

Invitation & Challenge

March 24, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Invitation and Challenge." The scripture reading is John 13, 12 to 17. Thank you to Earl, Amy, Diane, Ed, and Paul for being part of the video.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning, everybody. I wish to welcome everyone here this morning. We can see our numbers are down, March break. So, we have some of our members traveling and of course our students are all over the place. So, we're glad you're here on this snowy winter day. How often we said that this winter? Not often. And it's going to be 15, 16 degrees by midweek. So, it's been a weird winter for sure. Anyway, it's warm in here and we're glad that you're with us. A few announcements to begin. So happy birthday to Violet and happy anniversary to Heather and Paul. I want to ask how many are so young that you get to my age that it starts to become...

There's going to be a personal evangelism seminar, March 29th, 9 o'clock at Great Lakes, March 30th and 31st, 10 o'clock at Strathmore, and Austin Fowler will present. So, if you want more information. A Good Friday devotional will mark the events of the day and reflect on the spiritual significance of Jesus' sacrifice. It's suitable for the whole family. And that is Friday, March 29th. Good Friday, 7 to 8 o'clock at Tintern.

We're happy to have reported last week that Pam has been moved to Shaver for physiotherapy, more intensive as she recovers from stroke and the blood clots which was holding her up from getting to Shaver. So, they must have progressed satisfactorily for her to be moved. But please call ahead if you want to visit. She's probably more tired because of all the physiotherapy. So, by 4 o'clock in the afternoon is a good time to visit. Probably supper is 5.30. If you're going to go then, then you don't need to phone. Alice's sister Mary passed away and so we ask that you remember that family. So again, Paul is going to be speaking to us this morning, so we look forward to his message as Don is away this week. And as we begin, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the blessings of this life. We thank you for the fact that as a family this morning we can gather together as your children. We thank you for the spiritual blessings we have because of Christ. And we pray that you will help us this morning to reflect on your goodness and sending him into this world as we meet around the table. And please be with Paul as he speaks to us this morning, bringing us a message from your word. And we pray that you will help us as we sing songs of praise to give you the honor and glory you so richly deserve. We pray that you will watch over those who are traveling this week, especially our students who are away from us. We pray for safety and your blessings in everyone's life. We pray that you'll be with us throughout this hour. In Jesus' name, amen.

Communion

Good morning. The weather has actually cooperated very nicely with what I had planned to say today. When we had a warm spell in January, there was a thing going around on the internet and it's going to come up on the screen in any second.

There we go. The 11 actual seasons, winter, full spring, second winter, spring of deception, third winter, mud season, actual spring, summer, false fall, second summer, actual fall. And when this came out in January, we were at Fool's Spring. I think we are maybe into somewhere between second winter and spring of deception. I think we're sitting somewhere in that zone.

And I love this, and I love seasons because I feel like we have a lot of parables just baked into nature. We have a lot of parables that we can see throughout nature. For me, where I start to feel hope is when I see the crocuses. And I don't know if you are like me. My crocuses came out. They look like this, and we've got a picture. My crocuses are not awe-inspiring at this point, but they have poked their little heads out this week. And when the crocuses come up in spring, I start to feel hope. I know that there's going to be snow. There was snow today. So, I know that there's still going to be winter, but there is hope in that burst of color in my garden. It is the first color that I see in my garden, and we have uninterrupted color from now until November and that gives me hope through the season. Where is the parable in this?

We are seasonal creatures as well. Can we go back to the seasons list? Maybe spiritually you are in winter, or you are in full spring, or you are in second winter or you are in spring of deception, but we have this seasonality to our faith as well. We have this come and go. And sometimes when you are in winter or you are in second winter, it can feel like, is there any hope? Is there? What is next? How do we get out of this? Maybe you're in mud season, which I think is a beautiful description of April. Maybe that is where you are spiritually.

Sometimes we wish it could just be summer or actual spring for the whole time. We wish for that. But if you were to plant crocuses today, even though it is crocus season, you would get no blooms because the bulbs need to freeze. The bulbs need the winter in order to mature. We need our winter seasons in order to mature spiritually. We hate our winter seasons when we are in them, but they are part of that maturing process. They are part of that growing process and that is how we come out the other side and actually bloom.

Even Jesus, even Jesus when he came to the earth did not come to the earth and say, hooray, we're all saved with immediate following and immediate action on part of people. There was still a crucifixion. There was still a burial time. There was still a resurrection. We have this seasonality in our faith. We have this seasonality from God, and we can see it in the very flowers that are pushing up right now through the mid-March snow that we are getting. As a reminder from nature that times will come, and times will go. Seasons will come and seasons will go. But God is faithful, and spring is coming. Actual spring is coming. Actual summer is coming even though we have to go through these seasons of spring of deception or third winter or mud season. Let's pray together.

Dear God, we thank you for the reminders that you put in our way to remind us that you are faithful and that you are true, that spring is coming, that summer is coming, that your resurrection and its fulfillment has come and will come for us. God, we thank you for your son and his sacrifice and for the redemption that comes through that. In Jesus' name, amen.

Song Leader Comment

This particular song is about being still. It has some beautiful words in it. "Hide me now under your wings." So, you think of a bird, have its wings, and it gathers the young ones underneath on days like today, and the nest is a little cold. "When the oceans rise and thunders roar, I will soar above the storm."

We've been watching the weather in Portugal, and they've had warnings this past week of waves from the northwest between 8 and 12 meters high. Our first day is on a cliff looking at that. So, all this imagery in here about nature, and some of us find being in nature as a time to be still and to look and to think and to listen. So, I invite you to stand as we sing, and hopefully our service today and message today will help us to grow into stillness.

Scripture Reading

John 13:12-17

So, as you see, the morning's reading is from John 12. John 13, I mean. Starting at verse 12.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth. No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

We will be blessed if we do them.

Sermon

Invitation & Challenge

Hello. Just to a quick anecdote. Nope. Antidote. Illustration.

That's how you spell that word. That maybe helps to illustrate Adam's point about name tags. The first month or so when I moved out west, I didn't grow up there. I didn't really know many people out there. One of our members ended up in the hospital. And I was the last person in the church to know. And one of the reasons was I wasn't in the family group. I wasn't someone who'd grown up there. I wasn't just automatically in the group that everyone knew what someone would tell them. And if you're in that group, sometimes it's hard to imagine not being in that group. So even though you may say, "I've been here forever. Everyone knows my name." To most of us here, probably true, but not to everybody. So maybe a little illustration to help. Maybe you don't think it applies to you, but it might apply to somebody else for your benefit. Anyway, take it from what it's worth.

This is kind of a-- who watches streaming? YouTube stuff. Okay, you know the state of things now. Before we get into the actual video you want to watch, you have to watch the ad first. Well, this is the second ad. The first ad I wasn't intending on doing, but anyway. This is the second ad before we get to the actual video. So, Adam and I have been working on a Wednesday night class that currently has no name, because I don't like naming things. Naming things are hard. It's short and pithy. Explains the thing, but is memorable, but is unique. I don't know. Anyway, it's a class about

anxiety and faith and how we can journey through anxiety in the context of faith in community. So, worry and doubt can get the best of all of us. Anxiety, panic attacks can feel incapacitating. The Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing," but that can feel impossible.

Anxiety, like any other negative emotion, is a twisted version of a good thing from God. And while we live in this fallen world and may never have complete victory over it, we can have victory in it. So, for eight weeks we'll apply Biblical truth to our daily lives and struggles and look to God who promises to never leave us or forsake us. We'll look at Scripture, share and explore it with each other as we share our lives together. So, this will be coming up Wednesdays here in the building. 7.30 to 8.30 is our plan. Starting April 3rd, we'll have some singing at the beginning and come and join us if that sounds interesting to you. And we'll run for eight weeks. Did I say that? Yeah, I'm also not a fan of infinitely long classes. So, you're not booking your life away eight weeks.

So, let's get into our actual lesson today. Invitation and challenge. There are several rhythms of a local congregation and of our personal lives and faith found in Scripture. This ties in well with Amy's communion instead of rhythms, seasons. Same idea.

They can also be, all of these can be put in the category of these just make common sense things. But we look to Scripture first and if they make sense in human terms, that's good too. So, a couple of examples of these rhythms in both our personal lives and community of believers. Play and purpose. The idea of we play together, we have fun together, but we also work together. One without the other doesn't really work. All play means you don't get anything done. All work means you don't really like to be with each other. And eventually you don't get anything done either.

Structure/spontaneity. The idea that there's a time and a place for structure, for a process, a thing to help us move from place to be or do a thing. But there's also a time and a place for this comes up. We don't really have a plan for it, but it makes good sense. And we're here and we're now and it's great. So, the idea for this could be you prepare, but if the Spirit moves something better, you take advantage of that movement and do something better. Both are necessary. Up in and out, focus on God, focus on fellowship, focus on service and evangelism. The idea being sometimes we focus on God in our worship, in our actions. Sometimes we focus on fellowship on each other. Sometimes we focus on service or evangelism to the outside world, in some way, shape or form. All three of those are necessary and important. Take one out and we lose something. Arguably, I'd say all three of those are the kind of, if you're doing one well, you're doing the others well.

And then the example, if you want to tie this to Scripture, and this goes really to Amy's saying, the seasons of fruit bearing and pruning of John 15. The idea of in the vine, there's a period of time where you're productive and a period of time where you're being pruned. And those are different seasons of one's life.

So, invitation and challenge. This is a specific rhythm, season that I'd like to look at today. So, what is this? Let me give you an illustration. Do we have a Bob in the house? I don't want to pick a random name and have somebody be that name in the house. No? Okay, good. I can talk about Bob, the mythical Bob. So, in this illustration, something like, I have a neighbor Bob. We have a shared hedge along our driveway. His side needs to be trimmed. Understand where I'm coming from here.

So, in invitation and challenge, you may have experienced something like this. It's like a four quadrant system. There's two axes. There's the invitation axes, high invitation, low invitation. And there is the challenge axes, high challenge, low challenge. It means there's four quadrants that you can be in. So, let me give you four examples of how I might deal with my shared hedge with Bob. In these four quadrants, high invitation, high challenge, low invitation, low challenge. You tell me which one is most likely to get the hedge trimmed. Okay?

High invitation, low challenge. I see Bob across the fence. Hi Bob, sit down, have some coffee. Scone.

On the topic of our shared hedge, perhaps eventually, if you feel like it, maybe, could you perhaps trim it? Okay, that's high invitation, low challenge. Low invitation, high challenge. Bob don't sit. You won't be here long. You will trim that hedge when you leave, which is now. Low invitation, low challenge. If you say anything at all, something like, Bob, don't sit. The hedge needs trimming. Bye. High invitation and high challenge. Hi Bob, sit down, have coffee. Scone. I was noticing our shared hedge needs some trimming. Can I let you borrow my trimmer to trim up your side? I'm planning on doing some work on it Saturday, and I'd love to work together on it. What do you think? What do you think would be more successful?

We'll look at some scriptures that illustrate this principle in the text, briefly explore some specific invitation and challenges that they offer that come out of those specific examples in scripture, but then hopefully overall see the larger principle and action, and imagine what it might look like as applied to our lives, both personally and corporately in our church body. To start off with Romans six.

Or don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the father. We too live a new life, for we have been united with him and death like his. We will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him. So, the body ruled by sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Starting today with the gospel message, the Apostle Paul here is reminding his readers that through the gospel, through death, Christ's death and resurrection, as we participate with Christ via baptism, we also leave behind our sinful lives and now live a new life. The invitation here is the gospel message. We have been saved through Christ.

And then the gospel continues in verse 11. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to Christ. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body as you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under law, but under grace.

The challenge here is since we have been saved, we have left our old lives of sin buried in death, living new lives in Christ. Don't go back to that sin. There is the don'ts. Don't go back to the evil desires. Don't be instruments of wickedness, but rather the do's. Offer ourselves to God to be instruments of righteousness. The invitation here is we have been saved. The challenge is act like it.

Second example, Galatians chapter 3, starting at verse 24. So, the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So, in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. The invitation here is a reminder that again, through the gospel, we are all children of God because of faith and being clothed in Christ. That is our faith in the work of the gospel in our lives that God no longer sees my sin when he sees me, but rather because of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and my faith in it. God now sees Christ. My sin has been removed. Continuing in verse 28. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave, nor free, nor is there male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham seed and heirs to the promise.

The challenge here is that since we are all children of God through faith in Christ, the value judgments of the world, the physical realm are now meaningless when compared to being children of God. There is significant challenge in this even amongst us Christians as we hold on to those distinctions, make judgments and rules about them. These and there are certainly more discussion exploring of Scripture that can happen here, which is, by the way, pretty much true of all biblical truth. There is more to learn, explore, nuance and apply beyond what we're talking about today. But the invitation here is we're all children of God. That is our status. And the challenge is to set aside our worldly differences and categories that may get govern our actions.

First Corinthians 15 verses starting at verse three. For what I received, I passed on to you of the first importance that Christ died for our sins, according to Scripture, that he was buried and he was raised from the third day, according to the Scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve. And after that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Then last of all, he appeared to me as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace to me was not without effect. Jumping down in the chapter to verse fifty five. The apostle Paul hears the invitation of the gospel again. Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised. Because of what Christ has done, death has no more hold on us. We have victory in Christ. Christ died for our sins, which removes our sins from us. And as death is the result of sin, so it is too removed from us. It has no sting for us anymore. The apostle Paul used himself as an example. He has received God's grace, and his life has been transformed from prosecutor of the church. Persecutor of the church. Well, prosecutor, a persecutor of the church to now an apostle of that same church.

Fifty eight of first Corinthians, fifteen. Therefore, my brothers and sisters stand firm that nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. The apostle Paul's challenge is to urge the Corinthians to stand firm and keep working for God. We have been saved by this great work of God through Christ, death, burial

and resurrection. Now stand firm and keep working for God because we know that that great work is not in vain. The invitation is through Christ, death, burial and resurrection. We have been saved. And the challenge is remember who we are now. Sin and death no longer apply to us. Therefore, hold on to our faith. Keep working for God.

John thirteen. During a verse one, it was just before the Passover meal festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in process. The devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So, he got up from his meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured the water into a basin and began to wash his disciples feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around them. When he came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize what I'm doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I washed you, you have no part with me." Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, "Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well." Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet, their whole body is clean." "And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew that he was going, who was going to betray him, and that is why he said not everyone was clean.

The invitation in this text is by Jesus himself to set aside his position and literally serve those around him. The context here is the disciples and Jesus are sitting down for dinner. They've arrived at someone's home. Since this is in ye olden times, people weren't walking around with fancy Nikes or somewhat of my age, Nikes are less relevant, New Balances. That's the more exciting, relevant part for me. If you were lucky, you had some kind of sandal, but most didn't. There were no chairs in this culture, and so you didn't sit at the table to eat. You more lounged. You sort of laid and wrapped your body around the back of the person next to you. This results in your stinky feet being much closer to someone's face than is desirable in most social circumstances.

Thus, the custom of the time was for the lowest servant or house member or whomever was present to wash everyone's feet. Once everyone's feet has been washed, we can now sit down for our dinner and stomach our food. You can guess why this is the person, a person who does this, is of the lowest social position that does the washing. It would be a dirty, stinky, and quite unpleasant job. So, at dinner with Jesus and his disciples, who should wash everyone's feet? Well, there's definitively one wrong answer to that question. The Lord, the Master, the Teacher, the literal Son of God himself should not be washing the disciples' feet. And yet, Jesus does just that. This is an outrage. We see even in the text, Peter objects to this going on. But Jesus being Jesus quickly disarms Peter, and he proceeds, continuing on in verse 12.

"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I've done for you? He asked them. You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his Master nor a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them." This is one of my favorite scriptures, because as someone who looks to interpret scripture, Jesus interprets what

he's just done and said and applies it for us. It's great. He writes his own commentary. Great for biblical understanding. Jesus' challenge is just as he is willing to become a servant and serve his disciples, they should do the same for each other. Instead of trying to gain authority, power, prestige, social standing, we are rather to take the lowest positions and serve each other. The measure of success in the community of Jesus' followers is not who leads who, but rather who serves who. The invitation is Jesus chooses to serve us. The challenge is so we should choose to serve each other.

Our last example is Matthew 28, the Great Commission. Starting at verse 1, "After the Sabbath of the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, his clothes were white as snow, the guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus who is crucified. He is not here. He has risen, just as he said, come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples. He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you." So, the women hurried away from the tomb, yet afraid, yet filled with joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. "I come." They came to him, clapped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me." Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority and heaven and our earth has been given to me."

This is the Great Commission, or part just before. The invitation Jesus gives here to his disciples to witness his resurrection, to join him again, and to tell them that he is all-powerful. The text says that some of his disciples had doubts. They did not expect Jesus to be raised from the dead. And they needed to be invited to witness his risen self. His disciples had almost all abandoned him at his crucifixion. They needed to be invited again to join him in Galilee. And then invited to understand that all authority, both in heaven and on earth, was given to Jesus.

Verse 19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." This often quoted part of the Great Commission is the challenge that Jesus gives. Make disciples by going, baptizing, teaching, and don't worry because Jesus will always be with them. Why Jesus being with them is helpful is because he has all authority on heaven and on earth. So, he's a very useful companion to have. Because he has all that, and how do the disciples know that he has this power? Because they have been invited to his side to witness his resurrection. The invitation, Jesus invites them to join him, to witness his resurrection, to know the power that comes from that resurrection. The challenge is Jesus challenges us to make disciples going, baptizing, and teaching, remembering that Jesus is always with us. And that power of Jesus is always with us and present in that mission.

Invitation and challenge are often, in fact, almost always in some form paired in Scripture. Whether it's a reminder, a teaching, an illustration, some kind of warm invitation is given. And after that invitation is offered, then a challenge is given. Usually this challenge, unlike my hedge

example with Bob, at the beginning, is linked some way to that invitation. The challenge makes sense because of or builds on that invitation.

What if we applied this principle to our lives both personally in faith and wider in our community of faith? With our friends and family, with our relationship with God, within the church, evangelism, or our message to the society at large around us. Instead of issuing challenges, even good, well-meaning challenges to our family and friends, to each other, within or outside of the church, or even indeed ourselves, what if we first offered a warm, generous invitation? And like Scripture, my go-to would be to start with the greatest invitation of all the Gospel. I cannot think of a more generous, warm invitation than one that is based on the Gospel.

This could be explicit if the challenge is to another Christian, or implicit if perhaps the challenge is to come to Christ to someone who is not yet committed. The invitation I can offer comes from the Gospel that is offered within me, even if that invitation is something other than the verbal sharing of that Gospel, but that's good too. How might things change if we were more warm and generous with our invitations. With each other in the church before challenging each other, how might things change if we were more warm and generous with our invitations with people outside of the church before challenging them? And how might things change if we were more warm and generous with our invitations with ourselves before we challenged ourselves?

A practical example of invitation and change-- I've struggled with anxiety, especially since my cancer and now continued health adventures. I have felt and journeyed into the comfort of the gospel of faith in my life. If you have felt that anxiety in your life and you want to journey through that anxiety in the context of faith, what does God say to those of us who are anxious? And how can we better journey through it? We have this class coming up. Might help with that. This may be helpful for you, someone you know, or training for us to help others as we come into contact with people who might have anxiety.

So, an example of invitation, sharing my own life as it has been affected and touched by the gospel, hopefully illustrating that warmth of the love of Christ. And challenge, come and experience that same gospel and together in our class. I encourage us to think about the principle of invitation and challenge as it is found in scripture and how it might apply to our lives as we metaphorically come into contact with various people who might-- we might need to talk to you about our shared hedge. The invitation based on warmth of the gospel and the challenge that moves us towards God.

Closing

We thank Paul for his message. Warm invitation and the challenge. You know, those are two impactful kind of one and then the other. And thank you for the reminder that this is throughout scripture. And help us to engage others warmly and to be inviting this week. And maybe that's our challenge, is that we can reflect Christ as we interact with others. Now, I was a little remiss at the beginning because we have a special new person with us, Christopher. So, congratulations, Rafael and Lorena! And we welcome your new baby. Congratulations. Let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for your love, your goodness towards us. We thank you that you are an inviting God, that you care about each person, that you want us to have relationship with you. And

for those of us who do, we praise you and honor you for your provisions in our lives. But we pray, Father, that you will help us also to be inviting to others so that they might to know your goodness and your love in their lives. We pray to this end this week that we might be your messenger, your servant, as we interact with others in our daily lives. We pray for each member of this congregation. We ask that you watch over and be helping us to be tuned into the needs that are amongst us so that we become your hands and your feet. We pray that you will go with us to this end this week. In Jesus' name, amen.

Have a good week.

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