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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Good morning. I've had the opportunity to meet many of you by now, but for those whom I haven't met yet, my name is Sam. I'm a seminarian at Sewanee along with Alane and Riley, but Thankful isn't my field education site like it is for them; Thankful is my home. Beginning this year, I'll be discerning my call to ministry with Thankful and Mother Leyla. Since I started coming here last fall, Thankful has been a source of great comfort and joy for me, and it is truly a blessing to be discerning alongside you. Thank you for welcoming me with open arms and open hearts.

How many of us have lost our glasses or sunglasses only to realize that they're sitting on top of our head, or worse, already on our face? I've been wearing glasses for 23 years and have done it more times than I really care to admit. It's frustrating when that happens, and can bring a sense of helplessness. I *have* to wear glasses to see. I don't have much depth perception without them and run into walls and doors when I'm not wearing them, so it's unsettling and aggravating when I can't find them, and even more annoying when I realize that they're in my pocket or on my nose. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is also frustrated with the people around him. They can't see the glasses on their noses;

they can't see what's right in front of them: the Messiah, come to be the savior of them all. He says to them, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be a scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

How do you not know how to interpret the present time? From our perspective, they had all of the evidence right there in front of them. They had seen Christ performing miracles, doing wondrous things that only God could have done, and yet, they doubted. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, it feels obvious to us now in 2022, but living in that moment, the Israelites couldn't see the obvious. Or, could it be that maybe they didn't *want* to see it?

Time and again, Christ tells us that to follow him, to truly follow him, we have to give up everything and renounce our claim on the worldly in order to partake in that which is beyond the world. And such reorientation often causes disagreement - among the Israelites then and among Christ's followers in all times. Even today, it seems like the Church is always in disagreement about something: women's roles, LGBTQ marriage, healthcare, and even the Virgin Mary are topics we seem to disagree on more than we agree. As recently as the Lambeth Conference - that once-a-decade gathering of Episcopal and Anglican bishops from across the globe - that took place last week, we were faced with

tension caused by deep disagreement and it seemed like everyone was talking about it but nobody could agree on what to do.

How do we as followers of Christ reconcile our different beliefs when every side feels like it's on the "right" side of things? We feel these divisions deep in our bones and they seep into the marrow of who we are. It can be hard to hold one another in love when it feels like we are on the right side of things and they are not. But we are all one body united in the incarnation of the Word made flesh.

At the Lambeth Conference, rather than just deciding that, "I'm right, you're wrong," the Communion came together in dialogue, both in person at the conference and online. Nobody changed anyone else's mind, but we were able to hold one another in love because we knew that despite some pretty big differences in opinion, we are ultimately individual parts of the whole body of Christ.

When we stop seeing ourselves as all being a part of the body of Christ, that's when things begin to turn. We turn father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, and in doing so we turn away from God's will for us. We become the vineyard that yields wild grapes despite the best effort of the vineyard owner, becoming unfruitful and growing bitter and rough. "And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard," Isaiah writes, "I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down." What do we do when our hedges are

removed and our walls are trampled down? What would a vineyard owner do? They would rebuild in the hopes that next time, their harvest would yield grapes that are good for eating and useful for making wine. And so would we, because we are bound together by the waters of our baptism as the indivisible body of Christ.

When the stress of being a faithful follower of Christ becomes unbearable and division arises, we can stand firm in the assurance that in him we are a single living, breathing body, united in the baptism of his death and resurrection. That's not to say the body is always going to be perfect; how often do we trip over our own feet or stumble over words because our mouths are moving faster than our brains? The beauty of being part of the body of Christ is that even in the bumps and bruises, the stubbed toes and missing glasses, we are united in Christ and our baptism. Despite differing opinions on which translation of the Bible is the "best" or whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son or just the Father, at our core we are all followers of the same Christ who in his incarnation, death, and resurrection, unites us in him as a single, living, breathing body.

And so now, let us pray. Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.