



It is finished.

2021 Lenten Devotional

**University Lutheran Chapel
Ann Arbor, MI**





Introduction

You have in your hands a devotion that will take you daily through the season of Lent, Holy week, and Easter. The season of Lent has quite a different spiritual character compared to the rest of the church year: we have the eager anticipation of Advent, the joyous celebration of Christmas, the reverent praise in the power of the Pentecost, and the exuberant celebration in the triumph of Easter. Certainly, we have an abundance of reasons to praise and celebrate our incredible God, but Lent takes a bit of a different approach to that celebration. Lent is a somber season, a season sans-alleluias. It's a time to reflect on the sinfulness and shortcomings that ultimately required Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Lent is an opportunity to focus on self-denial and humble repentance through quiet moments with God.

For many, this can seem like a bit of an odd season— you might find it depressing or uncomfortable to be humbled in such a way. But the reality of it is this: without an honest recognition of our vast need for atonement from Jesus's sacrifice, the celebration of Easter is dimmed. The Gospel isn't the Gospel and Easter isn't Easter without Lent. Reflecting on our sinfulness makes God's immense love for us through the Gospel that much sweeter. Through the lens of Lent, we see Jesus' love as that much more abundant.

Daily devotions and quiet times before the Lord are beautiful opportunities to reflect and meditate. There is immense value in setting aside time daily to be still and to be in His Word. It's here in these times that we grow in character and grow in relationship with our Creator. It's in these times that we recognize His sacrifice and are awed by His vast love for us. We pray that this devotional is a blessing to you and that you use it as a time to reflect and meditate on God's love for YOU.

We want to say a special thank you to the many writers who contributed their time and thoughts to this devotional. We are blessed by your personal and unique perspectives on each of these Bible passages throughout the Lenten season and we appreciate all of the work you put into this. Readers, if you would like to learn more about each of ULC's talented devotion writers, there is a biography section featured in the back of this booklet. We also want to offer our gratitude to Pastor Gabe, who read through each devotion, offering his theological insight and expertise.

Finally, we pray that this devotion is a blessing to not only you, but to others as well. Use it to learn and grow in your relationship with God and pass it along to friends and family! Have a blessed Lenten season.

Editors,

Norma Polk, Margaret Baker, Ashleigh Creeden



Reading Schedule

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| February 17, 2021 | Ash Wednesday | Luke 3:15–22 |
| February 18, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 4:1–13 |
| February 19, 2021 | Friday | Luke 4:14–21 |
| February 20, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 4:22–30 |

WEEK 1

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| February 21, 2021 | Sunday | Isaiah 53:3–6 |
| February 22, 2021 | Monday | Luke 5:1–11 |
| February 23, 2021 | Tuesday | Luke 5:17–26 |
| February 24, 2021 | Wednesday | Luke 5:33–39 |
| February 25, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 6:1–11 |
| February 26, 2021 | Friday | Luke 6:12–26 |
| February 27, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 6:37–42 |

WEEK 2

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|-------------------|-----------|---------------|
| February 28, 2021 | Sunday | Psalms 40:1–8 |
| March 1, 2021 | Monday | Luke 7:1–10 |
| March 2, 2021 | Tuesday | Luke 7:36–50 |
| March 3, 2021 | Wednesday | Luke 8:22–25 |
| March 4, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 8:40–56 |
| March 5, 2021 | Friday | Luke 9:10–17 |
| March 6, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 9:18–27 |

WEEK 3

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| March 7, 2021 | Sunday | Psalms 63:1–8 |
| March 8, 2021 | Monday | Luke 9:57–62 |
| March 9, 2021 | Tuesday | Luke 10:25–37 |
| March 10, 2021 | Wednesday | Luke 11:1–13 |
| March 11, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 11:37–44 |
| March 12, 2021 | Friday | Luke 12:13–34 |
| March 13, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 12:35–48 |

WEEK 4

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|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| March 14, 2021 | Sunday | Psalms 32:1–5 |
| March 15, 2021 | Monday | Luke 13:1–9 |
| March 16, 2021 | Tuesday | Luke 13:31–35 |
| March 17, 2021 | Wednesday | Luke 14:25–33 |
| March 18, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 15:1–10 |
| March 19, 2021 | Friday | Luke 16:10–16 |
| March 20, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 16:19–31 |



WEEK 5

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|
| March 21, 2021 | Sunday | Psalm 124 |
| March 22, 2021 | Monday | Luke 17:7-10 |
| March 23, 2021 | Tuesday | Luke 17:11-19 |
| March 24, 2021 | Wednesday | Luke 18:1-8 |
| March 25, 2021 | Thursday | Luke 18:31-34 |
| March 26, 2021 | Friday | Luke 19:1-10 |
| March 27, 2021 | Saturday | Luke 19:28-40 |

HOLY WEEK

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| March 28, 2021 | Palm Sunday | Psalm 24:7-10 |
| March 29, 2021 | Holy Monday | Luke 20:9-19 |
| March 30, 2021 | Holy Tuesday | Luke 21:5-19 |
| March 31, 2021 | Holy Wednesday | Luke 21:29-38 |
| April 1, 2021 | Maundy Thursday | Luke 22:7-23 |
| April 2, 2021 | Good Friday | Luke 23:26-46 |
| April 3, 2021 | Holy Saturday | Luke 23:50-56 |
| April 4, 2021 | EASTER SUNDAY | Luke 24:1-12 |
| April 5, 2021 | Easter Monday | Luke 24:13-25 |



Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

“Wake-Up Call” | Pastor Gabe Kasper

Read: Luke 3:15–22

Almost every January for the last seven years or so, I have reluctantly joined my wife for Whole30. For those of you not familiar with Whole30, it's terrible. It's 30 days of eating only meat, veggies, fruit, and nuts. No carbs, no dairy, no sugar, no fun.

Now, the point of this diet is to serve as a wake-up call to our relationship with food. Rather than falling into unhealthy patterns with what we eat, we follow this temporary regimen to reset our systems and learn to make healthier choices moving forward.

It's a wake-up call to what we put in our bodies.

In the same way, in our text, John the Baptist issues a wake-up call to the world. He tells folks that the Messiah is coming and *“His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire”* (v.17). Pretty intense.

But the reality is, it's a message we need to hear. Yes, it's good news that Jesus, our Messiah, has come in grace to rescue us, but the first part of his message is “repent.” Wake up and turn around. Turn from our sin. Turn from those things that drag us down. Turn from the darkness. Turn from death.

And so each Ash Wednesday, we recognize this wake up call to repentance. We hear the words, *“Dust you are and to dust you shall return.”* Also pretty intense. And yet, as we recognize our mortality, we are invited not just to turn from our sin, but also to turn towards our Savior.

As we turn from our sin and towards our Savior, we find ourselves forgiven, set free, and given the gift of eternal life. And now we move forward in our Lenten journey assured of His grace, love, and forgiveness for us.

Reflection:

What sin in your life is Jesus calling you to turn from this Lenten season?



Thursday, February 18, 2021

"Don't Go in There!" | Justin Beemer

Read: Luke 4:1–13

If you've ever seen a horror movie, you know the characters make bad decisions. Obviously they shouldn't go in the basement or investigate that sound! Ironically, these supposed-to-be-terrifying movies become borderline comical once you notice all the unrealistic decisions.

Except, maybe they aren't so unrealistic. I've seen this level of decision-making in my life more than I care to admit. I've made a lot of mistakes, many of them avoidable. As in the movies, it would be borderline comical—if it were not so destructive.

Why can't we do the right thing when it's obvious? Temptation. A spiritual enemy whispers in our ear and makes evil look irresistible. As 1 Peter 5:8 says, *"Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

Which brings us to the temptation of Jesus. He faces the very same spiritual enemy that attacks us in our moments of weakness. It can be comforting to know Jesus endured the same temptations we struggle with. It's nice that Jesus knows how we feel—it's nice not to be alone.

But we can't stop there. Because inseparable from the picture of Jesus being tempted like us is one of him resisting where we fail. The story of Jesus' temptation is comforting, but it is also a stark reminder of why He came. His becoming human, receiving baptism, and enduring temptation were the beginnings of a ministry for sinners like us. It's a ministry that led straight to the cross.

This story reminds us of our own ugly failures. But this is not cause for despair! Because Jesus succeeded where we fail repeatedly, we have the promise of the resurrection. We can call on Jesus when tempted, certain He is more powerful than our enemy. The writer of Hebrews puts it nicely: *"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who...has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* Amen!

Reflection:

What temptations are you struggling with? How might you combat them and seek help in the face of them?



Friday, February 19, 2021

“Jubilee” | Norma Polk

Read: Luke 4:14–21

Michael Card is one of my favorite Christian singers/songwriters (this may give away my age!). He wrote a song called “Jubilee” that includes the following lyrics:

“The Lord provided for a time
For the slaves to be set free
For the debts to all be canceled
So His chosen ones could see
His deep desire was for forgiveness
He longed to see their liberty
And His yearning was embodied
In the Year of Jubilee.”

The Year of Jubilee that Card is singing about was established by God for His chosen people, the Israelites: *“And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan”* (Leviticus 25:10 ESV). In this special year, God commanded, people’s debts were to be forgiven and slaves granted freedom. Sold property was to be redeemed. It was to be an entire year of merciful actions that reflected God’s mercy.

In today’s passage, Jesus references the Year of Jubilee when he reads from Isaiah 61 during a visit to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. When He has finished reading, he proclaims, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (Luke 4:21 ESV). Jesus is saying that He is our Jubilee! Jesus’ mission on earth is to release God’s creation from bondage. God wants to redeem us from death and from the bondage of sin.

This freedom is available to anyone who asks, and yet many of those around us are still blind to this hope. Even we as Christians can get weighed down by guilt or by the cares of this world and forget the freedom we have in Christ. No matter what we’ve done and no matter what’s going on in our life, Jesus has paid our debts and reconciled us to God. He wants to remove the veil from the eyes of those who are blind to this blessed Gospel truth.

The chorus of Michael Card’s song puts it well:

“Jubilee, Jubilee, Jesus is our Jubilee
Debts forgiven, Slaves set free
Jesus is our Jubilee!”

Let us remember and thank Him for setting us free from the bondage of sin, for opening our eyes to the truth of God and the Good News, and for returning us to our family, the family of God.

Reflection:

How has God restored your life? Is there someone in your life you desire to experience “Jubilee?” How can you pray for this person? How can you share the Good News with him/her?



Saturday, February 20, 2021

“Being Ready and Willing: Challenges Lead to God’s Work in the World” | Julie Piazza

Read: Luke 4:22–30

Truly there are times when we are faced with physical and emotional challenges—consider this year! We have faced a pandemic, social injustice, and economic strife, and it has come closer to us than ever. It is interesting to me that God has worked in my life and led me to a career where I study, research, and support interventions to relieve pain with patients and their families. In many ways, I have prepared for years for just such a time as this.

God works through individuals to impart lessons for others, as He did in Luke 4. These are lessons of humility and pain, and for people God chose to receive His message, prophecy, and guidance to enlighten the world. Often, however, like the hearers in the passage, we ignore His counsel, and look elsewhere for answers.

“Truly I tell you...no prophet is accepted in his hometown” (v. 24), Jesus affirms. Perhaps you, too, have experienced this phenomenon. I know that I have often been an explorer and an innovator with vision for ways to improve or enhance, yet are not always on the “main path” or slightly outside one’s comfort zone. Have you also been in the position to challenge the “We’ve always done it this way” mentality? Jesus certainly was. He was not just introducing a new “enhanced way” of being, living, worshipping, He was revealing that *He* was and is The Way!

This was a hard message to accept for those who knew Him well, as the carpenter’s son, that man of Nazareth, that wandering preacher. Are we like them sometimes? Isn’t it human nature to be comfortable and seek whatever feels “normal” instead of asking questions and seeking to understand and receive guidance from God?

Who but the Lord has our best interests in mind and will lead us if we ask Him and stop to reflect and explore what He is doing in the hometowns of our lives. God is waiting for us and loves us, and He will use our circumstances to change us, save us, heal us. And He does it all with grace and love. Let us embrace our “hometown” prophet! Truly, He is the Only One who has the words of eternal life. Where else is there to go?

Reflection:

How have you seen or experienced in your life ways that God may have called you to be an explorer, challenger or mentor to reflect His healing touch, comfort and vision for this world?



Sunday, February 21, 2021

“The Passage that Gives Away the Ending” | Margaret Baker

Read: Isaiah 53:3–6

For many years, in the sixth grade Sunday school classes I taught, I loved to introduce this passage from Isaiah 53 as a “Mystery Passage,” then ask the students where in the Bible they thought they could find it. I would then enjoy their lively discussion about whether it was from Matthew or Luke. “No, John! I know! I know! It’s from John!” one student would inevitably pipe up, with beaming eleven-year-old confidence.

The point, of course, was not to shame their Bible knowledge, but to illuminate the divine, prophetic nature of this piece of Scripture that describes Jesus’ atonement in perfect detail, many centuries before Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth, or crucifixion (“He was pierced”) was even invented by the Romans. Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, was letting the Old Testament Jews in on the details of the “Suffering Servant” who would be their Savior. He was giving away the ending!

Sometimes when I reflect on this passage (and it is one of my very favorites), I feel like I am “cheating,” since unlike those who first read Isaiah, I know this suffering servant intimately. I often read, pray over, and reflect on the historical truths of Jesus’ earthly trials, trials He endured for love of me. I read of Him being despised by the religious rulers. I weep over His being afflicted, stricken, smitten, and chastised, and even betrayed by close friends, one of whom, Peter, literally hid His face so as to disavow any connection with Him. I also rejoice with the knowledge that while He was fully God, He was also fully human, someone who was, and is, “acquainted with grief,” and therefore, can enter fully into mine.

Most of all, as in my sin, I am certainly a sheep who has gone astray, I give thanks that the Lord did lay on Him my—and your—iniquity. Thank you, Jesus, for being the One who bears our griefs, carries our sorrows, endures being crushed for our sins, and brings us peace through Your wounds.

Reflection:

Spend some time today in quiet adoration of the One who saves!



Monday, February 22, 2021

“Trust Over Doubt” | Logan Davis

Read: Luke 5:1–11

I have never been much of a fisherman. The long periods of time sitting in a boat with your bobber in the water, just waiting for that tug, has never had much appeal to me. I'm not sure if it is because I am really bad at actually catching fish, or that I merely lack the patience to sit out on the water all day. And if there is one thing fishing requires, it is patience.

Just ask Simon Peter. In this passage, he and his crew have toiled all night and come up empty. They are exhausted and downcast after putting in so much work for nothing. This is when Jesus enters the picture. He hops into one of the boats and casts off a little distance from shore so more people will have the ability to hear and see Him as He teaches them. Then when He has finished speaking, He commands Simon Peter to cast his nets yet again.

It is not hard to imagine that Simon Peter, completely spent, would have been exasperated by Jesus' command. What can Jesus, a carpenter, possibly tell a lifetime fisherman? From Peter's perspective, there simply were no fish, and continuing to persevere would clearly be futile. Jesus' advice defies logic. But Simon Peter puts aside his doubts and trusts in Jesus, and sure enough the catch is an amazing amount of fish, so many that the nets even begin to break!

Like Simon Peter, we, too, experience periods of doubt. Can Jesus really deliver? To me, a sinner? The world tells us that we have made too many mistakes, and we doubt that we can be saved. And in a way, we are correct, for when our trust is in the world, we will always only have empty nets.

But because of Jesus' death on the cross, we can trust in His promise that our salvation has been accomplished. We are never too far gone, and Jesus will never leave us. When our trust is in Jesus and His finished atoning work, we will receive a bounty from Him that is immeasurable, greater than our nets will ever be able to hold.

Reflection:

When have there been times in your life that you have let your doubts override the promise of the cross? How might you look to Jesus to help you push through the doubts to His overflowing gifts of grace?



Tuesday, February 23, 2021

“A Group of Friends or ‘Some People’ Who Care” | Larry Frank

Read: Luke 5:17–26

In this season of Lent, as we gather our self-awareness—positives and negatives—we look for ways to express them. In solitary prayer, of course, but also with our neighbors, classmates, and work partners, or maybe within a ULC Community Group. We can discuss our fears, daily frustrations, and joys with others while we share our faith in Jesus and His love of His church.

In this passage, that church—the body of believers—is in full evidence. “*Some men were bringing a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus*” (v. 19b). These men had to be very good friends of the man, for they were going to a lot of trouble just to get him into Jesus’ presence. Imagine risking arrest by cutting a hole in the roof of a person’s house in front of a large crowd of authorities. Their goal: to bring their friend to Jesus!

Jesus was ready: “*The power of the Lord was with Him to heal*” (v. 17b). And Jesus delivered! “*When he saw their faith, He said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you’*” (v. 20). He saw the faith of the friends gathered around this man. Jesus recognized this steadfast faith and He healed the man, this man whose friends cared for him. And they all went home, glorifying God together.

C.S. Lewis wisely wrote of friendship, “[It] is the greatest of all worldly goods.... If I had one piece of advice to a young man about a place to live, I think I should say, ‘Sacrifice almost everything to live where you can be near your friends.’” For to know that your friends are waiting for you to be with them, brings great joy.

What needs to happen for you to join old friends, or find new friends with whom to “*take your mat and go home*” (v. 24)? And with them share—“*amazement, to glorify God, to be filled with awe (and exclaim) we have seen extraordinary things today*” (v. 26). It can happen with you and your friends in a room with Jesus!

Reflection:

Who are you most like in the story? Why? Are you a little paralyzed now—emotionally, spiritually, relationally? Ask Jesus to heal you from the “paralysis” that you may be experiencing. Thank God that He has sent His Son to help you with your affliction.



Wednesday, February 24, 2020

“No Mo’ FOMO” | Eddie Godbold

Read: Luke 5:33–39

Have you ever, as part of a group of like-minded people, been absolutely certain of the merit of a topic or policy, only to be personally confronted with evidence that proved you wrong? Is it easy in a situation like this to embrace the new way of thinking, and put away the old?

In today’s passage, Jesus is asked about the merits of fasting. Those around him were largely accustomed to this practice as a way of concentrating on prayer and meditation, or of punishing oneself for a sin committed. They even noticed Pharisees and John’s disciples fasting—it must have seemed odd that Jesus’ disciples weren’t following suit! Notice how Jesus compares the “old” with the “new” as he responds with a parable. The old mentality of the disciples and Pharisees was one of accusations and obedience to the law, whereas the new covenant made manifest in Jesus is characterized by forgiveness that fulfills the “old” covenant and offers radically renewed life through the Spirit.

Unfortunately, the Pharisees and disciples would struggle with recognizing and accepting this new way of life. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, we see the disciples attempt in vain to simply merge their “old” worldly mindset with the ways of Jesus. As God’s people today, we are also called to embrace the Gospel. While we anticipate the Easter celebration of Christ’s resurrection, and await the day when our bodies too will be resurrected, Jesus calls us to let his Gospel touch every aspect of our lives.

How sad it is, then, that we often forfeit this hope by refusing to let go of the “old,” perhaps tempted by a fear of missing out (FOMO) on the lifestyle of those around us if we fully embrace the Gospel’s calling.

Pressing into this struggle, a wise preacher once said, “Because of this hope that we have in the resurrection of [our bodies], it makes no sense for Christians to have FOMO.... If you are in Christ, you will miss out on nothing. There is an eternity in a renewed earth that awaits you.” (Rev. Gabe Kasper, Oct. 28, 2018).

Reflection:

Are there areas of your life where you experience FOMO? In response to this fear, how might you instead lean daily into the hope of the Gospel?



Thursday, February 25, 2021

“Giving Achievement a Rest” | Sam Rentschler

Read: Luke 6:1–11

As the first shelter-in-place orders were issued last March, many experienced changes to the tempo of daily life. For some, a time away from work or the absence of a commute offered the promising prospect of more downtime. Social media exploded with ideas and inspirational messages on how one could make the most of that downtime spent at home. Facebook and online magazines teemed with ideas for dazzling quarantine projects and reminders that time at home could result in awesome achievements. After all, did not Isaac Newton discover the law of gravity during quarantine from the plague, and Henry David Thoreau write *Walden* based on his experience living in restful solitude?

As we all know, reality was somewhat less ideal, and this year was far from restful. It may, in fact, seem incongruous to discuss the beginning of shelter-in-place orders and quarantine in the context of a passage about the Sabbath. However, there is an important connection. For the quickness with which folks sought to find projects to fill their extra time, which was a kind of “Sabbath” from the workaday world, indicates a general misguided attitude toward downtime, and by proxy, toward rest. We are simply not good at resting! Being comfortable with rest is difficult in today’s society where achievement shines center stage. It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing anything that could be considered “free time” not as an opportunity to rest, but rather as a chance to achieve more, hustle more, do more. Above all, we are tempted to show others our busyness, which, in our culture, correlates to our worth.

In today’s passage, the Pharisees exhibit a similar twisted perspective on rest. In their harsh judgment of Jesus and His disciples picking and eating grain in the fields on the Sabbath, they reveal their attitude toward the sacred seventh day. For them, Sabbath observance was just another law to be followed, an arduous burden to be publicly borne to demonstrate their “righteousness” and superiority.

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees, that He is “Lord of the Sabbath,” reinforces that Sabbath rest is to be valued as God values it, not as they—or we—might be tempted to value it. In his declaration of Himself as Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus reminds us that the Sabbath is not to be used by people for some kind of show of worth. He is showing us that when we choose to rest and let go of the idols of achievement and image, we can trust in Him to provide. In fact, only when we do choose to rest will we be able to recognize that His abundant provision is not something that only slavish 24/7 toil will afford us but is rather a gift from our Heavenly Father.

Reflection:

What would it look like to trust God by resting intentionally today? How could you take a break with God instead of taking a break *from* God?



Friday, February 26, 2021

“Blessings and Woes: Endurance, Christ-Centered Postures, and Eternal Reward” | Kyle Gontjes

Read: Luke 6:12–26

Picture this. You are in middle school, sitting on a cold, metal chair, half-heartedly listening to a lecture on geology. During this lecture, your mind drifts, not to geology or the previous class’s material, but instead towards your evening plans. You find yourself yearning to replace the toil of middle school with the joy of video games. The school bell could not come soon enough, and you patiently wait in anticipation! Oh, the wait!

Here, we compared present reality, a “boring” geology class, with the satiating, future reward of video games. By reflecting on our present postures and future aspirations, like those of this story, we can reveal our heart’s desires—our loves. Many have noticed the power of this practice. We are frequently reminded to correct our posture, to “stop living in the past,” to “live in the present” yet simultaneously prepare for the future. How dizzying!

Today’s passage, Luke 6:12–26, relates our present, earthly postures to either eternal blessing or everlasting woe.

Specifically, our passage contains four beatitudes, that is, proclamations of holy blessing. Jesus proclaims that the “*poor*,” “*hungry*,” “*those who weep*,” and those who experience earthly persecution, are blessed (v. 20–22). Each is to be rewarded in heaven. By contrast, Jesus proclaimed woe unto those who are “*rich*” or “*full now*,” who “*laugh*,” or receive earthly praise (v. 24–26)

How should we respond to these provocative proclamations? How should we reorient our hearts amidst a world of competing interests?

Today’s text reminds us that our earthly, self-seeking postures provide neither hope nor heavenly reward. Instead, we are called to patiently anticipate heavenly reward and Christ’s return. While this hope does not remove earthly toil, the security of heavenly reward frees us to faithfully serve as agents of renewal. With this Christ-centered posture, we are empowered to wholeheartedly love our neighbors and magnanimously build the Kingdom of God.

Reflection:

How do you find strength, endurance, and rest in Jesus? What distracts you from rejoicing in our heavenly blessing?



Saturday, February 27, 2021

“This Is About You” | Abby Haggard

Read: Luke 6:37–49

I have a bad habit, and maybe you share it with me. It's Sunday morning and I sit in the pew, listening as the liturgist reads the Scripture for that week. When the pastor comes up and begins preaching, I nod along, understanding and agreeing with the words coming out of his mouth. As I nod along in agreement, I think of all the people in my life who need to hear this sermon, saying to myself something like this: “If only _____ were here. They need to hear someone tell them that they're making an idol of their job and not leaving enough room for Jesus on the throne of their heart.”

I find myself doing this too often. I'll hear a moving sermon or come across a rich Bible passage and immediately think of *someone else* that needs to hear it. Instead of hearing what the Lord has to say to me, I decide that whatever I am reading or hearing must be meant for others.

Yikes.

I am not insinuating that it is fundamentally wrong to think of ways to desire to share a message you are hearing with others you whom believe may need to hear it. But when the preached word becomes a legalistic moral lesson (especially suitable for others) instead of the saving message of the Gospel for all, it becomes an issue.

Jesus addresses this point in today's Scripture verse, when He encourages us to take out the log that is in our own eye before pointing out the speck in someone else's (vv. 41–42). In other words, that sermon I identify as being so compelling for *someone else* to hear is for me, too, convicting as it may be. In other words, the “all” in Paul's words to the Romans, “*For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” surely includes me—and you—as well (3:23).

I do not say all of this merely to make anyone feel guilty. Instead, I am expressing that it is only when we reflect inwardly on faults and understand the great depth to which we each have fallen short that we can step back and gaze in awe on the magnitude of God's amazing grace, which He has generously given each and every one of his children, including you.

Reflection:

Pause today and look for some ways God may be speaking to you in your life. What might those be?



Sunday, February 28, 2021

“Trusting God in Times of Trouble” | Paul Chamberlain

Read: Psalm 40:1–8

Does the phrase “A Psalm of David” ring any bells? Have you heard of David battling Goliath, repenting of sin, or ruling as King of Israel? Knowing the accounts of Samuel anointing David as King, and of David defeating Goliath (1 Samuel 16–17), surely David and all those around him must have clearly anticipated that he would soon become Israel’s ruler. Surely, his ascent to the throne was imminent. And we might agree.

But we would be dead wrong. While David trusts in God, he has to endure several assassination attempts, feign madness, and flee both to the wilderness and to his enemies the Philistines (after having killed Goliath the Philistine hero) before finally becoming king (1 Samuel 18–27). So when David says, “*I waited patiently for the LORD,*” he is most definitely speaking from personal experience! David is trusting God, both during and after the battle with Goliath, but his circumstances grow ever more dire. It even comes to the point where David’s heart tells him that Saul will succeed in taking his life (1 Samuel 27:1).

Can you relate to David? Do you ever feel like you’re trusting God to work, only to have the situation get worse instead of better? This is a very difficult place to be, but it’s not the end of the story for David, or for you. God hears David’s cries, sees his distress, and enters into David’s suffering. He brings David out of the miry bog and sets him firmly on the Rock of his salvation. David can sing because God has put a new song in his mouth. And David cannot help but declare God’s wondrous deeds and delight to do His will.

David’s problems don’t go away after becoming king. *Au contraire!* In this very Psalm, David later asks God to deliver him from those seeking to snatch away his life (vv. 13–15). And the worst is yet to come, as David’s own son, Absalom, temporarily deposes him, as recounted in 2 Samuel 13–18. But David knows that God is faithful and most worthy of our trust and praise, even in the darkest of nights.

Reflection:

Do you ever feel like God is distant and your troubles are pressing down hard? Why is it difficult to wait patiently for the Lord? How can you ask God to put a new song of praise in your heart?



Monday, March 1, 2021

“He’s Got This” | Charissa Hasper

Read: Luke 7:1–10

This reading reminded me of my childhood. As a kid, I was a ball of energy. I had cute, blonde pigtails, and I talked just as often and as loudly as I do now! But for all my great qualities as a kid, I had the hardest time asking for help. I insisted on fixing most problems myself. I was too proud to admit that I needed help. As I grew up, I realized I have neither the skills nor the capacity to do everything on my own, and I don’t need to. But it took me a long time to get there.

The centurion’s experience parallels my own. Even in a position of power, he was faced with the reality that he was powerless to heal his servant. If he hadn’t acknowledged his inadequacy, he would never have thought to turn to Jesus in faith. Acknowledging we are not strong or good enough to save ourselves is the first step to following God. Once taken, it requires us to turn our focus to Him.

C.S. Lewis, as usual, expressed this idea succinctly: “As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”

No matter your job title, social status, or skill set, you cannot save yourself from sin. We cannot serve God or receive His salvation if we are absorbed with ourselves. By acknowledging our weaknesses and inadequacies, we can accept God’s grace through Christ’s death on the cross—a salvation that is for the entire world. We don’t have to save ourselves or walk through life relying on our own frail power to hold us up. And no matter how often we fall short, we have forgiveness in Christ. Give your failings up to God in humility and let Him carry you. Then, you can boldly step out in faith, knowing that He’s got this.

Reflection:

Take some time this week to think about areas in your life that you haven’t given to God out of pride. How is he calling you to step out in faith this week?



Tuesday, March 2, 2021

“Interrupted” | Tony Creeden

Read: Luke 7:36–50

It was a rude interruption, but she couldn't help it. Once she had learned Jesus was nearby, it was imperative that she see Him; more than see Him, worship Him. She knew people would talk—she was used to that—but that was the least of her concerns. More prominent on her mind was the deep desire to honor the One who could redeem the life she found herself living. She felt the weight of her sin and needed relief. She needed the only one who could truly offer that kind of freedom. She needed Jesus.

It was a rude interruption, and he was furious. What right did this woman have to enter his home and make a fool of herself when he had more important matters to attend to. He needed to understand this so-called Messiah, to know who this Jesus really was, to sift through his words and find the real truth of his identity buried underneath the growing mound of myths and miracle accounts. Then in walks this woman. Groveling. Embarrassing. If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this was who was touching him, for she is a sinner. A sinner! That's who she was! Then again, maybe this did say a lot about who Jesus really is. No Messiah would accept such a woman. Could this be the answer to his burning questions? Maybe she had done them all a favor. Time would tell.

Two interruptions. For the woman, an interruption to a life that had been marked by sin and sorrow. For the man, an interruption of a dead spirituality that had lost its connection to the heart of the very God it proclaimed to follow. And now in one moment, Jesus would use this interruption to change two lives. The woman would receive the forgiveness her heart longed for, and the man would receive the wake-up call that could potentially turn him back into a real relationship with God. It was the exact interruption they both needed.

Lent is intended to be that same kind of interruption. It is a moment to stop and evaluate where we are and how we got there. It is a chance to hear words from God that make your mind and soul come to a screeching halt as you reflect on life as it stands now. Are you like the woman, struggling with secret sins that you have become an expert at hiding while they eat you from the inside? Or are you more like Simon, someone who has become rigid and judgmental, hiding behind a shield of self-righteousness and pride because looking inward has become too painful? In either case, it is now Lent, the ideal time to stop and return to a right relationship with God. One that interrupts a comfortable life and makes you embarrassingly grovel at the feet of Jesus so that Jesus can interrupt you. Lent reminds us that it is Jesus' turn to interrupt the voice in your head that tells you that your sin is all you are and ever will be. Lent is Jesus interrupting the judgment that is intended for you and absorbing its full weight to set you free. Lent is an interruption of mercy unlike anything you've ever seen. It is the chance for you, like the woman, to hear, *“Your faith has saved you; go in peace”* (v. 50).

Reflection:

Where in your life could you use an interruption? Why?



Wednesday, March 3, 2021

“Calm Before, During, and After the Storm” | Mary Kay Liston

Read: Luke 8:22–25

Jesus and his disciples were in the midst of a great storm on the lake when their boat became swamped. They felt they were in great danger. Jesus slept through all of this. The disciples went and woke him, saying, “*Master, Master, we’re going to drown!*” (v. 24). He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. By quieting the storm, Jesus showed the disciples that He has command of all things. Jesus then questioned the disciples’ faith, faith in the God who is always in command, and who loves them.

In our daily lives we also encounter storms, that may sometimes seem like tests of our faith. Some of the situations we face, indeed, may be much greater than the storm the disciples faced. We can be assured of two great truths, however. Jesus is aware of our struggles, and through these times, the Lord is always inviting us to trust in His love and protection. The disciples knew they needed to call on Jesus to save them. We know this, too. He provides for us the same peace that He provided the disciples in the boat in Luke 8. For the disciples, He was just a few feet away, and for us, He is just a prayer away! I know I do not need to fear anything, for He lives in my heart.

Reflection:

Pray a prayer of thanks that Jesus is with you through all life’s storms.



Thursday, March 4, 2021

“Two Precious Daughters” | Amy Robson

Read: Luke 8:40–56

While people gathered around Jesus, “*Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with Him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying*” (vv. 41–42). Jesus immediately responded to the father’s anguish, and began to make his way to Jairus’ home. However, his movements were interrupted when someone touched him. He stopped to inquire who this person was. The disciples were incredulous about his inquiry because they were being swarmed by a crowd. When He insisted that power had gone out from Him, the “guilty” woman came forward.

Although she had already received healing for her bleeding, Jesus wanted more for this woman who had lived with shame for so long. Despite having been on a mission to heal the beloved twelve-year-old daughter of an important synagogue leader, He stopped to restore this twelve-year outcast and give her a new identity: “*Daughter, your faith has healed you*” (v. 41). He calls her “Daughter!”

With the love of the Father, Jesus then continued on his journey to Jairus’ home. Just as Peter had logically suggested that there was no point in finding out who had touched Him earlier, the onlookers now informed Him that there was no need to go to Jairus’s house; his daughter was already dead. Their common sense counsel, however, did not deter Jesus. As he empathized with the heart of the bereaved father, He went into the little girl’s room, took her hand, and said, “*My child, get up!*” And she did.

While Jesus often used parables to teach truth to His disciples, this account is instructive as a kind of non-fiction parable, with Jairus, his daughter, and the bleeding woman as the central characters. Just as Jairus sought healing for his only daughter, Jesus sought healing for another “daughter,” the woman, who needed relief not just for her physical malady, but also for her emotional wounds of shame. He found her, saw her, loved her, and gave her the new identity of daughter.

In both situations, Jesus defied our logic. He demonstrated that His ways are not our ways. The unnamed woman wanted physical healing, but Jesus healed her emotionally and spiritually, too. Jairus wanted physical healing for his daughter, and Jesus brought her back to life. Most importantly, Jesus’ father-heart embraced them both as beloved daughters.

Reflection

The Lord considers each one of us as His “only” child, and He desires to meet our needs above and beyond what we can imagine. We just need to believe it!



Friday, March 5, 2021

“You Give Them Something to Eat” | Becky Johnson

Read: Luke 9:10–17

The needs just don't seem to stop! A friend loses her mother on Christmas Day. Another friend has a 26-year-old daughter just diagnosed with breast cancer. A family member has been diagnosed with lupus and is expecting a baby. Aging parents are struggling. A friend has walked away from her faith. Another's daughter is struggling with addiction. The list goes on and on.

We all have in our lives people we know and love who are hurting, struggling, needing help. In addition, the current political situation creates fear and strife. Then there are the global needs that we see and read about: people dying from COVID-19, refugees stuck in overcrowded camps, thousands struggling with depression and anxiety, broken marriages, abuse, racial tension, poverty. And in the midst of this we are also painfully aware of our own brokenness.

The needs crowd around us, hem us in, press down on us. For a time, we try to meet the needs, but then comes the moment when like the disciples, we want to send the crowd of needs away. Enough! Let them get their own food. Let them get their needs met elsewhere. Yet Jesus welcomes the large crowd with all of their needs. And when the disciples want to send them away, he says something surprising, “*You give them something to eat.*”

Why does Jesus say that? He knows their limited supply: two fish and five loaves of bread. He knows they do not have enough money to buy more food. So why does he tell them to give the crowd something to eat? To make them realize that they are looking at the problem from the wrong perspective. They have been looking at their own resources or lack thereof to meet the needs of the crowd. That's the point. Their own resources are not enough. Not by a long shot—they never will be. But with God all things are possible.

Jesus then takes the little they have and blesses it, and it miraculously feeds over 5,000 people! We don't have enough love, enough wisdom, enough resources, enough compassion to meet the needs of those around us, much less the needs of the world. But Jesus does. He invites us to serve, not out of our own strength, but by bringing what we have to offer to Him and allowing Him to anoint, bless, and work through us to welcome the crowd and serve the needs of those around us.

Finally, Jesus offers us Himself as the Bread of Life. He meets us each week at Communion to give us Himself, broken for us, to heal our brokenness, to forgive our sin, and to fill us with His love to share with this needy, broken world.

Reflection:

Where are you trying to meet needs out of your own resources rather than turning to Jesus? How can you continue to feed on Jesus, the Bread of Life?



Saturday, March 6, 2021

“Our Will vs. God’s Will” | Thad Polk

Read: Luke 9:18–27

I accepted Jesus as my Savior after my oldest sister, Sherri, shared the Gospel with me over Christmas vacation one year. I was very excited about my new faith, but I was also pretty immature spiritually. Actually, if I’m completely honest, I was embarrassingly, excruciatingly immature. I viewed my faith very much like a superpower that I could use to do whatever I wanted. In fact, I can vividly remember testing out my new powers by trying to make things in my bedroom levitate, solely by the power of intense prayer! I thought of faith as a way to accomplish my will without considering whether what I was praying for was God’s will. And no, I wasn’t 9 years old at the time; I was actually 19!

Most Christians would agree that God is not in the business of granting all our wishes, but rather of accomplishing His will and furthering His kingdom. Nevertheless, it’s easy for us to confuse our will with His will. Consider the early Christians in today’s passage. These people were Jewish, and the land where they were living, the promised land that God Himself had given to their forefathers, was under Roman occupation. They were waiting for God to rescue them. Then along came Jesus preaching a powerful message of freedom from bondage accompanied by many miraculous signs. In fact, as we read in yesterday’s devotion, He fed 5,000 people immediately before the events in this passage occurred. It would only be natural for Jesus’ followers to think that He must have been sent by God to rescue them from Rome and restore Israel to its former glory. What they wanted in their Messiah had to be what God wanted, right? Wrong.

Jesus informs his followers that, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”* (v. 22). Not exactly the kind of salvation that the oppressed Jews were hoping for! And yet, Jesus knew that there could be no true salvation without His sacrificial death as an atonement for sins. God’s plan was infinitely better than the plans His followers had in mind.

Of course, the same is true for us today. God’s plans for our lives are infinitely better than our own. And although most Christians would acknowledge that truth, how often we make decisions based purely on trying to maximize our own comfort and happiness rather than based on what will advance God’s kingdom. Instead, may we strive to follow Jesus’ command: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (v. 23).

Your will, not ours, be done Lord.

Reflection:

Are there areas of your life in which you feel like you’re pursuing your will, rather than God’s will? Or areas in which you’re trying to convince yourself that your will IS God’s will? What steps can you take to turn those areas over to God?



Sunday, March 7, 2021

“Springs of Water in the Desert” | Paul Chamberlain

Read: Psalm 63:1–8

Does the phrase, “A Psalm of David” ring any bells? Are you having *déjà vu* from last Sunday’s reading? In today’s reading, we return to our good friend David, who is writing this Psalm from the wilderness of Judah.

As we hinted at last week, David’s life as king of Israel is not all sunshine and roses. After sinning against Uriah and Bathsheba and repenting of his sin (2 Samuel 11–12), God tells David through the prophet Nathan that “*I will raise up evil against you out of your own house*” (2 Samuel 12:11). In a dramatic turn of events recounted in 2 Samuel 15–18, David’s dearly beloved son, Absalom, brings this prophecy to fruition by turning the Israelites and some of David’s inner circle against him. David is forced to ignominiously flee Jerusalem and camp out in the Judean wilderness until it is safe for him to return home. And it is from this place of uncertainty, shame, and humility that David pens our reading for today.

David fervently thirsts for God as he would thirst for water in a desert or perhaps in the wilderness of the Judean Desert when running for his life. Despite his circumstances, David blesses God and recounts how God has been his help in past times of trouble. David is confident that God’s steadfast love is better than his life as king or even than surviving his son’s *coup d’état*. “*In the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy*” (v. 7), he writes, and “*My soul clings to you*” (v. 8). David does not know how his story will end, but he does know he can go through it clinging closely to the God who saves.

We may feel like we are in a desert or wilderness of sorts with nary a drop of water to drink. But we have a God who does not stop with quenching our thirst. Instead, God generously pours out full-blown “*springs of water welling up to eternal life*” (John 4:14) on all who thirst for and drink of Jesus and His Gospel. Let us long for and find Him today!

Reflection:

How do you thirst for Jesus? How have you seen God bring forth springs of water in your heart? How can you rest in the shadow of God’s wings and cling to Him in times of trouble, even though you don’t know how your story will end?



Monday, March 8, 2020

“What’s the Rush?” | Makayla Wylie

Read: Luke 9:57–62

On January 6, 2020, I had big plans. I was going to have the best first week of classes possible and I was determined to finish my to-do list on time. I would create a semester that was both fun and successful with new goals, personal projects, and (of course) plenty of coffee. I was going to go to all of my classes, get to a basketball game, and hit the gym. Like everyone else in the city of Ann Arbor, I was always moving.

On January 6, 2021, I spent the day at home. I read a book and then eventually ate dinner. For as everyone in Ann Arbor knows, a few short weeks after my day of big plans, all plans were halted, and productivity ceased as the COVID-19 crisis became a full-blown pandemic. We now live day by day, staying safe and doing significantly less. Yet, even with all of this free time and change of pace, my spiritual life is eerily—and disappointingly—similar.

In Luke 9:60, Jesus commands a follower to “*go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*” Jesus urges this man to start following Him immediately, not even to go home to say goodbye to his family or bury his father. Jesus is commanding this follower to put plans on hold and do the most important thing possible: follow Him. The urgency is unmistakable.

It may seem odd to talk about urgency right now, when everything seems to be on hold. However, I think this is the ideal time to start following God urgently. With time to develop a deep relationship with Him, we have an opportunity to create a great foundation for witnessing to others. With personal contacts limited to only a small circle of people, one can develop a couple meaningful relationships instead of many shallow ones.

We may not be called to leave our fathers or families (v. 60–61), but we are called to follow Jesus with willingness to put Him first in our lives. I want to challenge you to make sacrifices like those called for in this passage. Challenge yourself to use this time to grow a deeper relationship with God and others. Consider the way having a different schedule can be beneficial to your spiritual life. Follow Jesus at all costs and live “all in” as Jesus’s follower.

Reflection:

How can you follow God with a sense of urgency?



Tuesday, March 9, 2021

“The Reality of Compassion and Mercy” | Larry Frank

Read: Luke 10:25–37

“Behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to a test” (v. 25). Boldly, this lawyer asks Jesus a question. Jesus responds with a harder question from the Law. The clever lawyer then responds with the exact right answer, including the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus affirms, and then adds simply, “Do this, and you will live.” Jesus goes on to tell the man the well-known parable that will define the “neighbor” that the lawyer is called on to love.

A man is traveling through the “robbers’ alley” on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, attacked, and left “half dead.” The first to pass by is a priest, who knew the Law (Leviticus 21:1–3). He followed the Law and understood that to get involved would be to make himself “unclean.” A Levite, also a temple insider, was next to pass by, and he also knew the Law (Numbers 19:11–22). His duties were keeping the Tabernacle from being “defiled.” Both kept the Law to the letter, as required of them in Numbers 19:21a: “And it shall be a statute forever for them.” So, why are they perceived as the bad guys in this story? Is it because they are measured against the Samaritan, who stops and shows “compassion”? Compassion!

Then Jesus puts a final question to the lawyer: “Who proved to be the neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer’s answer—“The one who showed mercy”—is correct. Mercy! So, the answers to the questions in this story are Compassion and Mercy, not the Law. But, Jesus adds this, “You go, and do likewise.” That is an actual directive for personal action from Jesus! Not only with words, but as the Samaritan did, with intentional helpful actions.

This is the Gospel of Jesus. It is the unfiltered witness of the Gospel to those being helped. As C.S. Lewis summarizes, “Our courage (to act boldly like the Samaritan) is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality.”

Reflection:

Has anyone, anywhere, ever tested your willingness to follow the heart of the Law, to show compassion and mercy, like the good Samaritan did?



Wednesday, March 10, 2021

“Our Father” | Liz Komurka

Read: Luke 11:1–13

Luke 11 opens with the one of the disciples asking how to pray. Fundamentally, that question is getting at not only the desire to be in communion with God, but how to approach God. And that makes sense. Imagine you were going to go before the Creator of literally everything (Genesis 1:1–17), who knows you more intimately and honestly than you can ever know yourself (Psalm 139:13–16); you’d want to get the diction and syntax correct.

And yet, we are not given endless rules of address and lists of titles with the appropriate timing for a curtsy or bow. The Lord’s Prayer opens not with “Our King, Creator of All” but with “*Our Father*” (Luke 11:2). This language is reminiscent of that used by God upon Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan: “*You are my beloved Son*” (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). It denotes an unconditional and loving relationship, extended to us. Through our baptism, we have the ability to call God “Father” and speak to him the same way we would a cherished, loved family member (Romans 8:14–17, Galatians 4:3–7). Moreover, through the person of Jesus Christ, we can boldly approach God and lay our needs before Him (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus’ answer that believers should open prayer by calling on “Our Father” would have been shocking to His Jewish listeners in its invitation to enter into a familial relationship with God. We, too, should marvel at the intimacy God desires by inviting us to address Him as “Our Father.” We have a God who actively invites us to build a personal relationship with Him—whether we have the words in our hearts or rely on Scripture to start speaking with Him. And He wants nothing more than to draw us closer to Him.

Reflections:

When are times where you are caught up in how you speak to God instead of simply talking to Him? What are the times where you find yourself freely speaking to God and His Son?



Thursday, March 11, 2021

“Inner Transformation” | Charissa Hasper

Read: Luke 11:37–44

I think it's safe to say Lutherans like to follow the rules. We like going through motions God has set for us. He gave us His law so we can follow it, and doing so is important! But I think it's also fair to say we take it too far sometimes. We go to church, know our theology, say the right prayers—but we start to focus exclusively on those things. We rely on our actions for salvation instead of God's grace.

The same thing happened with the Pharisees. They did right on the outside, but their hearts were sinful. What Christ wants is more than obeying Him because “We are supposed to.” Instead, He wants us to turn inward, to invite Him into our whole life. He wants our belief in His promises to shape everything we do. Christ died so we can have a relationship with Him again. It should be out of a desire to be close to God that we obey His laws.

Lay your sins before God and accept His grace. Continue in spiritual disciplines, and search for God outside them as well. Grateful for God's faithfulness, follow Him where He leads.

Let this meditation from Martin Luther fill your soul today: “Now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful.... Furthermore, I have the comfortable certainty that I please God, not by reason of the merit of my works, but by reason of His merciful favor promised to me...if I work too little, or badly, He does not impute it to me, but with fatherly compassion pardons me and makes me better. This is the glorying of all the saints in their God.”

Reflection:

How might you be “going through the motions” in your faith walk? How is He calling you to further live out His grace where He's placed you?



Friday, March 12, 2021

“What, Me Worry?” | Todd Baker

Read: Luke 12:13–34

To say that we live in a time full of anxiety is a massive understatement. There is so much cause for us to worry.

Do you have enough toilet paper? Are you taking every possible precaution to avoid contracting an illness? Are you working out enough? Do you have enough saved for retirement? Did you see a tweet and get enraged about it? Are the government officials enacting policies that you agree with? It's 10 p.m., do you know where your children are?

While these questions may have some important issues beneath them that are not inherently bad to ponder, the constant worry that can come with them can be paralyzing. Pause for a second, and really think about what good has come about from constantly worrying about these concerns. Can a life governed by anxiety actually expand our life expectancy, clothe us, enrich our relationships, or better allow us to serve God and His people?

As followers of Christ, we are uniquely equipped to cast these worries aside. If constant worry cannot even add an hour to the span of our life, why not allow the Creator of the universe to provide the answers to our worries for us? He has provided nature with all that it needs, not to mention salvation from our sins. Indeed, even the greatest worry we could possibly have—what happens when we die? —has been removed. Instead of spending our lives wrapped in fear of the things of this world, let us seek to find our rest in Him.

As our text for today explains, the thoughts that permeate our days showcase that which is at the forefront of our hearts and minds, “*our treasure*” (v. 34). With Christ as our treasure, and thus at the center of our hearts, we can allow Him to take our worries from us. This cannot be done by our strength alone. In this Lenten season, join me in praying that God would take our worries and fears away from us.

Reflection:

Think of a time that you have been incredibly anxious. What helped you curb this anxiety? How would our reading today have encouraged you during that time of heightened anxiety? Would you have found it a helpful guide?



Saturday, March 13, 2021

“Be Ready” | Andrew Komurka

Luke 12:35–48

The Roman philosopher Seneca reportedly said, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." In light of today's reading, we can paraphrase Seneca to something like, "Being lucky means being ready." Readiness is something we recognize when we see it. A pack of tissues in a purse, jumper cables under a car seat, even a plastic bag clipped to a dog's leash. Being ready means thinking now about what could happen in the future, and acting now to enable acting appropriately if or when that future comes true.

Readiness is tricky, though, because answering the underlying question, "What should I be ready for?" is difficult. Thankfully, Luke 12:35–38 and other similar passages (Matthew 24:36–51) answer for us. We need to be ready for Jesus to return "*at an hour when [we] do not expect him*" (Luke 12:40), and that when he does return, "*Each of us will give an account of himself to God*" (Romans 14:12).

Now that we've answered the "what" question, "How can I be ready?" is the natural follow-up. Again, we are given answers. In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus details the metrics used to evaluate our account: "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me*" (Matthew 25:35–36, 40).

With these words of Jesus in mind, spiritual readiness means living a life filled with serving God by serving others, especially the "least" among us. It's not as simple as grabbing an extra napkin in case your ice cream melts quickly, or double-checking that you do indeed have those jumper cables in the trunk. Spiritual readiness is a marathon made even more challenging because the finish line is a mystery.

Thankfully, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit's encouragement and support: "*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:7–8).

Reflection:

What does spiritual readiness look like in your life? How can you help others improve their spiritual readiness?



Sunday, March 14, 2021

“Blessed Are the Forgiven” | Ashleigh Creeden

Read: Psalm 32:1–5

We’ve all felt it. That crawling out of your skin—or burrowing deeper inside of it—feeling. The imminent need to retreat, to run away, but having nowhere to go. The physical ache—a sick-to-the-stomach feeling, or “bones wasting away” from embarrassment or shame over sins committed. It’s a visceral feeling of being exposed, without want of exposure, along with a desire for self-preservation.

Guilt from sins can do that to us. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, and like David in this Psalm, sin causes an inherent desire to hide. We want to feel better and alleviate the guilt. We want to heal, but often our first attempt at healing is through a solitary hiding place rather than confession to God or to others. Hiding seems safer than sharing because it feels as if admitting, acknowledging, and confessing our sins, even to God, would bring the opposite of healing: exposure, humiliation, and more pain. Cognitively, we may know of God’s forgiveness, but sometimes the greatest distance in the world is the one between our head and our sinful hearts.

In this Psalm, David accentuates this very tension that sin brings to our lives through his own experience with hiding. He articulately expresses the contrast between the ache of unrepented sins and the joyous healing of forgiveness. This beautiful contrast points directly to God’s grace. With sin we experience the heaviness of guilt, the lies of shame, and the isolation brought on by our desire to hide. With God we experience freedom from shame’s prison cell, vindication from our sin, and a grace so overwhelming that its peace and joy and beauty change us. It lifts the weight that sin places on our bodies and allows us to live in His love.

David’s Psalm reminds us that true healing can only come from raw, honest confession in relationship with God. Lent is a time for that reflection and confession. It’s a time to humbly acknowledge our sinfulness and come before God with contrite hearts in repentance. This season brings an awareness of our vast separation from God caused by our sin, but an equal awareness that He died to bring us back to Him. Our sin sent Him to the cross, but in repentance and relationship with Him, the cross atones for our sins and brings grace upon grace.

Reflection:

Has there been a time in your life when you’ve struggled with unrepentant sin?
How did it affect you?



Monday, March 15, 2021

“Repent and Trust” | Vanessa Lane

Read: Luke 13:1–9

“What do you think about Pilate mixing the blood of some Galileans with their temple sacrifices?” the crowd asks Jesus. According to Jewish law, mixing blood with a sacrifice would have made it unclean, and the text implies that it was their own blood. To a Jewish person in Jesus’ day, then, this inhumane act—that would surely have defiled the sacrifice—would have compounded the tragedy of their murder at the hands of Pilate. Being fully God and fully human, Jesus picks up the subtext behind their inquiry. He knows that they were really asking, “Was God revealing that *those* Galileans were somehow worse than all others by allowing them to suffer in this abominable way? Are you trying to confirm that they were worse than you, and therefore deserving of that punishment?” He is hinting at their smug feelings of self-righteousness.

Oof.

Maybe they did think they were better than the Galileans. But this raises an important question all Christians should ask: Is all suffering a punishment for wrongdoing? If we look back through Scripture and even at the lives of the great men and women of the faith who have preceded us, we do not necessarily see suffering as a punishment for sin. What we do see, however, is that suffering is always an invitation to seek God.

C.S. Lewis addresses this close connection between suffering and God’s invitation in his book, *The Problem with Pain*: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God is not evil. Rather He overturns the evil and pain from the sins we commit, as well as the sins that happen to us, and He uses them to draw us near to him. He draws us back to Him and away from the brokenness of humanity. Jesus has come to redeem us, not to punish us. And to be redeemed, repentance is necessary. “*Unless you repent, you likewise will perish,*” Jesus warns the crowd.

Repentance is more than a box to check, though. As defined in the Augsburg Confession, repentance is “Contrition + Faith,” meaning having a broken heart and trusting in Jesus for healing and life. This is what Jesus urges His listeners to do, and what he is still calling us to do today. Psalm 51:16-17 says it concisely: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*” Recognize your wrongdoing, bring it before Him as a sacrifice, and trust that He has overcome it and will bring forth new life in you.

Reflection:

Why do you think it can be hard to repent and trust Jesus?



Tuesday, March 16, 2021

“The Conquering King Laments” | Will Cannon

Read: Luke 13:31–35

This passage shows Jesus’ intense resolve to destroy the power of sin and death. Earlier, Luke had stated that Jesus had “*set his face to go to Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:51). In other words, it is clear that Jesus did not merely stumble into His crucifixion, or recklessly give His life over to the authorities. He willingly and decisively gave His life away in order to gain access to our hearts (Matthew 13:45–46).

The Pharisees catch up with Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God and healing people, and try to scare Him away by supplying information that Herod is seeking to kill him. Jesus not only responds with courage and defiance, He also reveals His true intent to gather all to Himself (v. 34). He laments over the failure of the religious systems of the day. Jerusalem, the City of David, the city of the Temple, the very dwelling of God on earth, is “the city that kills the prophets” and those sent by God. He ends by hearkening to the irony of his “triumphal entry” that we celebrate on Palm Sunday where all cry out, “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*” (v. 35).

Jesus’ response is striking because it is both bold and tender. He stands defiant in the face of worldly and spiritual authority, and merciful towards the children He will gather to Himself. Ultimately, it is Satan He calls a fox, and us, so graciously, His friends.

Reflection:

How does Jesus’ boldness and intentionality in going to the cross change the way I understand the crucifixion? Reflect on Jesus gathering His people to Himself as a hen gathering her brood. How do I express my willingness to belong to Christ even when He is going to be put to death?

Take some time and pray for Jews to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah.



Wednesday, March 17, 2021

“Priorities” | David Carlson

Read: Luke 14:25–33

Which of us has not been startled by Jesus’ admonition in Luke 14 that, “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*” If one were inclined to quote Jesus without context one could conclude that Jesus would have us love our enemies and hate our family. This, of course, would be nonsense. Surely Jesus doesn’t want us to hate anyone. And yet, and yet, and yet.

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis tells of the first time he met Arthur Greeves, who would become his closest and most enduring friend. Growing up, while they were neighbors, they had had little contact. Then one day while visiting Arthur’s home Lewis noticed a book lying on Arthur’s bedside table. It was a book of Norse mythology that was one of Lewis’ favorites. “You like that, too!” Lewis exclaimed, and the friendship began.

“Friendship,” Lewis was later to say, was the one love that rivals love of a sibling for strength and duration. The love of friendship differs from sibling love in its object. While the object of love of sisters and brothers is one for the other, the object that forms friendship is love of something beyond themselves. Do you love Big Ten basketball? Do you love bluegrass music? Do you love old movies? Well then, as Rick says to Captain Renault in the final scene of *Casablanca*, “Louis, this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

If basketball and bluegrass are not your cup of tea, can we still be friends? Pastor and best-selling author Tony Campolo, channeling Plato, asks us to imagine priorities represented as a triangle. At the base are all the things that interest us. As we move up towards the pinnacle, we prioritize our interests until we reach the peak and find the one thing that eclipses all others. The question is, “What is that one thing? Is it family? Is it a career? Or something else?” Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century American theologian, extols the virtue of family but warns us that love of family is simply an extension of love of self. This brings us back to Luke 14—and to Plato’s triangle.

What would Jesus have us place at the pinnacle of the triangle? Himself. A husband and wife standing side by side each adoring their Lord will be a better husband and a better wife with a deeper love for one another. You and I standing shoulder-to-shoulder worshiping the resurrected Lamb of God cannot but be friends. And through this kind of friendship each of us will be enabled for real discipleship. It is far easier to keep our attention directed to our God when the world around us is in chaos. And so here we are.

Reflection:

How has this past year changed your relationship with our Lord? How has it changed your relationship with those around you?



Thursday, March 18, 2021

“Rejoice With Me” | Andrew Komurka

Read: Luke 15:1–10

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.” You might have seen that adage on an inspirational social media post, a classroom poster, or even a throw pillow. It is an encouragement to set lofty goals, affirming that while 100% achievement can be an unrealistic, unhealthy standard, even 90% accomplishment will still be a high achievement worth celebrating. However, Luke 15:1–10 illustrates God’s desire to “*draw all men to [himself]*” (John 12:34). All men, 100% of them. Not just “some” or even “most.”

To the Pharisees who were muttering against Him, Jesus gives two illustrations of how highly He values reaching out to all. He delights in engaging with individuals who are not part of the “in crowd,” the “tax collectors,” and “sinners”—here represented by the sheep who has strayed and the lost coin. Not only do the shepherd and the woman—who represent God in the parables—give their complete attention to finding what they have lost, they invite their community to rejoice with them when they are successful (Luke 15:5, 9). The focus of both parables is on outreach, repentance, and celebrating recovery.

Jesus makes this mission very clear in His response to another group of muttering Pharisees: “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*” (Matthew 9:12–13).

His words are both an encouragement and a challenge. When we are lost sheep, we take comfort in knowing the Good Shepherd is pursuing us because He wants to restore His relationship with each of us, and celebrate with us when He does. When we find ourselves in the 99%, left in the open country, we are challenged and invited to join the celebration when the lost one is found.

Reflection:

What opportunities do you have to engage and interact with the “lost sheep” in your life? How can you celebrate and encourage outreach?



Friday, March 19, 2021

“The Little and the Big” | Allie Banach

Read: Luke 16:10–16

Everyone has their life figured out, right? Everyone always knows exactly who they are as a person, who they want to be, what their meaning is, and what they want in life? Whether we are high schoolers, college students, parents, or near retirement, that is certainly the complete opposite of reality.

The truth is that we can all relate to the feeling of being lost and without a direction or purpose. But through reflection and introspection, we discover the fundamental values and beliefs that help us in making the decisions that will restore our sense of direction. What better way to help us regain focus than by reading the Bible and talking to God, remembering that only He is the foundation and guide that we can trust and lean on throughout life?

In this passage, we are reminded of the importance of this focus. We simply cannot serve two masters without being dedicated to one and not to the other. This truth applies whether our second master is money, as in this passage, or success, sports, lust, or any other idolized wants. It is a basic truth, and we need to come back to the basics.

In sports and all other forms of learning, basics are the most important thing. If you do not know or cannot perform the basic forms for any activity, it will be very challenging to learn and perform the harder and more complex tasks. In my sport of diving, for example, if my back flip straights are inconsistent, and I do not model the dive before execution, I will most likely not be able to add a more advanced twist into the flip. The basics are critical.

Similarly, if we do not work on our “spiritual basics,” consistently praying and focusing on God’s Word, how can we expect to have a strong enough faith to be able to handle life’s bigger obstacles and struggles? We cannot! This does not mean that we have to be or appear perfect because that is utterly impossible. As the Scripture reading says, “*God knows your hearts.*” He knows you and He knows your efforts and your struggles. Serve only God and keep Him at the center of your life. If you find yourself straying, refocus and experience the joy of Him welcoming you back with open arms.

Reflection:

How are you prioritizing God and keeping Him at the center of your life? In the next week, what are one or two small things you can focus on to strengthen your relationship with God?



Saturday, March 20, 2021

“Discourse on Unexpected Reversals” | Steven Kurz

Read: Luke 16:19–31

Presumably, like the religious audience of Jesus, many of us have assured beliefs about who is in and who is out of the Kingdom of God. In this passage, as a child of Abraham, the rich man would clearly have been seen as “righteous” because God blesses those who are righteous. Lazarus, with his ordinary Greek name, was undoubtedly recognized as a poor Greek man, an unclean Gentile, and therefore, unrighteous. Why else was he poor?

But as in so many of Luke’s parables, Jesus deconstructs the commonsense notions of righteous/unrighteous, clean/unclean, and those who are in/out of the Kingdom of God. In Jesus’ reversal of what was surely a common story of his day, it was not the rich child of Abraham who went to feast with Abraham, but instead, the poor, uncircumcised man who ended up receiving eternal comfort.

The one who believed he was promised a place with Abraham because of his circumcision is now refused a place, and the one who was never circumcised now sits with the first person to be circumcised. The one who lavishly feasted every day yet refused to invite Lazarus to his table is now refused a place at the table with Abraham and Lazarus. The one whose sores were licked by dogs in his earthly life now receives comfort from Abraham.

This story, then, is a picture of eschatological fulfillment from Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain”: *“You who are poor are blessed, because the kingdom of God is yours. You who are now hungry are blessed, because you will be filled.... But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your comfort. Woe to you who are now full, for you will be hungry”* (vv. 6:20–21, 24–25). Lazarus, representing the poor and hungry, is now blessed.

Reflection:

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man holds up a mirror and forces us ‘children of Abraham’ to reassess who we think has a place at the table: Who am I excluding from having a place at the table?



Sunday, March 21, 2021

“Our Unfailing Father” | Liz Komurka

Read: Psalm 124

God had a covenantal relationship with the Israelites. He promised to do all of the heavy lifting by protecting, rescuing and providing for them. In exchange, all the Israelites had to do was dedicate their worship and service to Him alone and follow His Law. In the Old Testament, we see God makes not one covenant with His people, but five.

God flooded the earth and then saved creation, promising to never again destroy the Earth with flood waters (Noahic Covenant; Genesis 9:8–17). God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in Heaven (from whom shall come Jesus Christ), land to inherit, and that they will always be His people (Abrahamic Covenant; Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–21; and 17:1–21). God promised a Law to help guide His people in their relationship with each other and God Himself (Mosaic Covenant; Exodus 19:1–31:18; 34:1–28; Deuteronomy 5:1–30:20). God renewed His promise and Law, demonstrating His faithfulness and commitment to His people (Mosaic Covenant Renewed; Joshua 23:1–24:27). Finally, God promised that a King and Savior of all the Earth would come from the eternal House of David (Davidic Covenant; 2 Kings 7:1–29; 23:1–5; Psalm 89:1–37; Isaiah 55:3–4).

So why five Old Testament covenants? Because God’s greatest desire is to bring all of creation into communion with Him. In the Old Testament times, no matter how many animals were sacrificed, or how well the Law was kept, we humans were going to fall short, as we were bound by the stain of sin and death: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). The Law was not meant to save us (Hebrews 10:1–4); it was meant to teach us and reveal our sins (Galatians 3:19–25).

Even with our failings, however, God remains faithful to His people and His covenants, culminating, of course, in the perfect fulfillment of the old covenants: the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17). Through Him, all of our shortcomings, all of our failings, all of our inequities are made right, and we are restored to God.

Reflection:

What are some times when you did not see God’s presence watching over you until the calamity had passed? How are you comforted by the fact that He has secured covenantal relationships with His people from the very beginning of time?



Monday, March 22, 2021

“Doing What You’re Told” | Corissa Mattson

Read: Luke 17:7–10

As a full-time college student, I have to do a lot of reading and assignments for my classes. Sometimes what I’m working on is interesting, but other times when it’s late at night and I still have hours of work left to do, I find it quite frustrating. It doesn’t matter if I would rather be sleeping or doing literally anything else with my time. I am a student, so my job is to study. In return for receiving the knowledge of my professors, I agreed to do all the work they assigned when I chose to take their class. That is the nature of our relationship.

As we read in the parable, Jesus is telling his disciples to adopt this same mindset in their own work. Sometimes their work will go well, other times it will be hard. In the end it doesn’t really matter, as both the easy and the hard things are part of what God has assigned them to do in this world to further His Kingdom.

What about us? Certainly Jesus’s words apply to us as well, but personally, I sometimes forget just how important the things that God has asked us to do are. I want to pick out the easy bits and do those, or only focus on the parts that will make my church look good and me. But God has given me—and us—a job on this Earth. Regardless of how difficult or unappealing this job may seem at times, we are not the ones to whom the glory is due. He is. We are only doing the job he has set before us. We serve our master. What the world thinks of us is inconsequential.

Reflection:

What does it mean to you to adopt a servant mindset? Are you doing what God has asked of you or have you been selecting only what is easy?



Tuesday, March 23, 2021

“Remember to Say Thank You” | Jeaneen Wyly’

Luke 17:11–19

Luke 17:11–19 recounts Jesus’ healing of ten leprosy men and his encounter with the Samaritan leper, who returns to thank him. As in many recorded Gospel events, we can recognize ourselves in these Biblical characters. Sometimes we are healed and unthankful; sometimes we are trying to follow Jesus by reaching out to others. Prayerfully, this Lenten season, we have an opportunity to reflect and be cognizant of the healing, that Christ has worked in our lives.

When we are struggling with a difficult situation and need help or healing, we often reach out for God. In fact, I often find my prayers start with, “Please, God...” Like the lepers, though, we often forget those pleas when God has brought us through the trial. “Thank you for...” prayers are often forgotten. Though I look back and can see in hindsight how God has healed me through deaths, heartbreaks, and uncertainties, at the time, I was often oblivious.

When I do remember my thankfulness for God’s healing, I find myself called to reach out to others. I have always been drawn to the fact that Jesus spent his time with those whom the rest of the community regarded as “other”: a tax collector, “promiscuous” women, Samaritans, lepers. Just as God has called each of us into his family, he has called us to invite others in—those who do not yet know his love and healing or see themselves as part of his family because we have not yet shown them.

Finally, when I might feel convicted for not being thankful enough or not reaching out enough, I remember that I, too, am the healed person. Jesus has taken my sin away just as he took the man’s leprosy away, and he has made me whole and cleansed to stand, not facing the priest, but before God himself. As Pastor Meda Stamper writes, Jesus meets us in our dark, hidden, unclean places where “we may least want to be seen and most need to be touched.” I find these words of Stamper comforting: “Jesus, who is not afraid of borderlands, does not mind meeting us in those places, and it may be that by recognizing Him there, we will find in our deepest selves a new outpouring of the grateful love that makes well.”

Reflections:

Where are you in the story right now? In what areas has Jesus healed you? Take a moment to say a prayer of thanks and invite him to open your eyes to others who may need to see his love and healing.



Wednesday, March 24, 2021

“A Purpose Beyond Justice” | Tony Creeden

Read: Luke 18:1–8

It is easy to become preoccupied with Justice. News outlets seem to vampirically feed off of our unhealthy addiction to stories. Additionally, click-bait about social strife and tragedy bleeds us dry of hope and leaves us tired and outraged. It is in these moments of hopeless weariness that our inner demand for justice can consume us, causing us to disproportionately fixate on the need for all things wrong to be made right. That’s when we can get lost.

To help us to find our way back, Jesus offers us the Parable of the Persistent Widow. In the story, the woman is persistent with a judge who cares not for her or her cause but succumbs and awards her the justice she seeks because she is relentless in her pursuit. Jesus then extends the analogy more broadly: *“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily”* (v. 7). That is to say, God will bring justice in His time as He sees fit.

But the narrative does not end there, as Jesus follows up with a query: *“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”* (v. 8b). Will he? Will he find faith among us at ULC? Will he find faith in you and me?

And herein lies the crux of the parable. So often we can get so caught up in upholding right vs. wrong that we, as the Church, forget our greater purpose, our primary mission of leading others to faith. Jesus’ question issues a warning to His disciples—and to us as His people—that if we are all-consumed by the idea of justice, we may forget this primary mission. To put it plainly, Jesus is reminding us to be concerned with justice, yes, but not at the expense of faith formation.

In what seems to be an endless sea of injustices in our world, it is easy to get caught up in the frustrations, sadness, and hopelessness that fill the news. Jesus’ advice? Don’t get sucked in. While we should be ever vigilant in addressing injustice within our communities, ultimately, we must trust in God’s promise to deal with justice according to His purposes. Moreover, we should focus on helping people to come into a Gospel relationship with the God whose justice is unlike any we have ever seen. It is a justice that executed your consequences and mine upon His Son, rather than upon us. I think we can agree that this is a justice worthy of more focus and conversation.

Reflection:

How might the work of faith formation and evangelism assist us in addressing matters of justice?



Thursday, March 25, 2021

“Jesus’ Willingness to Suffer” | Sam Rentschler

Read: Luke 18:31–34

“I Don’t Get It”

We’ve all been there. Someone has shared a joke we don’t understand or made a statement that seems to require a jump in logic we missed. Conversely, we have all been in situations where something seems totally apparent or obvious to us but not to someone else. Today’s passage likely fits this second pattern. Why don’t the disciples understand what Jesus is telling them? I mean, He literally says, *“And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise”* (v. 33). Come on, guys! His statement seems really straightforward.

As we look at Scripture two millennia after these events took place, it can be easy to forget that the disciples did not know what would happen next. For many of us the idea of Jesus going to Jerusalem and being killed isn’t new. Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead are the core moments of our Christian faith. We may even find it easy or tempting to take the story of Jesus’ sacrifice for granted.

But to the disciples, the idea of Jesus dying and being raised from the dead was so radical and absurd that, even though he tells them multiple times that it will happen, they could not comprehend it. And even though sometimes the disciples do not come off as being the sharpest bunch, their confusion in this case doesn’t seem so ridiculous.

Jesus’ sacrifice for sin should seem radical and absurd. From a human point of view, it doesn’t make sense. Why would God incarnate, a Savior who has declared himself to be the only way to God’s kingdom, die a painful, shameful death? We know that his love for us is what motivated him to die on the cross. But don’t let that familiarity with the story cover up how radical an act of love it was. For a moment here, push through the familiarity of Jesus’ story and reflect on how significant it is that He cares enough for us to choose to suffer for us out of love.

Reflection:

What emotions come up as you consider the price Jesus paid to be gracious to us? What does that emotion motivate you to do today?



Friday, March 26, 2021

“Zacchaeus—His Lesson for Us All” | Mark Liston

Read: Luke 19:1–10

Remember being in a Vacation Bible School and learning this song?

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he
He climbed up in a sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see.
As the Savior passed that way, He looked up in that tree.
And He said, ‘Zacchaeus, you come down.
For I’m going to your house today...For I’m going to your house to stay.’”

I have always loved this song and the Luke account that inspired it. Who would you climb up in a tree to see? LeBron? Jordan? Springsteen? Can you imagine this person you idolize walking by, looking up into the tree, where you are perched, and letting you know he is coming to your house? And what’s more, he is going to spend the night?

What are your first thoughts? “Jeez, I didn’t make my bed and I haven’t vacuumed the living room! I’ve got dirty dishes in the sink.” “What do I have in the refrigerator for dinner, and what about breakfast?”

If you were Zacchaeus, your excitement over the Lord wanting to stay at your home would quickly turn to thoughts about your unworthiness to host him. Tax collectors were not respected by anyone. In fact, they were hated by most people, especially the Pharisees. They were considered a scourge, the dregs of society. Why would Jesus come to his house? Didn’t Jesus know what tax collectors did and how they stole money?

Zacchaeus knew his own sin, of course. He had cheated many. But when the Lord asked him to repent, he replied he would give back four times the amount he had wrongfully taken. He understood that Jesus knew him and knew his sins, and he so desired closeness that he was willing to climb a tree in hopes of just seeing Him. What a wonder that Jesus also wanted to know him and even initiated a relationship with him.

Just as Jesus desires to know Zacchaeus, he desires to know us. We have nothing to hide. He knows our sins. And to see and know Him, we do not have to climb a tree. We can just open the Bible and read the truth of the Gospel: He died for each one of us so we can have salvation. What a comfort this is!

Reflection

Read this passage carefully again, and imagine yourself in Zacchaeus’ sandals. Prepare your heart, for Jesus is not just visiting your house today. He is dwelling in you!



Saturday, March 27, 2021

“A Turning Point” | Dan Dolsen

Read: Luke 19:28–40

Toward the end of World War II, the Allied Forces amassed a huge aerial strike force in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea that would lead to the defeat of the German war machine. This force of strength was a turning point. A turning point for victory and the restoration of freedom for many who were held captive.

In today's Lenten reading, we see a similar turning point. It is also a turning point toward true freedom for those who are held captive. But it is announced not by the bombardment of air strikes, but with the shouts of people welcoming an itinerant preacher—Jesus of Nazareth—being carried on a borrowed burro. This Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem and is preparing to do battle with those who hold power over the weak through religious oppression.

But Jesus was also entering into a larger, cosmic battle, *“not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6:12). It is these spiritual forces of evil that hold humanity captive to the ravages of oppression, evil wrongdoing, and death.

This Palm Sunday, as you wave (virtual) palms and join the triumphal songs of proclaiming Jesus' triumph, Rejoice! Rejoice in the King who has won the victory for you!

This triumphal entry can serve as our turning point. It is an opportunity to experience true freedom from those things that oppress us and hold us back from embracing all that God has for us.

Reflection:

What has been a turning point for you as you journey with Christ?



Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021

“The True Triumphal Entry” | Will Cannon

Read: Psalm 24:7–10

To find the jubilation in this passage, one must experience the weight of the question and raised in verse 3: *“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?”* And the answer, *“He who has clean hands and a pure heart,”* should be sobering. It is a response that virtually every religion on earth gives to the question. It is “on you” to make yourself pure and holy in order to be with the God of all Creation. That is a tall order. Are you able to respond positively to this penetrating question?

Fortunately, this Psalm—and our Lord—shows us a different way. Jesus Christ is the only pure and blameless One who has ascended the hill of the Lord, and there, has made us pure and blameless (Hebrew 9,10). In His ascension, His final act of victory over sin and death, Christ has entered the true Holy of Holies. Knowing our inability to make ourselves clean, God put it on Himself to open these gates. This is good news, indeed!

It is this background that makes the angelic response in verses 7 through 10 so joyous. Although we were dead in our trespasses and sin, we are now alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1–4), and free with all of creation to belong to the Lord (Psalm 24:1–2). The angels are welcoming Jesus Christ into heaven. They command “the gates” and “ancient doors” to open—gates that had been closed to humanity after the Fall in the Garden of Eden. They ask in astonishment, *“Who is this King of Glory?”* Only now can the church victorious answer back, *“It is Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to take away the sins of the World!”*

Allow yourself to be taken up into this heavenly dialogue. In worship and prayer, add your voice to the jubilant reply, preparing yourself for the day we will all follow in His way.

Reflection:

How do I attempt to “clean my own hands” in order to come before God?

Read through Ephesians 2:1–10. How do I rely on the mercy and love of God to be made alive in Christ? What does that look like in my life? Do I find the joy of recognizing Christ as my righteousness entering the true Holy of Holies? Do I draw near to God in turn (Hebrews 4:16)?



Holy Monday, March 29, 2021

“Our Inheritance” | Norma Polk

Read: Luke 20:9–19

In the Fall of 2020, our Bible Study group studied ten of Jesus’ parables. We were delighted to find that His parables gave us insight into God’s heart and His Kingdom. “When examined with care,” Kenneth Bailey, author of *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* wrote, “His parables are serious theology, and Jesus emerges as an astute theologian.” We certainly found this to be true.

In today’s passage, Jesus tells us a parable about a vineyard whose tenants, the so-called vinedressers, were renters, not owners. They were tasked with watering, fertilizing, and pruning the vineyard at the right time and in the right way, so that the vineyard would produce bountifully for the owner and for them. Unfortunately, they forgot that they were merely renters, charged temporarily with the garden’s care in the owner’s stead! When the owner sent a servant to bring the fruit back to him, the tenants beat and sent the servant away without any fruit. This happened three times. Finally, the owner sent his beloved son, in the hopes that the tenants would have more respect. But the tenants figured that they would inherit the vineyard if the son was out of the way, so they took him out and killed him! They wanted to possess the vineyard and keep the harvest for themselves.

What does this parable mean? In the Old Testament, vineyards were often a metaphor for the Kingdom of God and its citizens. The psalmist wrote, “*You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land*” (Psalm 80:8–9). It is clear that the owner of the vineyard represents God, its Creator, to whom this Kingdom belongs. The tenants represent the temple leadership (chief priests, scribes, and elders) who had the task of making sure that God’s people were nurtured, so they could grow to produce the fruit of righteousness and give back to God.

To make sure that the temple leaders were not leading the people away from God, He sent His servants—the prophets—with messages from God Himself. When those messages were ignored and the prophets were persecuted, God, like the owner in the parable, sent Jesus, His beloved Son (Luke 3:22). As the Son, He had the full authority of the Father. And as in the parable, He was killed.

This parable also has a lesson for us today. God, in His immeasurable mercy, sent His beloved Son to provide redemption for us, to restore the vineyard and allow us to inherit the Kingdom of God. We are now the tenants of His vineyard. Let us not act like the tenants in the parable! Instead, let us nurture one another, be sanctified, and bear the fruit of righteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit! Let us also dedicate the fruit of our lives to God, the owner of the vineyard.

Reflection:

Can you, your family, or community group, think of ways to nurture and grow God’s Kingdom here on earth? What fruit in your life could you dedicate to God?



Holy Tuesday, March 30, 2021

“Endurance” | Dan Dolsen

Read: Luke 21:5–19

In 1982, I had the honor of graduating from the University of Michigan in a ceremony that was held on the floor of Crisler Arena. That was actually my second visit to be on that storied floor. When I was 12-years old, I was a scrawny, nerdy kid living a quiet life in a rural town just 30 miles south of Ann Arbor. This all changed in the Spring of 1972 when my parents dragged my two sisters and me to a David Wilkerson Crusade at Crisler Arena.

If you are of a certain age, you may know that David Wilkerson was a preacher from rural Pennsylvania who moved to NYC to minister to the most hardened gang members and drug users in Time Square. His story was captured in the riveting 1962 book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. That day, as I watched hippies, drug-users, and gang members step forward in Crisler Arena to ask Jesus into their lives, everything changed for me. The power of the Holy Spirit was very present, and He compelled me to step forward onto the floor of Crisler Arena and commit my life to Christ.

When I returned to my little town, however, I began to encounter the battle of wanting to live out my faith and ran into a number of confrontations with schoolmates who did not agree with me. In one instance, I nearly came to blows over the Gospel!

In today's Lenten reading, Jesus is instructing His disciples—and us—to endure during times of persecution. Jesus tells us to not be led astray when we encounter tumultuous world events. He warns us that we will face persecution, and that this can be an opportunity to bear witness. He states that we do not need to worry about what we are to say when we defend our position of trusting in Christ because He will provide the words that no adversary will be able to contradict or withstand. By our endurance, He concludes, we will gain our lives.

Reflection:

How has God met your needs as you experience tumultuous world events, persecution, and the daily challenges of living for Christ?



Holy Wednesday, March 31, 2021

“Preparing for Jesus’ Return” | Thad Polk

Read: Luke 21:29–38

Imagine that you are having guests over for dinner (remember the good old days?). How would you prepare? Do the dishes? Vacuum? Plan a meal, go grocery shopping, and get to work cooking? Maybe all of the above? The point is that you would put other things aside and prioritize getting ready for your guests. And that goes double if you are hosting someone you really admire and respect, like someone who is very important in your field of work (or maybe Pastor Gabe or Pastor Marcus!).

Now imagine that you are expecting a very important guest, but the exact date of their arrival is up in the air. They might arrive in five minutes or in five days, and there is no way to know for sure. Then what? Well, presumably you would try to be ready on a moment’s notice. You would try to keep your place clean at all times and continually restock any supplies you might need.

In today’s passage, Jesus warns us to be careful because human beings are actually in a similar situation right now. It is not that we are expecting a very important person for dinner. Instead, Jesus himself is going to return to earth for the final judgment. And yet, many people have prepared less for Jesus’ return than they would if they were having a friend over for dinner. They may not even give His return a second thought. Instead, they are *“weighed down... by the anxieties of life”* (v. 34).

We Christians are not immune to this attitude of indifference. We too can get weighed down by the day-to-day concerns of life and forget that our lives are part of a much, much bigger story, namely, God’s eternal plan. And the final chapter in that plan features Jesus returning to earth calling His people home. Jesus urges us to *“be always on the watch”* so that we will be able to *“stand before the Son of Man”* (v. 36) on that Day. May we live our lives in such a way that we would welcome Jesus’ coming, even if He returned this very day.

Reflection:

How does the knowledge that Jesus will return affect your day-to-day life? How should it?



Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021

“At the Lord’s Table” | Shelby Kurz

Read: Luke 22:7–23

This passage describes the celebration of the Jewish Passover among the disciples and Christ and the communion sacrament administered by Christ to his disciples. The Passover is the celebration of the Exodus events and events described in Exodus 12–13. It is a holiday of remembrance of the liberation of the Jewish people from their oppressors. In biblical times, one of the major observances of Passover was bringing the Paschal lamb as a sacrifice.

This sacrifice recalled the lamb that was killed in the Exodus account, whose blood was used to mark the Israelites’ doorways to spare their firstborn sons. It seems rather fitting that on the night of Passover, Jesus shares this intimate moment with his disciples before he, too, shares the fate of the Paschal lamb. Jesus gives His disciples wine and bread to commemorate the events about to occur, a sacrament we celebrate each week at ULC.

I have always enjoyed partaking in the sacrament of communion. When I receive the bread and wine, I approach in humility, remembering the history of the church, understanding that it is through the sacrifice of Christ and the gift of living life with the church that I can look with hope for the things to come, whatever they may be.

Sometimes I like to imagine that during the gathering of people together and partaking in sacred bread and wine, I am also partaking with all the saints of all times. I am partaking with my former pastors. I am partaking with my relatives who have moved on. I am partaking with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. I am partaking in the celebration of forgiveness. I am partaking in the remembrance of the suffering Christ, the Christ who suffers with us. I am partaking in the remembrance of Christ, His love, and His life. What a truly beautiful picture of our community.

Reflection:

Savor these words of prolific and profound theologian, Soren Kierkegaard: “We pray that those who are gathered here today may come to the Lord’s Table with heartfelt longing, and that when they leave it they may go with intensified longing for him, our Saviour and Redeemer.” May you leave this day with more longing for Him, our Savior.



Good Friday, April 2, 2021

“Walking the Via Dolorosa” | Janette Haak

Luke 23:26–46

When Norma Polk asked if I would prepare the Lenten devotional for Luke 23:26-46, I felt a bit inadequate to cover the account of the crucifixion. However, I remembered that I do have a unique perspective on that event. In 2012 our family was privileged to travel to Israel with Pastor Dan Flynn, along with several other St. Luke and Living Water parishioners. It was the trip of a lifetime, and I was very excited for our family to experience the Holy Land. To refresh my memory, I called Pastor Dan, and we had a nice walk down memory lane of our time in Israel. Most significantly, we recalled walking the Via Dolorosa.

What struck me most as I walked slowly down this road—which Pastor Dan reminded me, means “The Way of Suffering”—was the thought of how confused the women must have been on that first Good Friday. They were probably sleeping while Jesus was on trial and beaten, not knowing what was taking place. Then they saw him walking with His cross to be crucified. I can only imagine their feelings of confusion and horror. How could this have happened, and how could it have happened so quickly?

We can contemplate Good Friday and mourn with the women, but we know Sunday is coming. We know how this nightmare ends. The women did not have that benefit. Pastor Dan shared with me that some of early Christians who walked the Via Dolorosa back in the 1200's, did it to feel the suffering that Jesus felt. As they walked, they would pause and reflect on how Jesus suffered for them.

This past year, I have felt that it has been a continuous Friday, and I have been just waiting for Sunday to rescue me from the drab, monotonous grind of our current situation. Maybe you have felt this, too. But as Christians, we know the story will not end here. Sunday is coming! Praise God for being with us through our “Good Fridays,” and that His promise of Sunday is unchanging and everlasting.

Reflection:

What does it mean to suffer in your life? How have you spent time reflecting on what Jesus has done for you? Give thanks that Sunday is His eternal promise!



Holy Saturday, April 3, 2021

“Joseph of Arimathea” | Kristin Rathje

Luke 23:50–56

It is a well-known scene. Jesus has gone to the Mount of Olives to pray and has asked his disciples to “keep watch” with him. He goes off by Himself, has the complicated “*If you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will but Yours be done*” conversation, and then finds his disciples sleeping. Just as He is giving them a good talking-to about the value of prayer over slumber, a crowd shows up.

Led by Judas, here come the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders. They arrest Him and take Him to the house of the high priest. Early the next morning, the members of this council bring Jesus in for questioning. When they ask if He is the Son of God, He says, essentially, “That’s right,” and they march Him straight over to Pontius Pilate for a Roman trial.

They had caught Him. They must have been pleased with themselves—all of them but one.

Joseph of Arimathea, Luke tells us, “*had not consented to their decision.*” He presumably went home that night instead of going to the garden. I imagine him telling his wife, “You won’t believe what they’ve done! These ‘men of God’ have paid one of Jesus’ followers to incriminate Him. Now they are taking Him to Pilate and demanding a trial.”

The next morning, he must have witnessed the crowds shouting, “*Crucify Him!*” He must have stood at the side of the road as a bloodied Jesus walked to Golgotha. He must have wept with the others who stood in the shadow of the cross. And then, when the centurion had declared Jesus dead, Joseph, who “*had not consented to any of this,*” got permission from Pilate to take Jesus’s body off the cross, wrap it in linen, and place it in a tomb. And then he likely went home to be devastated.

Until the third day. That miraculous third day.

In our sinfulness, we recognize that we find ourselves calling for Jesus to be crucified. But, in faith, we do not consent to Jesus’ arrest, humiliation, and crucifixion.

We, too, are devastated, yet we know what happens on the third day.

Reflection:

When you disagree with the actions of your community, what ultimate actions can you choose that will draw you into serving Jesus and joining Him on His mission?



Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

“Remember His Words” | Marcus Lane

Luke 24:1–12

It is unsurprising that today many people find the accounts of Jesus' resurrection difficult, if not impossible, to believe. We live in a secular world that largely believes the natural world is all there is, and we understand it through science, reason, and human experience. We often have difficulty believing in extraordinary natural events. No wonder so many find it difficult to believe in such a supernatural occurrence as a person rising from the dead.

It is not just people in today's world who find it hard to believe. When the disciples first heard the claim from the women who went to the tomb, they scoffed. As Luke recounts, *“These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them”* (v. 11). Even Jesus' own disciples first believed that this claim was nonsense.

Theirs is exactly the natural reaction many have to the resurrection. You may even feel that way, too. Surely it must have been a vision, dream, hallucination, spiritual experience, or fabrication of some big conspiracy. We try to rationalize it because we know it means something. In the words of Jaroslav Pelikan, “If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters.” To believe in the resurrection is to have life upended, and most of us would prefer comfort without stopping to recognize that comfort is often just hidden hopelessness, waiting around to die. So, if we know that this claim is important, how can we actually come to believe it?

It is noteworthy in this story that it is the women who believe. Luke tells us that they were terrified, but after hearing the angel, *“They remembered his words”* (v. 8). It is in remembering the words of Jesus that all of this took place according to Scripture that has the power to lead us from unbelief to belief.

We can come up with every proof imaginable (and there are plenty), but without faith the story will be nothing but an idle tale/nonsense. So may you remember his words and come to trust in the life-upending truth of the resurrection. May you come to prize the risky hope of the resurrection over mere creature comforts. Remember that it all took place just as he said it would. Trust in him, because he is risen. He is Risen Indeed! Hallelujah!

Reflection:

How does trusting in the resurrection bring hope to your life right now?



Easter Monday, April 5, 2021

“Where Do We Find Jesus?” | Becky Johnson

Read: Luke 24:13–35

Where do we look for Jesus? Where do we expect to find Him?

The disciples on the Emmaus Road had expected Jesus to be the one to redeem Israel, to conquer the Romans! They had seen His power displayed throughout his ministry—His power to heal, to deliver people from evil spirits, and to rule over nature. Yet the hopes of these despondent disciples had been dashed. They had seen their beloved teacher crucified and killed. That was not what they had been expecting. How could that have been part of God’s plan?

Even after hearing the reports from the women and others that the tomb was empty, they were still downcast. After the crushing blow of the crucifixion, they were not ready to believe these reports that perhaps He had risen from the dead. Amazingly, Jesus then appears on the road and starts walking with them. And in surely one of the Bible’s greatest moments of dramatic irony, they do not recognize Him. Why? Was it their lack of faith that blocked their vision? Was it that Jesus was so transformed? Or was it that God was teaching them, weaning them, from Jesus’ physical presence to something else? As they walk along, Jesus asks a probing question. Upon hearing their answer, He rebukes them, and then rather than saying plainly, “Hey guys, it’s me, Jesus,” He points them back to God’s Word and opens their eyes to all that the Scriptures say about Him.

Did you catch that? Jesus points them to His Word.

Then when the disciples arrive in Emmaus, they ask Jesus to have dinner with them. When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. What does this event bring to mind? The Last Supper—communion. The Scripture repeats this at the very end of the account, how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Jesus wants to be seen by us. Jesus wants us to find Him. And we need to look where He has promised to be. He invites us to see Him in His Word and to encounter Him each week at communion when He gives us Himself in his body and blood. Word and Sacrament.

So often I have found myself looking for Jesus in other places, disappointed perhaps that He has not acted in a more dramatic way in my life. Yet every time I read this account, I am encouraged to remember that Jesus is always with me, walking alongside me. Always, He is inviting me to find Him where He has promised to be.

Reflection:

Describe a time when you felt your heart “*burning within*” as you read a Scripture or listened to a sermon and knew that God was speaking to you. Ask the Lord to open your eyes so that you, too, may continue to recognize Him and His activity in your life.



About Our Writers

Margaret Baker

Margaret is married to the man of her dreams, David, with whom she shares five children, ranging from 14-22. While her Ph.D. is in Chinese literature, she currently works at home tutoring writing and coaching college essay clients. She loves reading, walking, swimming, and playing on the piano from the American Songbook.

Todd Baker

Todd is a software developer who enjoys reading, mostly Economics and History, and watching well made classic movies.

Allie Banach

Allie is a part of the High School Bible Study and goes to Early College Alliance at EMU. She hopes to go into a STEM field and enjoys rock climbing, reading, and playing the piano.

Justin Beemer

Justin is a senior at Michigan studying computer engineering. He helps teach the undergraduate course on operating systems, works part time at ULC, and loves watching the Lions and Red Wings.

Will Cannon

Will is a mission director for University Christian Outreach and a member of the Servants of the Word, an international brotherhood of lay missionaries. He serves as an elder for ULC, as well as on the music team.

David Carlson

David is a retired professor of sociology who has been married to his bride Pat going on 53 years. Now in retirement he has time to practice playing the guitar and catch up on reading.

Paul Chamberlain

Discrete Math GSI and educator extraordinaire, Paul hopes to graduate with an M.S. in Computer Science in May 2021. He enjoys running, board games, playing piano, and speaking *auf Deutsch*, *en español*, or *en français*.

Ashleigh Creeden

Ashleigh spent seven years in ministry working as a Director of Family Life, and two years in non-profit work, helping to further the mission of a through-marketing and business administration. Ashleigh is married to Tony and has a little one on the way, due to make her appearance to the world in July!

Tony Creeden

Tony served as a pastor for eight years and then taught high school theology for five years before transitioning into graphic design and beginning his own gospel-centered ministry, BoldSpeak. He is married (Ashleigh Creeden) with two kids and a third on the way! You can learn more about him and read more from him at www.theboldspeak.com.

**Logan Davis**

Logan is in his third year at Concordia University Ann Arbor in Pre-Seminary studies. After four more years in the seminary, he hopes to be a pastor so he can teach others the love of Christ. Logan enjoys snowboarding and just being outside enjoying God's beautiful Creation.

Dan Dolsen

Dan is married to Kristin and they have three sons Michael (married to Jana), David and John. Dan and Kristin split their time between Ann Arbor and Beulah, Michigan (Crystal Lake) where they enjoy hiking, snowshoeing, and boating.

Larry Frank

Larry is a retired Architect, married to Nancy for 63+ years, with three married children, seven grandchildren, and a new great-grandson. He hopes to be a fly-fisherman again soon.

Eddie Godbold

A native of St. Louis, MO, but HAILing from Ann Arbor, MI with a degree in mechanical engineering, Eddie currently works for the automotive supplier ZF. He is a recent convert to the game of golf, enjoys delving into German language and culture through his work and free time, and during the pandemic he became a (virtual) student again.

Kyle Gontjes

Kyle is a PhD student at UM who studies infection prevention in nursing homes. Outside of the lab, he enjoys listening to music, reading, and drinking lots of coffee.

Janette Haak

Janette Haak is a mom of two young adults and wife to a pilot. She loves to travel, hang out with children, and play tennis. She's also a remedial reading tutor. Her life motto is "I want to live my life so the Pastor doesn't have to lie at my funeral. I want my funeral to be about Jesus and salvation, not about me."

Abby Haggard

Abby is a Secondary Education major at Concordia University Ann Arbor, hoping to not be a lame High School English teacher. She enjoys reading, the Cleveland Browns, and anywhere that serves tacos.

Charissa Hasper

Charissa is a senior at UM studying Music Education. She loves laughing, watching movies, and worshiping God with her musical talents.

Becky Johnson

Happily married to Tom, Becky enjoys being a grandparent and aunt. She works part-time at Ann Arbor Christian School as the Spiritual Life Coordinator. She loves leading worship, hiking, gardening, and talking with friends.

Gabe Kasper

Gabe Kasper is Lead Pastor at ULC. Husband to Melissa. Dad to Titus, Lila, and Levi. Fan to Packers. Friend to all.

**Andrew Komurka**

Andrew is an engine performance analyst at Ford Motor Company. He's very thankful for his wife, Elisabeth, and any opportunity to play a sport, make music, or ride a motorcycle.

Liz Komurka

Liz is a collegiate golf coach and is married to her best friend, Andrew. She loves filling their house with the smell of freshly baked bread and spoiling Andrew with a wide assortment of meals and desserts. In her spare time, she loves hiking with their dog, Quincy, and, unsurprisingly, being on a golf course!

Shelby Kurz

Shelby is a biologist, gardener, and creative wonder-er.

Steven Kurz

Steven is currently a student in EMU's Master of Philosophy program.

Vanessa Lane

Vanessa is a child of God, wife, and a mom. In her spare time, she can be found hanging out with her family, drinking coffee, learning something new, or watching NBA basketball.

Marcus Lane

Marcus serves as campus pastor here at ULC and loves reading, writing, coffee, whiskey, basketball, and spending time with his wonderful wife Vanessa and their two kids, Della and Jude!

Mark Liston

Mark is a retired Franchise Executive who is enjoying life, family and our ULC family. His wife, Mary Kay, also retired at the end of last year and he reports that the retired life is better than they could have ever imagined.

Mary Kay Liston

Mary Kay is a retired Franchise Executive and past president of Molly Maid and other brands at Neighborly.com. She is enjoying the wonders of life with grandchildren and being a Grammie! Previously, a 25-year veteran of work in the television industry.

Corissa Mattson

Corissa is a Creative Writing and Biology student graduating from Michigan in the Spring. She likes to rollerblade, ski, and is an avid science fiction fan.

Julie Piazza

Julie is a project manager and researcher at Michigan Medicine focusing on improving patient experience and pain management with non-pharmacologic strategies with children and adults. Julie is married to her sweetheart, James, and mother to three young adult sons and now a new daughter-in-law! She loves nature walks, writing poetry, and traveling whenever she can even when it's virtual!

**Norma Polk**

Married to Thad, mother of three adult children, and owner of three cats and a dog (Sam). Enjoys Bible journaling, cooking, golfing, and traveling. Costume designer at Concordia University and the Dio dinner theater.

Thad Polk

Thad is a psychology professor at Michigan who does research on the aging brain. He's married to Norma, his college sweetheart, has 3 children, and loves to golf and play guitar.

Kristin Rathje

Kristin teaches high school English and is wife to John, mother to four, and grandmother to two. In her continuing journey to physical, mental, and spiritual health, Kristin spends time practicing yoga, walking, reading, and writing a blog.

Sam Rentschler

Sam recently received a Master's in Social Work from the University of Michigan and is hoping to find a job in mental health counseling in the coming months.

Amy Robson

Amy is an English tutor. She met her husband, Brian, at St. Luke, and they have been married for 34 years and have three children in their twenties. She looks forward to traveling with friends and family in the future.

Jeaneen Wyly

Jeaneen is a teacher at Lutheran Westland. She is married to Jamie and mom of Makayla and Jenna. Her favorite things are reading novels and all things summer.

Makayla Wyly

Makayla, a senior at the University of Michigan, studies Psychology and History to pursue a career in social work. She enjoys playing basketball and card games, and hanging out with friends.