

Virtual assistant responds to sermon and orders toilet paper

February 19, 2019

OKLAHOMA CITY (The Christian Chronicle)—When Phil Brookman preaches, even the virtual assistant Alexa listens—and dutifully obeys.

Brookman, a minister for Memorial Road Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, was delivering a Sunday message from 1 Corinthians 12 when his sermon illustration nearly resulted in the purchase of \$28 worth of toilet paper.

The sermon, titled “Greet One Another,” was based on the Apostle Paul’s admonition that the church function as one body with many parts.

In addition to the audience of more than 1,000 worshippers gathered for the congregation’s early service, numerous believers watched the sermon online through the church’s video streaming service.

One of them, Bethany Becknell, was at home with a sick child, Eli.

Her husband, Wes, attended Memorial Road’s first service with their other son, Cam.

Brookman preached about how easy it is in the 21st century for Christians to live separate lives and to fail to see the need for the kind of unity Paul advocates.

Even shopping has become depersonalized, Brookman said. Instead of going to a store and interacting with other humans, one need only say, “Alexa, order toilet paper.”

From the master bathroom in her house, Bethany Becknell heard a polite

female voice respond: “OK. I’ve added it to your cart.”

The voice was that of her Amazon Echo smart speaker, which can play music and set alarms in response to voice commands—and order things from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Bethany Becknell grabbed her phone. Sure enough, there in her Amazon cart was a package of 60 double rolls of Angel Soft Toilet Paper. Cost: \$27.45.

“My first thought was: ‘Cancel! Cancel! Cancel!’” she said. Her family simply didn’t need that much toilet paper.

She soon figured out how to remove the item from her virtual shopping cart—but not before texting a screenshot to her husband. After the sermon, Wes Becknell approached Brookman and said, “You owe me 28 bucks.”

Brookman, enamored with his newfound power, quickly incorporated the screenshot into his sermon and shared it with Memorial Road’s second service. (Two other church members later told him they also wound up with toilet paper in their Amazon carts after the sermon.)

Bethany Becknell said she was happy to add some humor to the sermon, but she added, “I’m a little embarrassed that everybody knows how much toilet paper we buy.”

For the second service, Brookman opted for a new sermon illustration: “Alexa, donate \$500 to the Memorial Road Church of Christ.”

No word yet on if it worked.