

Exodus 4

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Preacher: Calum Jack

[0:00] Signs for Moses. So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake, and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

This, said the Lord, is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.

Then the Lord said, put your hand inside your cloak. Moses put his hand in his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous. It had become as white as snow.

Now put it back into your cloak, he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, if they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second.

But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.

[1:33] Moses said to the Lord, pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you've spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.

The Lord said to him, who gave humans beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind?

Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. But Moses said, pardon your servant, Lord.

Please send someone else. Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, what about your brother Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well.

He is already on his way to meet you and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth. I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.

[2:30] He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he was your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so that you can perform signs with it.

Then Moses went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and said to him, let me return to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive. Jethro said, go and I wish you well.

Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, go back to Egypt for all those who wanted to kill you are dead. So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt.

And he took the staff of God in his hand. The Lord said to Moses, when you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I've given you the power to do.

But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. They say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says. Israel is my firstborn son and I told you, let my son go so that he may worship me.

[3:37] But you refuse to let him go. So I will kill your firstborn son. At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him.

But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. Surely you're a bridegroom of blood to me, she said.

So the Lord let him alone. At the time she said, bridegroom of blood, referring to circumcision. The Lord said to Aaron, go into the wilderness to meet Moses.

So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say, and also about all the signs he had commanded him to perform.

Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed.

[4:37] When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped. I'm going to keep your Bibles open.

There's so much in this passage, and we're not going to be able to go into all the depths of it. Hopefully at community groups, we're kind of exploring some of the different avenues that are

there.

Those of you who know me know that I am a movie, action movie buff. I love action movies. I could spend many hours watching them. And of course, great action movies, some great lines from many of them.

Think of the final movie in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, The Return of the King. Argon is riding up and down on his horse, sort of stealing the men for a great battle against evil forces that was coming ahead.

And of course, he should use that great line. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day, and so on.

[5:45] I could go on and quote from Gladiator and many other great scenes and great quotes from these movies. But here's the thing.

There are moments, however, when the courage of men and women do fail, when our courage fails, when our faith fails, when we don't have the strength to do what is ahead of us.

And we're seeing something of that, aren't we, in these two chapters that we've been looking at last week and this week in the life of Moses. Our courage fails in those moments when maybe we need to speak up against an injustice that's in a workplace or around us.

We fail to speak up, we fail to have sort of faith and trust, maybe in those opportunities that Emily was praying about, just when we lack courage to share just in a gospel moment, we are conscious that actually I can maybe speak something about the faith here.

Maybe even just to say that I was in church yesterday or, you know, that I'm a Christian. Courage, you know, or strength or faith in the moment of moral choice, we give in to sin or to temptation, to our addictions.

[7:00] We struggle in the faith, we go weak-kneed, maybe in the face of a difficult diagnosis, even in the face of death itself, in the face of the curveballs that life can throw at us.

We struggle in courage and faith, you know, in fulfilling the commission that God has given to us, whether that's, you know, to go out onto the campus through the Christian Union or Navigators or Friends International.

In the Freshers' Week or in our Missions' Weeks, we sort of stumble in thinking about maybe obeying a call to go out to the teenagers of our community or onto the streets of Stirling at night or into the prisons or amongst the addicted, following a call of God to maybe go overseas or to serve them in a full-time way here in the UK, in some form of paid ministry position.

You know those moments, don't you? We've all had them. And here is a passage that allows God, by His Holy Spirit, to speak into our lives this morning.

So let's open our hearts to Him as we look through this. Because the beauty of the scriptures is that it does not present, you know, plaster-casts saints who get it right all the time.

[8:18] But it gives these warts and all accounts of the life of those who are putting their trust, you know, sort of falteringly in the Lord's. Of those who start from sometimes from fragile beginnings and how the Lord sort of sees them through, through the ups and downs, through to the finish line.

The Moses that we're seeing here in these early chapters in Exodus, very different from the Moses that we will see later. The book of Hebrews records in that great role of heroes of the faith, if you like, in Hebrews 12, where it speaks of the man of faith who left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger, persevered, you know, and trusting in the God who was invisible and yet very real and very near.

Last week we saw how God met with Moses in a powerful way, an incredible encounter, wasn't it? You know, there at the burning bush, take your sandals off, Moses.

The place that you are standing, it's holy ground. Just, you are so close in the presence of the Lord right now. Don't we envy him that encounter? I loved Phil's lines.

You know, the miracle was not so much that the bush was not consumed, but that Moses was not consumed in the presence of a holy God. And chapter three, verse 10, we saw God calling him to go to Pharaoh.

[9:45] And as he does that, God laid out exactly what's gonna happen. Here's what I'm asking you to do, and here's what's gonna happen. Chapter three, verse 16, go to the elders of Israel, tell them that I've heard their cry.

Verse 17, you know, in accord with the promise that I gave to Abraham, way back in Genesis 15, 13, that they would be in Egypt for 400 years, and there would be a time of trial, but I will lead them out into the promised lands.

And verse 18, in particular, take note of that he said, and they will listen to you. But, and he warns them that the hardship ahead, Pharaoh will not, he will need to be compelled.

And verse 20, that he wonders, and he will ultimately let you go. And of course, we have to give Moses a little bit of credit here. I mean, if, who, if, you know, you were called to speak to the, the sort of premier of the, the superpower of the time, would not go a bit weak at the knee at a call to do such thing.

Jonah had exactly the same issue, isn't he? Struggling to obey this huge command and call of God. And of course, Moses had the additional thing that he'd already been in Egypt.

[10:57] He'd already been part of Pharaoh's household and had previously had to flee for his life. That's why he was in Midian. But those years in Midian, they've, they've kind of humbled Moses, haven't they?

Gone is the impetuous and bold intervener of the youth that we saw in those earlier chapters who might have been, you know, had, if God had called them then, yeah, yeah, yeah, send me, send me.

But like he did in those times, would have possibly gone in his own strength and not in the strength of the Lord. And maybe the time in Midian then that meant that though Moses had come out of Egypt, time was needed for Egypt to come out of him.

And of course, Moses raises the objection, chapter three, verse 10, as we looked at last week. But Lord, who am I? And we might have resonated with that. And God responds, verse 12, Moses said, not so much who are you, it's who am I?

I am who I am. I am the all-sufficient God who is able to meet, sufficient to meet every need that you will face. And I, verse 12, that all-sufficient God, the God Almighty, I am with you.

[12:21] And of course, as we'll see, and actually as we sung earlier, that not only is he with him, but he has actually gone before him. So it's not so much who Moses was, it's not so much who we are, but who he is.

That was the word last week, wasn't it? It was powerful. But is it a word that we need to be reminded of again this morning? It's not who you are. As you're looking to this week and thinking, how am I going to be faithful to the Lord this week?

I lack the strength, I lack the faith, I lack the conviction. Well, don't look in, look up. Be reminded it's not so much who you are, it's who I am.

I have strength enough, sufficient enough for you to help you to meet the challenges that you'll have this week. You know, actually, God's presence with us is something I've been sort of reflecting on and beginning to sort of spend some time sort of trying to think about more and more, trying to figure out how to be conscious of God's presence, not just in the sort of quiet time in the morning, but actually through the whole of the day.

That truth that he is with us and is able to meet, you know, help us in whatever situation it is that we are, because he is able to kind of, he is the one who is able, the prince of peace, the king of peace, to give us peace when we need it.

[13:49] He is the one who has all strength, who is able to give us the strength that we need when we need it. He is the God, our shepherd, who guides us, who is able to give us guidance and leadership when we need it.

He is the one who is promised by his Holy Spirit to teach us, to remind us of the things that he has taught us when we need to hear them. How can we be, how can I be conscious of his presence in every situation, in every, you know, all of the day, that he is with me and just enjoy and lean into that precious, precious truth.

I am still working on it, but surely that is our desire, isn't it, when we hear this promise that he will be with us to help us, to give us the comfort that we require when we need it, the strength we require, the direction, the rebuke when we are out of line, the restraint, the self-control or the love of the forgiveness.

And of course, when we're thinking about the presence of this God, there are two temptations, at least two temptations. One is a kind of modern temptation.

I think it's to think of God as almost a divine Santa Claus, a kind of ho, ho, ho, you know, jolly kind of just thumbs up on whatever it is that we think that we should be doing. The other temptation, maybe it's an older temptation, is to see him as a sort of divine policeman ready to clobber you at every moment of every day because, you know, of course you're such an idiot.

[15:20] But actually, what does the scripture help us to see? What is the picture? You know, and there are many pictures, but there's an overarching picture, isn't it, of God as a perfect, wise father who loves us, has redeemed us through his son who is our Lord, our king, and has given to us his Holy Spirit to mediate his powerful, beautiful, wonderful, redeeming purposes, his presence and his power.

And we are going to see, I think, as it was with Abraham, this perfect loving father, teaching, coaching, training, growing, rebuking Moses to be the man of God that we read about in Hebrews, a different man from whom he was at the beginning.

So what is our temptation in terms of how we sort of default in thinking of God? The divine Santa Claus? The divine policeman? Or actually, who he wants to be revealed to us now that he has adopted us as his sons and daughters, as a wise and perfect father?

Yes, all powerful, but who has drawn near father and who loves us and who in Christ is for us and has good purposes for us.

A good father who loves you and longs, longs for your growth and thriving and prospering in his good purposes, godly purposes, in all the trials and joys that we face to grow, to bear more of the family likeness and to enjoy it and to him as we glorify him as he restores the family likeness in his Christ likeness, holiness, godliness.

[17:13] But what does that presence that God promises look like for Moses as his fears and objections ramp up, as he wrestles with his sense of inadequacy as the reluctant rescuer?

What we see here in chapter 4 is him discovering, these titles are rubbish by the way, I couldn't think of anything better, okay, so he's discovering God's resources. Verse 1. I'm not sure if Moses was just not listening as he spoke or his fear in a sense as it was growing within him began to shortcut his thinking but his question in verse 1 actually is a direct questioning of what the Lord had promised in chapter 3 verse 18 that they will listen to you when you go but here he's saying oh but what have they don't listen to me Lord?

What is the thing behind the thing here for Moses and maybe for us too? Maybe it's this, Lord, I'm struggling to trust you, isn't it?

Now I want to note an important principle here that, you know, in looking at these major Bible characters, we are not Moses, he has a particular calling and a particular season and so on and praise the Lord actually we have a greater Moses that Emily was sort of alluding to in prayer who has led us out in our exodus out of sin and into the new life in Christ the one who wasn't a reluctant rescuer but was a willing rescuer to come and to save us but there are elements and again as Emily said where Moses is just like us in many ways and those are the things that we're picking up on because who of us does not at times maybe often times struggle to trust the Lord we go on our own strength and our own wisdom on worldly wisdom hello this is exciting there was a debate already this morning as to whether to use the other lecture

I was like oh no no this one's fine I think it's more robust going in my own wisdom there obviously that illustrates the point alright where was I there we go but actually as we look at the excuse me as we look at this passage together like I said earlier actually as as Moses kind of fully is brought out into the light it is here to help us bring some of the folly of our thinking out into the light isn't it to help us discover the remedy for it in those moments of struggling to trust the big thing that we're maybe needing is just some reassurance you know as Moses here being a little bit like Gideon remember Gideon was struggling to take on the calling that God had placed them in so he puts out the fleece at night to see if it's sort of moist in the morning and so on he was struggling to fully trust and looking for a sign of reassurance so there can be a sort of sense we need a little bit of reassurance from the

[20:47] Lord in those moments it can be like a little bit like Mary you know I kind of trust you but I can't quite figure out how you're going to do it you know when the angel came to her and said you're going to have a baby and she's like how can this be you know I'm not married I don't have a husband you know but in Moses favour he is being honest here before the Lord isn't he and it's so interesting how because of Moses honesty and kind of struggling in it we get these wonderful revelations of the Lord not least that you know his revelation of who is I am who I am because in response to kind of Moses saying who me and so the Lord gives him these signs of the staff and the snake and the leprous hands and if that's not enough he then gives him this other sign the water from the Nile that pours out onto the land turns to blood and a kind of anticipation of that first sign to

Pharaoh Pharaoh but what are we seeing here we're seeing grace from a gracious father there is patience here isn't there a patient father whose presence with Moses is promised and he's experiencing the character of this God that he's called to follow this is the kind of the way in which we know the Lord and we're kind of able to think at the time thinking actually he is a perfect father he is patient able to dig into the scriptures that tell these things about him there's something here isn't there about learning to trust and just yielding to him and as we try and figure that out for ourselves some of us will kind of logic it out you've been trustworthy in the past Lord I've seen you working as I think about it I can trust you now it might be that in that moment you know the Lord actually gives us a sort of gift of faith if you like for that point and when you're young in the faith or whatever just in a particular way

I've experienced that where you seem to get the strength and the faith and the help you're not sure where it comes from but it's just the Lord gives you in that moment it might be that as we logic that we get to the point we're reassessing the order of our loves and we get to the point where actually we're saying Lord I'm struggling to trust you but actually when I think about it my loves are in the wrong order I'm not loving you more than this thing it's my security or my identity or whatever Lord I realise I need to love you most of all and trust you most of all you know there are different ways in which when we're thinking about trusting the Lord and at different seasons in our lives that we are helped and need to come to that point and work things through before him I wonder if this morning you're needing reassurance from the Lord and there's one of these paths that you'll take to get to that point but to know this morning that he wants to reassure you as you seek to trust him

I know that in a number of times you know just where faith is encouraged I've lacked I've had to just cry out on the Lord in absolute desperation Lord I cannot it feels like I cannot handle this I need a word I need you to act in a very real way and many of you know the story that when we started Cornerstone I had that night where I was just you know thinking about leaving a previous situation and starting up Cornerstone thinking Lord I'm weak need I can't sleep I'm worried I need you to speak to me I need reassurance I need help I want to trust you and in that moment the word came I will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast who trusts in me the Lord the Lord the Rock eternal and I was thinking that's not a verse I've memorized of scripture it sounds like the Bible I didn't Google it Isaiah yes that's from the Lord 26 verse 3 somebody kindly put it on a piece of wood for us and it sits in our kitchen if you come in the word I needed what a gracious father we have what a gracious father we have sometimes though we can be a little bit like the paralyzed man whose friends had to bring him to Jesus we're so beset by fear that the Lord gathers others around us who hold us up pray for us support us through it I've been there what a gracious father we have he provides but Moses fear here keeps pouring out verse 10 he said to the Lord pardon your servant Lord but I've never been eloquent neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant I'm slow of speech and it's pretty articulate here in saying that but did he mean that his Egyptian wasn't that great because he'd been away from it for a while his Hebrew was pretty poor because he'd been away for it for a while it was it that he wasn't great thinking on his feet you know he'd been looking after you know in the countryside for a while and just sort of not used to all that kind of city life if you like and again who of us hasn't had those kind of moments especially when it comes to faith sharing

[26:58] I'm a bit hopeless at this I never I always think of the things afterwards why is that it's just me I don't think so but I can't help thinking of the guy and I think we're in a different season in society now that there is a greater openness amongst some and so I can't help but thinking of the guy that Jesus healed you know that he and his parents got questioned by the Pharisees you know were you really blind from birth so were you really healed by Jesus and they quizzed him a second time about it and he's like look I can't answer all your questions all I know is that I was blind but now I see and you wonder if he's just got cheekiness in him because he then you're thinking right I'm going to give it to you so he says anyway why are you asking me all these questions do you want to follow him too and the fires are like spitting out their teeth and you know give him an earful what on earth do you think why would we follow and he walks out with a big smile on his face I'm quite sure but all he was able to do is I can't answer your questions but I was like this now

I'm like this and it's wonderful or I you know I can't but I you know I I prayed about this thing and this is the way that the Lord answered or I was listening to this thing or I was reading this thing in the Bible and it's really you know I was needing peace and just I got the peace of the Lord I think it's real I think it's true I remember Billy Graham interviewed it shows how old I am by Terry Wogan Billy

Graham was doing sort of you know big campaigns in UK at the time and Terry Wogan said to him oh Reverend Graham you know aren't you concerned that people are saying that God is dead today and Billy Graham kind of looked at him I said that's really weird because I was just speaking to him this morning and he was very much alive you don't have to have you're just saying that's just how I'm experiencing him you don't necessarily have to have the big answers

Lord I'm not eloquent I don't need you to be eloquent I just need to tell you what you're experiencing verse 11 his gracious father turns Moses' attention away from himself Moses I know you're worried about your mouth and your speech but let me direct your gaze to me I made your mouth and everybody else's mouth and speech I know you sense your inadequacy but I am more than adequate to help you in the calling I've placed on your life so verse 12 now go I will help you speak and will teach you what to say and here we get down to the real nitty gritty with Moses don't we in verse 13 pardon your servant Lord will you just send somebody else please here's a far cry from the man that he will be isn't it and here's lesson 101 with the

Lord when he asks you to do something you shouldn't really go refusing him he is the Lord after all and yes he is patient and yes he is kind and yes he is father but also he is God the Lord the sovereign of heaven all powerful almighty all wise all seeing and he has promised that he himself will be his helper and of course the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that yes God is our father but also as a father he at times will lovingly discipline us those whom he loves it's a sort of coaching kind of you know loving concern for us and Moses he says you're still going to be the man but okay I'm going to send Aaron in fact he's already on his way and I will help you both and like I said earlier praise the

Lord that in Christ we have a leader over our lives who is not a reluctant rescuer like Moses but perfectly obedient yes he had his Gethsemane moment that wasn't disobedience I was just saying is there another way but he is the one who is perfectly willing to come and to rescue us and as we walk faithfully before the father we have him our tender and perfect shepherd king to perfectly lead us in the paths that he would lead us paths of righteousness of obedience that he himself has trod and gone before us in which he was tested and is able to identify with us in it and he's given to us his precious holy spirit and then we have in the latter section of this chapter what sort of briefly looks like a little bit of a curveball incident regarding circumcision because verses 18 and 19 Moses obeys he honors his father-in-law gets his father-in-law's blessing verse 21 it's like the Lord is kind of coaching him and teaching him and just reminding him this is what you're going to do don't be surprised this is how they're going to respond you're going to declare this word of judgment it's a judgment on

[32:42] Pharaoh and the people for their massacre and murder of the Hebrew boys and then there in verse 24 to 26 and there's a lot of thought on this but let me just sort of cut to the chase that not only does he discover God's resources as his reluctant messenger also he discovers God's expectations of faithfulness and obedience I said I would do this at a community group Helen McCabe quoted this in our community group on Tuesday night God's love language is obedience it's helpful isn't it God's love language is obedience John chapter 14 verse 15 if you love me you will obey my commandments John 14:21 whoever has my commands and obeys them he is the one or she is the one who loves me and I too will love them and the father will love them and reveal ourselves to them it's God's will calling on our lives to be done in God's way yes we are saved by amazing grace the blood of

Jesus covers all our sin but to quote Luther we are saved by grace alone but saving grace is never alone the same power that saves from sin also sanctifies leads us into greater likeness of Christ to enable us to act be like him act like him in increasing measure out of the corners in which we kind of get trapped into the freedom of faithfulness and obedience and life in him and the fruit the evidence of that grace is a changed and changing life it's a challenge isn't it we're going to be talking a lot about that hopefully at the men's curry night Moses here had been sloppy in his obedience was he tempted and sort of into the kind of the thinking of the world around him and Midian at the time I don't need to do that they're not doing it I don't need to do it neglecting obedience in the small things the sign of the covenant the sign that God would be their God and he would be their people here's an important principle

I think that the ends do not justify the means in our lives that yes Moses what do I mean by that Moses has this great call to go to Egypt but that doesn't mean that he can just live any old way before the Lord he's called to go in the Lord's will but in the Lord's way the firm roots in him will

ensure good and lasting fruits God's covenanted purposes were for his covenanted people who obediently bore the sign and seal of the covenant and in that day it was circumcision of the flesh which represented circumcision of the heart a taking of the old life and the new life taking on the new life that was to come in accord with God's will and way there's more going on here of course so there's a sense in which what

Zipporah did was a precursor to the Passover in the same way that on the Passover night which we'll look at in future chapters if they'd been sloppy in the command of God that night and not bothered painting on the lintels the blood of the lamb the judgment of God would not have passed over them and here's where every story whispers Jesus name isn't it we are all the scriptures tell us subject to the wrath of God because of our sin apart from one thing that saves us that our sin has been atoned for by the blood shed on the cross by the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world as Marianne gave testimony to earlier on Christ died so that you and I could live in and with him and enjoy his good purpose and the new life that he is giving to us enjoying their adoption as children enjoying his fatherly care and leading under the lordship of his son by the power of the Holy Spirit God's love language is obedience what a challenge isn't it and we see that in our perfect leader the greater Moses who was obedient even to death on the cross because of his love for you we in Christ now are freed from the power and the penalty of sin though we still live in its presence around us set free to enjoy the freedom for which he has set us free and as he leads us in humble joyful increasing obedience for his glory and for our good trusting in the one not in ourselves but in the one who is clear in scripture is true to his promises and we see that Moses is learning that as he promised in verse 15 Aaron was already on his way to meet him as he promised in chapter 3 verse 18 they will listen to you and what do they do here in verse 31 they do listen to you and more than that they give thanks they worship the Lord hearts and we have a commission from the greater [38:32] Moses don't we to go and to be making disciples to walk in that humble obedience maybe as we think on that we hear those objections in our hearts that we've already explored hearts but here's something I was reflecting on as I was sort of sitting in silence this morning just sort of thinking about this passage before I came to church that the Lord is kind of saying to this passage will you let me do a kingdom work in you throw you closer to me for you to grow and being able to serve and we're thinking who me I'm not that great at this or that that you're calling me to maybe someone else would be better at it that's what we do isn't it are you hearing say no I've got a work to do in you trust me not in yourself or maybe also he's saying actually I've got a work to do not only through you as an individual or as couples but I've got a work for us as a church family us and we think who us oh we're not that great maybe some other fellowship should do it no no stop looking to yourselves look to him in whatever it is that he has for us as a fellowship hear him say that stop clear your mind open your heart hear him say that to you don't look at yourself it's not who you are as an individual couples or a household or a family as a church family it's who

I am let me lead you know his fatherly care for you for us that he longs to see you us thrive and prosper in his good purposes for us learning his love language of love of obedience joyful in him following the one who was obedient even to death death on a cross for love's sake let me finish with these words from psalm 27 verse 14 so wait for the lord be strong take heart wait trust in the lord amen let me pray god our father we bless you and thank you that your word is living and it is active and that you have been speaking to our hearts lord if there's anything that I've said that's just nonsense lord help us to forget that and if there's stuff that you are saying lord help us to remember that to dwell on it to take it out into the week to pray on it to encourage others with it help us not to be like

James says the person who looks in the mirror and then turns away and forgets what they look like and having heard your word turns away and just completely forgets it lord help us to to receive it deep into our hearts bless you and thank you for our fellowship and our the way that you've been calling us on our love for you our love for one another lord lead us we pray help us to keep looking to you for we ask it in Jesus name amen