-states. But after a certain time, there isn't any question that in human government, there is the necessity of the execution of penalties for theft, for adultery, for murder, lying. Any of the basic offenses, and many others, of course, are included. So Romans tells us that God established government since his government is not functioning directly over the nations of the world today, or over the empires of the past. In so doing, even the judges are asked to judge righteous judgment.

And when it came to the story at Sinai, there was a written code explaining what the way of life should be, and when you violate it, what the penalties are.

You do not attempt to kill a man who was trying to steal bread.

He who deliberately does that premeditated is himself a murderer. Stealing bread, if you were hungry, did not deserve that kind of penalty. Now, all sin brings death.

But in the human government structure, not all sin should bring death, and never did, in the law of Moses. Is that clear? Sin spiritually brings the death penalty.

Christ paid for that. But in society, we are asked to judge righteous judgment, to distinguish between that which is capital offense and that which is not. When I speak of we, I'm not talking of the church here, I'm just speaking of humanity in general.

And the reason I'm going into this is it's related, the situation in the court, is related to the military. You cannot imagine at the beginning that the human family needed to have soldiers, but when the human family divides and grows and begins to organize itself, occupy areas, and with the human family cut off from God as a whole during the pre-flood world, human beings needed to devise and so devised means of protection.

And in a world that was filled with violence, that's all we know about it, but I will now move to the next stage, you find, for example, a remarkable story in Genesis 14, verse 14, where Abraham armed young men. Now, what is significant is that in this world, listen carefully, Paul said that though our spiritual weapons of warfare, or the Christian warfare, requires a spiritual battle, we do not as Christians today representing the kingdom of God, not yet established over the nations. Listen carefully to what I say, I didn't say the kingdom has never been here, but it is not established over the nations. And therefore, there has to be a recognition of authority, and if we want protection, Paul appealed to the emperor.

He had a right to appeal to human government. Abraham was a prince, Abraham was a patriarch, there was no higher authority among humans over him in the area in which he lived, in which case the government was on his shoulders. Am I making it clear? The government of Rome was not on Paul's shoulders. The government in the area in which Abraham lived was on his shoulders, and therefore, Jesus said, if my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight.

Because by the nature of human beings, and the nature of the devil, and the nature of fallen angels, and the nature of nations, of religions, of people who are trading, there can be no expectation that everybody treats everyone else honorably and loves one's neighbor as oneself. Abraham had no higher authority. He was a prince who made agreements here and there, as nations make agreements, in a sense he was his own ambassador in that patriarchal world.

And in that sense, he had to protect the people who were under him.

Abraham was not a pacifist. There came a time, there was a church that was a nation, Israel.

You know the story of the book of Judges, you know the story of David. Now the king over Israel was the Lord, but he was not visible to the nations. He was not visible even to Israel, but David and others knew, the prophets did, many people recognized the Lord as king.

But the bulk of them, in the days of Saul, wanted another king than the Lord.

Now, in that case, there was no nation having higher authority.

Saul was the highest authority. David was the highest authority. Solomon was the highest authority.

Therefore, if God called you to be a king, as he called David to sit on the throne of Israel, and in this world we are asked to administer government for the security of people, David had the responsibility, as Moses did for the children of Israel in the wilderness, to have an army. As Jesus said, if my government were a part of this world, he was no pacifist, he said my servants would have to fight to protect ourselves, or to defend our neighbors. I will go so far if they appeal to you for help.

Take the case of Joshua and the Gibeonites. That's a good story. The Gibeonites, you know, fooled the Israelites, said they were from the distance, they made an agreement and turned out they were their Canaanite neighbors, and then all the other Canaanites sought to pounce on them, but they had made an agreement, so they came to their aid. Now, you must understand then that in the case of Cain, God was the highest authority actually functioning.

After the flood, God turns the responsibility over to the head of families, to the head of cities, and in the days of the patriarchs is also the kings, the highest authority is the person at the highest level of human government. That person had a responsibility to God, but that was a spiritual matter. Some people knew, some did not. There came a time when the Assyrians dominated, then the Babylonians. Zedekiah was not the highest authority.

Nebuchadnezzar was the highest authority. Now, Daniel and your friends, I would like you to know, you young men, that I brought you over here. I, Nebuchadnezzar, you're my servants.

You know the function of a servant? I tell him what to do.

You're not a free man. You're free to advise me when I want advice. You're free to do, as I say, you must make up your mind, but you will do what I say.

You see, Daniel was not free to say, I don't want to have authority.

Is that clear? We do not ask to sit in jury duties, in jury duty, whether a grand jury or a local jury, we don't ask to. The church leaves it free for you to decide today.

We have some people whom God has called who are judges, as in Vanuatu, one of the Isles of the Caribbean, I forget which. We have people who are called in the military, people who were called in the police force. Now you have to recognize that there came a time when somebody said to Jesus, I want you to discuss with my brother and me the fact that he's not fair in trying to take the inheritance from me. Jesus said, who made me a judge over you? My judgment, that time is coming later, not now. He refused that responsibility. He represented the coming kingdom of God.

David represented the kingdom of God as manifest in the physical nation.

So I want you to see those big distinctions that I cannot remember anybody actually looking at it from this perspective in all my years in the church. Now if you remember a sermon on that, that's wonderful, but I don't think anybody has actually taken notice of this perspective.

In this age, human governments have a responsibility.

They will give an account, said Paul. We now have weapons of a spiritual nature.

The church says today, you are free to make a decision if you want to be in the judicial system, if you want to be on jury duty, if you want to be in the military.

It is your choice. Now you want to take note of what the consequences of your choices are.

If you are a judge, you have to know what to do. You have to know what the law of the land is.

I was an expert witness, that's the technical term. It doesn't mean I was an expert, but I was an expert witness in a child custody case. The lawyer for the woman in the church, her husband was not a church member, they had a boy and a girl.

The lawyer for the woman was an honest man, not the brightest lawyer I have talked to.

The lawyer for the gentleman differed on both points.

He wanted to get me into trouble with the judge, who was a Roman Catholic, who was said he was, and the community knew he was. And the judge posed a question, which I said I would answer.

Our lawyer said that that was really not related to the case.

He wanted me not to answer, and the judge said, but I would like to know anyway, what this, what is it, the Worldwide Church of God, yeah. What is it that you believe? The lawyer asked, can this judge become a member of your church? And still, sit on the bench. Does he have to give up this job to become a member of your church? See, that gets me in trouble with him. If I say yes, he'll have to do that.

Well, I mean, at this point, the lawyer fell into my hands and didn't know it. He dug a pit.

I said, judge so and so, good Italian name. If in all good conscience, he can administer the laws of the state of California and obey the laws of God, in this office, he does not have to set aside his judicial robes.

It was so obvious. I hadn't thought about it before. That was just one of those things.

Now who had to give the answer? The judge, could he? And the lawyer switched the question right away.

Because then the next thing is either the judge had to answer, or the lawyer had to get him to answer, whether he could do so, in all good conscience. So when you think of being a judge, when you think of sitting on the jury, when you think of being in the army and you bring up the question of hate. If you cannot hate your neighbor, and he who even hates his neighbor is a murderer and has no eternal life in him, ask yourself whether you can truly serve in that capacity. Even David had to analyze this question of what perfect hatred was.

It wasn't easy for David to be king. It isn't easy to be a judge in this day, or even a policeman.

So it is significant that when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire, described in Daniel, passed to the Persians, the Jews made special requests.

Now I have the antiquities, I will stop with this because I think this is a good ending.

At the close of the Persian period, what was it like to be a Jew, subject to first the Babylonians, then the Persians, and now the Greeks? Well, it happened that in this day, when Alexander 331 came, he was angered by the Jewish stance, as it had been told him by the Samaritans, who often were enemies of the Jews. And so the Jews came to an unusual situation.

They needed God's protection, and they prayed, and as a nation, Alexander was coming to punish the city, and the Jewish high priest had a dream.

And the dream of the high priest was that he should go out in his robes. He was the highest official. There was no higher official in Judah under the Persians. He had told Alexander earlier by a message that he had given his oath, and would not break it with Darius, because he had given his oath, not to rebel. And Alexander said, nobody gives oaths to anybody but me.

And in this set of circumstances, all the people were asked to dress up, and all the priests, so they dressed in white. The priests in their royal garb opened the city gates of Jerusalem, and decorated it, and went out to meet Alexander, because God had told them that's what to do in the dream to the high priest. And when it happened that Alexander saw, he bowed to the high priest instead of putting him to the sword. And his companion said, what are you doing? And Alexander said, I am not bowing to the man in front of me, but to the God who has chosen him for this office, for I saw him in a dream when I was yet in Macedonia. And he told me that I was destined to conquer the Persian Empire, and that God would see that he did.

And so Alexander asked the Jews, if you please the church, what is it that I may do for you? And the remarkable thing, they asked, please allow us to obey the laws of our God, with respect to taxation in the sabbatical year, with respect to the Sabbath, with respect to the festivals, with respect to collecting money for all of the things that are mentioned.

And also that if there are any who wish to enter the army, that you would grant any Jew who does, enter the army permission to keep the same. And Alexander gave them an oath that he would do so.

Then later, the remarkable thing is that the Romans found the Jews sending them ambassadors after the Greek world had broken up. And they asked to be friends of the Romans. And as a result of appealing to the Romans to recognize that they wanted friendship with the Romans, not hostility, as Rome was moving into the Eastern Mediterranean, the Romans granted, I'll just read the statement here, that the Jews may be allowed to observe their Sabbaths and other sacred rites according to the laws of their forefathers, and that they may be under no command because they are our friends to serve in the army. The Jews were absolved from serving in the Roman army.

A remarkable thing. They asked not to serve, and they were granted this because they had the wisdom to become friends of Rome at first, rather than to have resisted them and been forced into that situation. One place here, I have dismissed those Jews who are Roman citizens and who appear to me to have their religious rights, and to observe the laws of the Jews at Ephesus on account of the superstition they are under. They are not to serve in the army.

They were permitted in that sense, conscientious objection.

Christians were a sect of the Jews, and also, as a sect of the Jews, were able to have the same right in the apostolic and first century. How long that continued depended on how the Romans viewed it. Now, in conclusion, when I read the Bible, I recognize that when there is authority on shoulders of people in human government, you have to exercise it rightly or step aside.

And if God has called you to that position as Daniel was, or David was, then you have to learn how to do it. David said, shall I do battle? Joshua said, what shall we do? And the angel would answer, or the lights on the breastplate of the high priest would answer so that David knew what to do.

The church today, in principle, represents a kingdom that is not of this world.

It grants you permission today, officially, to make your own decisions on these matters.

I would, however, caution you as to what it would be like to be trained in the Marines, to hate the enemy, what it is like to have to be a policeman, what it is like to be a judge, what it is like to have to make decisions on jury duty. And as you judge, should you choose to, so you will be judged. A conscientious objector in terms of warfare is one who recognizes the right of the state to go to war, who recognizes that a pacifist is wrong, who says God should not have said, my man shall man's blood be shed. But we represent a distinct kingdom that is to bring peace to the world, at which time when the government of God rules over the nations, they shall not learn war anymore. Mr. Herrera, would you close in prayer today? And while you were coming up, I will just mention something.

You may not know the story of the Herrera family in Mexico, but for the faith, one of their ancestors was burned at the stake for his religious convictions.

Our father in heaven, a great creator and sustainer, the king of the universe. Thank you, father, so much for the freedom that we have at this time during this age to assemble freely, to hear your word, to fellowship with one another, people of like mind. Thank you for the preservation of your

holy word, father, for the lessons that we can learn from history, from the experience of your church throughout the last century and the past centuries.

And thank you, father, so much for your holy spirit that enables us to understand your will and your purpose and enables us to obey you and serve you. We ask that you would dismiss us with your blessing, that you guide and protect us during this coming week and bring us again safely in the next Sabbath. We give you thanks for everything, father, in Jesus Christ's holy and righteous name. Amen.