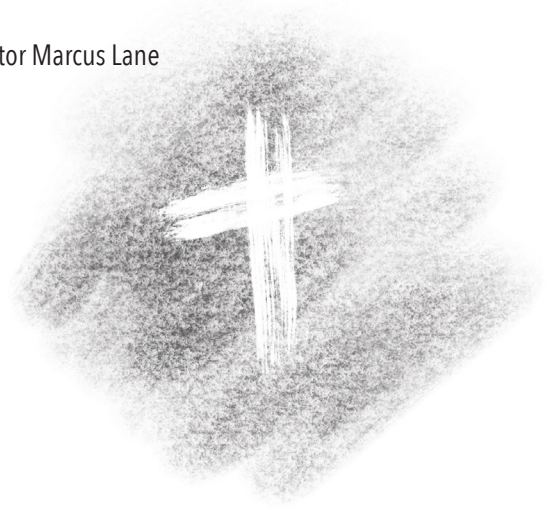


1 Peter 1:1-12

**Sermon: The Path of Trial** | Pastor Marcus Lane



Matthew 4:1-11**Baptized and Tempted** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

The season of Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter in which we often take time to fast. And so, the story of Jesus fasting for 40 days and being tempted by the devil is a fitting for us to unpack during our 40-day fast. But, in order to grasp Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4, we need a little bit of context. Immediately before this moment, Jesus is baptized. As Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends from heaven in the form of a dove, and God the Father speaks, announcing Jesus' identity: *"...and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'"* (Matthew 3:17). Before Jesus begins his ministry, the Father makes Jesus' identity clear. Jesus hasn't done anything yet, and the Father says this is my beloved Son and I am pleased with Him. Immediately after that, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where this identity as the Son of God is put to the test by the devil.

This story is our story too. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God gave you an identity that can never be taken from you. He said, "You are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased." And just like Jesus, as we go through life, in so many ways, the enemy calls that identity into question. We're tempted to find who we are in so many other things instead of who God has made us in Christ. And, if we're honest with ourselves, so often we fall for the lies of the enemy and fail to live into who we are in Christ. But, the good news in our text is that while we may fail to live into the identity we've received, Jesus is faithful. He resists the devil. He stays true to His identity as the Son of God even when it leads Him to the cross where He lays down his life that we might rest in His finished work on our behalf.

May you cling to that promise of the cross this Lenten season.

**Reflection:**

Where is your identity as a child of God being tempted right now? How might you resist that temptation as you rest in Christ's work on your behalf?

## Are You Lost? Simply Hit "Recenter" | Dan Dolsen

Recently, I was in Charlotte, NC to meet with a group of dads for The Fatherhood Project. When I picked up my car at the rental facility, I grabbed my GPS and entered the address of our meeting place. I followed the GPS instructions and reached my destination. But to this day, I haven't a clue where I was in relation to the rest of the world! What I mean is, I carefully followed the instructions and was even alerted to possible hazards and the potential presence of "police ahead." (I'm sure they alert you to the presence of police to help make you feel safe!) But with all these carefully mapped-out instructions, I did not know where I was on the map! That's the problem with GPS, it gives you the street-level view of where you are. It even helps you "Recenter" to get back on course. But it does not give you the total picture of where you are going. In short, it's hard to see the total picture, when you are at street level.

As we begin this Lenten sojourn at "street level," James 1:2-18 sets out a series of spiritual GPS coordinates with a clear and life-changing destination: being a new creation or firstfruits in Christ (v.18)! We begin our journey with joy because we are going to have our faith tested, and this testing will result in a sureness in Christ that is fully complete (v. 4). Our journey will require wisdom, so ask for it and know that you will receive it since this is what God promises (v. 5-8). At this point, you may need to again hit "Recenter," because along with wisdom, we are told to put on humility, a reminder to recall that our earthly life will fade away, including all of our possessions, but also that our life's destination is forever with Christ (v. 9-11)!

As we continue toward our destination, because we will meet with detours, potholes, and construction delays, we will certainly need to hit "Recenter" on our spiritual GPS. And although we may not have the total picture of where we are heading, we do, at the street level, have the perfect spiritual GPS guide us: God's Word. Godspeed!

### Reflection:

Where do you hope your journey will take you this Lenten season? What will you take with you and leave behind as you embark on this journey?

**Incredible Blessing** | Norma Polk

In the NT Greek there are two words that are often translated into the English word "to bless." They are *eulogeo*, a verb, and *makarios*, an adjective. The first one means to praise someone or even God. The word "eulogy" came from this. It also means to invoke God's graces to someone. The second one sometimes is translated into "happy," but it means more than that. Jeffrey Gibbs wrote, "The adjective in Matthew has strong connotations of present and future salvation. It does not mean 'happy,' but something much stronger, tantamount to 'saved.'"

In our culture, when we think of the word "blessed" we think of the meaning of the Greek word *eulogeo*—we think of good health, good wealth, good relationships, etc. So, it took me a long time to have a good understanding of the word "blessed" in today's reading. How can one be called "blessed" when he/she is persecuted?

Persecution is such an awful thing! Many Christians are persecuted by people who are hostile towards Christianity, from mockery, to even death. Persecution has existed since the beginning of Christianity! Stephen has been considered as the first martyr, he was stoned to death after he laid out God's plan of salvation for His people. A dear friend who is a refugee from a Muslim country often feels high anxiety, because he has become a believer in Jesus after leaving his country and now residing in Europe. In his mind his uncle would get someone to murder him because he became a Christian. "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (v.10). How could we call these two people blessed? One was stoned to death, and one keeps looking over his shoulders! These two people were persecuted for righteousness' sake. And whose righteousness is it? Their own? Let us consider what Jesus reminded his disciples in John 15:18, "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*" We can conclude here that it is because of Jesus' righteousness!

Even though I encountered Jesus almost 38 years ago when I was a Muslim, I have never experienced a first hand persecution so far, except for losing some friends. No one has ever threatened to kill me. I have to admit that it seems that it becomes harder and harder to speak of our belief in Jesus openly in certain situations at times. Will it get harder? Will I face persecution when I go back to my country for a visit? Will my husband face persecution because he is a professor with a strong faith in Christ?

The good news is that this blessedness is a promise: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Because of the death and resurrection of His Son, He made us righteous before God! With that the Kingdom of Heaven is ours! Yes, I belong to His Kingdom. I now live in the kingdom of the world and there is a risk of facing persecution because of my faith in Him. But, whether I am persecuted or not, I belong to His Kingdom! In a way, persecution because of Him is a sign that we belong to Him, not that I wish this for my worst enemy!

**Reflection:**

Have you ever experienced any kind of persecution? If so, how did God help you through it? How has His promise of the Kingdom of Heaven helped you in your faith?

1 Peter 1:13-25

**Sermon: The Path of Holiness** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

## Psalm 51

**I've Made A Huge Mistake | Todd Baker**

We cannot fully rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins if we do not realize the true weight and pain of our sin.

In verse four of Psalm 51, David writes *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."* Wow! Against God and God alone have we sinned. This is not something to be taken lightly. Our sin is more than just some small inconvenience. It is evil in God's sight. If our sin is so severe that it warrants the death of the Son of God, then surely it holds a great weight. As Paul writes in Romans 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death."*

We desperately need God's forgiveness. Just as David was writhing in guilt from his sin with Bathsheba, we are guilty of turning away from God. The punishment for all sin is death and separation from God. It is by His grace that the death and resurrection of Christ happened to save us from the evil of our sin.

Thankfully the story doesn't stop with the heinousness of our sin. God has hidden our face from all our sins and blotted out all our iniquities. Praise the Lord for the cross and empty tomb! Praise the Lord that the punishment for our evil sins has been wiped clean. It is through the death and resurrection of Christ that we celebrate this Easter that we are given the grace and freedom to rejoice that our sins are forgiven. Paul finishes Romans 6:23 with *"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

**Reflection:**

Take a moment to reflect on the severity of your sin. Now take a moment to reflect on God's forgiveness of all our sins. Does reflecting on the weight of your sin in conjunction with the Gospel give you greater joy in salvation?

## The Joy of Walking in the Light | Jeaneen Wylie

In Christopher Marlowe's 1604 *Dr. Faustus*, a gifted man, bored with everything the world has to offer, makes a deal with the devil to gain ultimate power for the next 24 years. Faustus meets famous people, plays tricks on the pope, and becomes incredibly wealthy and renowned. As the end of his 24 years nears, Faustus begins to panic because he realizes his soul will soon be required of him for payment. An old man comes to speak with him and urges him to repent, that there is still time to turn back. Spoiler alert: Faustus doesn't repent. The play ends with him being dragged into hell by demons. As we studied this play in a literature class last month, one of my students commented that it "wouldn't have mattered if Faustus HAD listened to the man and repented since he had made the deal and had to pay the price."

The idea that we don't have to eternally pay for our own mistakes, that they have already been paid for, and that one can repent, even to the last moment of life, and be forgiven, seems to go against our human idea of fairness. In fact, no other religion attempts to assert such a claim: while they all tell us how to get closer to God or our own perfect essence, only the Bible tells us that if we "*confess our sins*," God is "*faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*." What a thing to state! No matter where we find ourselves, how lost we are, and how far away we have wandered, God, the "*Word of life*" who has existed "*from the beginning*," wants to share His forgiveness with us and have fellowship with us!

Because we are witnesses and beneficiaries of this incredible, un-human-like forgiveness, we can truly be filled with "*joy*" and "*walk in the light*"! We will not want to keep this amazing news to ourselves. So many in the world believe they have wandered too far away from God and that He would never accept their repentance. They believe they have "*made their deal*" and now "*have to pay the price*"—to be judged on how they've lived. We have the amazing opportunity to share with them that, yes, God does love each of us so much that He has paid the price for us!

### Reflection:

Take a moment or two to think about how amazing it is that we are forgiven, that we have fellowship with God. Ask God to show you opportunities to share that Good News with others around you.



**The Only Plan We Need** | Margaret Baker

Alpha is a ten-week program of dinners, videos, and discussions that introduces seekers to Jesus and invites believers to consider their faith more deeply. The first session opens with a rich question: "If there is a God, and you could ask one question, what would you ask?" I love what comes forth: "Why is there so much evil in the world?" "Could you please explain the Trinity?" "Were there pandas on the ark?" This session, one especially thoughtful question invited deep pause: "What is the plan?" Or more specifically, "What is the plan for me?"

In today's passage, the disciples seem to have been asking just this. Jesus has just announced that they will *"cross to the other side of the lake,"* in other words, leave culturally comfortable Galilee to travel to the very un-Jewish and slightly terrifying Decapolis. One follower responds boldly, *"I will follow you wherever you go,"* but Jesus' reply shows that this follower is actually thinking, "But only if there is a Holiday Inn nearby." Another comes up with an excuse, doubtless concerned about how long this next phase will be: *"First let me 'bury' my father,"* meaning "I need to care for him until he dies, possibly for the next 15 years or so."

The disciples have just witnessed a dizzying series of healing miracles: a leper, the centurion's servant (a long-distance healing, no less!), Peter's mother-in-law, multiple demon-possessed individuals. They also certainly recognize what Matthew points out, that Jesus is appearing to be an awful lot like the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who *"took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."* Wouldn't the best plan now be for Jesus to restore the Kingdom of Israel? Instead, He is proposing a detour.

Aren't our lives full of such detours? Just when we think we have "arrived" somewhere, at a place of relative drama-less calm, a detour, sometimes of the devastating variety, arrives and changes our course.

How can we find comfort when this happens? First, He has promised never to fail or forsake us even when we do go to the figurative Decapolis areas of our lives (Deut. 31:8). Second, He reminds us not to be afraid, for He does know our plan. *"Even the very hairs on your head are all numbered,"* He assures us lovingly (Matt. 10:30-31). Finally, as some of the same disciples who were so hesitant here said at another time, there is no real alternative to following Jesus. *"Lord, to whom shall we go?"* they queried. *"You have the words of eternal life."* (John 6:68). We are not told every

detail of the plan for our lives, but we do know the Plan: life adventurous and fulfilling on earth, and eventually, in Heaven, with a God who is so crazy about us that He gave His only Son to buy us back from life without Him. I'll take this plan!

**Reflection:**

As challenging as your life may be, and surely many at ULC have almost unfathomable challenges, take a moment to reflect on Romans 8:18 and the "glory that will be revealed in us."

Matthew 9:9-13**Following Jesus** | Patsy Bruenger

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. *"Follow me,"* he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him (v.9).

Jesus asking a tax collector to become His disciple was shocking to the Jews in Jesus' day. In that time, tax collectors were often dishonest. They were seen as traitors and considered to be outcasts. They were not like friendly IRS employees. Tax collectors were Jews, hired by Romans to collect dues imposed by the Romans for the benefit of the Romans. They often added extra onto a tax to pocket money for themselves. In this way, some became quite wealthy.

For Jesus to ask Matthew to follow Him is significant in several respects. Jesus talks directly to Matthew, asks Matthew to come along with Him, and then has dinner with him. I don't know about you, but I have never invited someone I really disliked or saw as a traitor to come have dinner with me. This act reminds me that Jesus meets us where we are in whatever condition we are in. He wants to be with us and spend time with us. He doesn't wait until we are all cleaned up and have our acts together. He comes to us despite our sins.

Matthew has to leave behind his life as a tax collector in order to follow Jesus. In the same way, Jesus may ask us to leave some of our "old ways" behind to learn a new way of living. As we spend time with Him, we learn His ways.

**Reflection:**

Psalm 139 says, *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* Do I sometimes feel that I am too far away for God to reach me?

Matthew 11:25-30

**Weary? Try this yoke on, but first ... call a friend |** Larry Frank

***"25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children ...."***

Why is the Gospel hidden from the wise and the learned? How are you like the wise and learned? Who truly knows God? Is it those who accept Jesus' mission?

***"28 Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."***

How far could you carry a burden before stopping to rest? What arrangements would you need to carry the burden a great distance? There are many kinds of burdens—physical, spiritual, and emotional, which are not as easy to see. Unseen burdens can exceed our strength to bear them alone, and we become weary. The yoke with Jesus is how the Lord can lighten our burdens and bring us rest. How does taking up His way lead to rest? *"And he said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest'"* (Exodus 33:14).

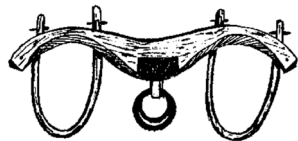
***"29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

What does Jesus mean by taking up his "yoke?" To humbly do His will and allow Him to guide and direct our lives? Is the "rest" what He promises to those who do? Since a yoke unites two—in common work—what can this imply about discipleship?

Take Jesus' yoke, put it on, but team with another friend, partner, spouse, or just share the yoke, by pulling those burdens with others ... and Jesus!

"The yoke that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 11 is a 'free gift' to us that requires a willing submission on our part. It leads us to a posture of surrender and trust ... to yield ourselves to the Lord." (Henry commentary 2018).

The yoke of Jesus is light and easy to carry ...  
it is the yoke of repentance and faith!

**Reflection:**

Is Jesus' yoke resting lightly on you, or are you struggling to get out from under it? How does that affect your friends that are sharing your life?

Remember, in that "YOKE" (of and with Jesus), all "three" of you are looking and pulling in the same direction.

## Romans 8:4-11

**Present** | Rachel Olson

Growing up in the church I remember that from a very young age I had it drilled in my mind that God was always there. Frequently I was told this as a reminder that if I did something wrong and no one noticed, God would still know about it. While the reminder that God knew everything was accurate, it instilled in me an idea that the presence of God was simply about rules; that He was sitting around pointing fingers at me all day and looking upon me in disappointment. And I am guessing that I am not the only one to ever feel that way about God's presence.

Yet Romans 8:4-11 paints a different story of God's presence, as it talks about the Holy Spirit being present with those who belong to God. The message that Paul is giving to the Romans is that having the Spirit gives belonging, life, and strength. God is not sitting around waiting for us to fail, but rather knows that we are weak on our own and has given us His Spirit—*“the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead”* (v. 11)—to give us strength and life.

God did not just give us some small insignificant helper but rather has given us His Spirit. Not only that, but His Spirit does not appear every now and then but instead Paul describes the Spirit as dwelling in us: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (v. 11).

The Spirit dwells in God's people. And as His people God is not only present with us, but we get to show God's presence to those in our lives. God is present and we can be His presence to those around us in the everyday tasks and in the big life moments.

**Reflection:**

How has the Spirit given you strength in your walk with God?

1 Peter 2:1-12

**Sermon: The Path of Maturity** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

## Psalm 1

**The Gift of Delight** | Rachel Thoms

You know those people that just exude joy? There's something different about them. Their eyes are bright. Their yoke is light. Being near them is a...delight! To delight or be delighted is not something that we can choose to have on our own—it is a gift. Delight is given to us.

Psalm 1 talks about how our delight is in the law of the Lord (v. 2) and how meditating on Scripture leads to prosperity and bearing fruit. That sounds like something I want! Sign me up! But, wait. That would mean actually prioritizing our time studying Scripture. Meditating on God's Word, or as another translation puts it, "*chew[ing] on Scripture day and night*" (v. 2), takes time and commitment. It's a state-of-being and a lifestyle.

God gives us His Word and we can draw near to Him through it. His Word is inerrant. His Word is God-breathed. The Psalms, in particular, can bring us comfort when we are lost and give us the words to pray when we are suffering. We can know God, and because we know Him, we delight in His Word and what he has to say to us.

I'll be honest—I do not prioritize meditating on God's Word nearly as much as He calls me to be with Him. I internet-search for answers and scroll for solutions despite my direct line to my Father in Heaven who is my refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1). He is the one who refreshes my soul (Psalm 23:3) and listens to my prayers (Jeremiah 29:12). What a gift that is!

**Reflection:**

God gives us many gifts through His Word, including delight. As you do the daily devotions in this Lent devotional, truly take the time to read the correlating Scripture, listen to what God is telling you and receive the gifts He has for you.

Ephesians 4:17-32**What If I Am Angry?** | Rev. Ken Huner

David Burns, author of *Feeling Good*, says anger is an emotion that is created by our own thought processes and cannot be caused by outside people or events. He says this: "No matter how outrageous or unfair others might appear to you, they do not, never did, and never will upset you. The bitter truth is that you're the one who is creating every last ounce of the outrage you experience." When I first read that, my anger got the best of me!

What I do want to share with you is that anger, in and of itself, is neither right nor wrong. It is an emotion that our Lord created us with. Anger can be released in a right or wrong way. We are vulnerable when we are angry. Uncontrolled anger can lead to bitterness, hatred, and even unhealthy destructive behavior.

Ephesians 4:26 reads: "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*" (ESV). I like this ESV translation because it's more accurate to the original Greek. The NIV reads: "*In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*" In the original Greek, the expression is an imperative or command, not a prepositional phrase! In other words, we can be angry—it's an emotion that God gave us, but don't let it get out of hand. At that point, it can become unhealthy and sinful.

The verb for anger in our text at this point is "orgizo" (transliteration) in the original Greek. In this passage as well as Mark 3:5, Christians are encouraged to have this type of anger—the anger that includes no revenge or rage. At the end of the verse Paul says: "... *do not let the sun go down on your anger.*" Here a different Greek word is used—"parorgismos" (transliteration). This is an anger that has been provoked. It is characterized by irritation, exasperation, embitterment—resentment. Not a good thing!

So how can we as Christians respond to the emotion of anger in our lives? Details would have to be reserved for a Bible study. But, in short, we need the Holy Spirit and God's grace and power in Christ to help us! And He will as we go to Him prayerfully in His Word and Sacrament.

**Reflection:**

What are some ways that I can temporarily suppress my anger, admit to myself that I am angry, ask why I am angry, talk to my Lord about it, and replace the bad thoughts with good thoughts? How will God's Word and Sacrament help me?



Matthew 13:10-17**The Eyes of Christ** | Nate Zuellig

The older I get, the more intriguing and enigmatic the character of Jesus seems to me. It's one of the aspects of faith that I feel most grateful for— that even after a lifetime of hearing and learning about Him, I feel like I'm always entering into a new depth of understanding.

The parables are a shining example of this enigmatic nature of Jesus. He loves symbolism, and the disciples and public were often just as clueless to His cryptic meanings as you and I. My favorite example of this is in Matthew (16:6-7) when Jesus says, *"Be careful ... Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,"* to which the disciples respond by frantically discussing among themselves that they, *"...didn't bring any bread...."*

Jesus' words very often went over their heads, just as they go over ours. We *"have ears,"* but, *"can barely hear."* And here, in Matthew 13:10, the disciples ask Jesus up front, *"Why do you speak to them [the crowds] in parables?"* Notice how they claim to be asking on behalf of "them," definitely not for themselves.

Let's stop and imagine this. You go to church and there's a guest speaker preaching this Sunday. You've heard amazing things about him. Then, as you sit there with your family sipping your coffee, he begins preaching, but it's not about forgiveness or love or righteousness—no. He's giving a tutorial on farming. He's just describing what happens when you plant seeds, what can go wrong, and how to do it most effectively. Is there anyone who wouldn't look at the person next to them and ask, "Has this guy lost his mind?"

The irony, however, is that Jesus' mind is the most brilliant and beautiful of all minds, and that's what He's so eagerly trying to share with His disciples and us. He hears all of creation speaking about the Kingdom of God and gives them the key to decode His illusive way of conveying that truth. But even with this key, just like the disciples, we still often need to strain our ears to really hear Him.

**Reflection:**

What lessons has God been speaking to you about His Kingdom and heart through your day-to-day life? Where can you make space and time to invite Him into your normal routines?

**Seeds, Soils and Weeds** | Bob Grese

I've always loved these two parables. I guess it's my love of working with plants and helping them flourish. For many years, I've worked to restore native prairies in Michigan. While it's best to match the seeds you're using to the type of soil, often you don't have a choice. You may only have a general mix of seeds for spreading over a field of different soils; some seeds will grow well and others will not.

In the first parable, Jesus likens us to the various types of soils found in a field—compacted soil along a path, rocky soil where plants quickly wither, soil full of weeds and thorns, and good, productive soils. None of us want to be compared to the deficient soils, but we are in so many ways. We can be hard and resistant to hearing God's word, and vulnerable to problems or temptations that prevent us from accepting His message of forgiveness and grace. Or, we might accept God's word for a short while, but we abandon Him when life becomes challenging. Often, we surround ourselves with other people or values that threaten our faith and not let it flourish. Only through grace can we be fully receptive to God's teachings and allow His love to penetrate all aspects of our lives. Only then can we bear abundant fruits as we live out our faith in the communities around us.

In the second parable, again we see Jesus as a sower, but this time we're the seeds. Jesus has planted us in the world, but all around us are other values, morals, and priorities that conflict with God's. What's interesting here is that the sower insists that the good plants grow together with the bad, saying that the two will be separated at the harvest. As Christians, we live in a world full of unbelievers, and it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other until we begin to bear fruit. Fortunately, through our faith and life in the Spirit we are able to bear spiritual fruits—“*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Gal. 5:22).

**Reflection:**

What kind of soil are you? Are you receptive to God's Word and His desire for you to flourish? What “fruits” are you producing?

## Hope for the Harvest | Allie Milot

The "Parable of the Weeds," found in the book of Matthew, is often overshadowed by other well-known parables. That may be because the meaning is less clear compared to other parables, the content can be challenging to apply to our lives, or that this particular parable discusses what will happen during the end times (something Christians don't want to touch with a 10-foot pole!). Whatever the reason may be, there is still a lot we can harvest from this parable.

First, the Lord is aware of the sinful and fallen nature of the world. The Lord knows that *"his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat"* (Matt. 13:25). There is brokenness, despair, anger and bitterness all around us. God did not design the world to be this way, but after the Fall, sin entered the world and it became a dangerous place. Despite seeing this sin on Earth, the Lord knew that if he was to wipe out all earthly evil, he would end up taking his chosen people away too. For that reason, He left us here to exist alongside all people, being in the world but not of it.

Second, the Lord calls us to live in community with all people, Christians and non-Christians alike. God could choose to eliminate all evil from the world, yet out of love for His people and His creation, he uses us to accomplish his mission of redemption. The Lord has placed each of us on teams, in workplaces, and in families with people who are not followers of God. Some Christians may experience moments of opposition and persecution in these groups and be surrounded by secular points of view that do not align with God's Word. In 2 Corinthians 12:10, we are called to be *"content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities"* for the sake of Jesus Christ. Through our weakness, the strength of the Lord is revealed. We are commanded to love our neighbor and to pray for those who persecute us. We are not called to add to the evil that exists; rather, we are invited to live into moments that will stretch and strengthen our faith, all in preparation for what is to come.

Finally, the Lord has a plan: he sees all that we are and promises to bring us back to Him at the end of time. As we sojourn through this side of eternity, the world may appear dreary, doubtful and disappointing. However, we are commanded to not lose

hope! The Lord knows our pain and the obstacles we face. Through it all, the Lord invites us to lean into Him as we look towards the future with hope. The Lord promises that *"at harvest time [He] will tell the reapers"* to gather up His followers so they can be by His side for eternity (Matt 13:30).

**Reflection:**

When thinking about the end of days, do you have hope for the harvest? Despite the pain and sin in the world today, how do you live filled with the light of the Lord?

## Colossians 2:6-15

**Jesus, Lead the Way** | Lydia Schroeder

When I was in high school, I interviewed my Grandpa Schroeder for a class assignment. This past March, he was called to join Jesus and I found this voice recording of the interview we had done together shortly after his passing. I am reminded of my grandpa by reading these verses that Paul writes in Colossians—pointing us to God's Word and seeking leadership from Christ in our lives as we go out in this missionary field.

Throughout this interview with my grandpa, he made it evident that "life is a blessing" and the words that he spoke pointed to His Creator and Savior. I find it difficult to read these verses by Paul and not feel this same sense of peace and closeness to Jesus. Verses 6 and 7 state that through our Baptism and renewal in Christ, we are to "*walk in Him*." I love this image of walking not even alongside Jesus, but "*in Him*." His presence is within us and in our hearts everyday.

Not only do we "*walk in Him*," but we are "*rooted and built up*," and "*established in the faith*" of our Creator. When we live our lives fully knowing and believing these, we can then "*abound in thanksgiving*." Though we have all been corrupted by sin, Jesus chooses to love and guide us every step of our life journey. This type of thanksgiving is not dependent on our earthly and temporal circumstances, but on the sacrificial love of Christ Jesus.

What a wonderful Savior we have who would sacrifice Himself for US! Even though we are dead in sin, we can live our lives with the confidence that just as Jesus has died and will be raised from the dead, we are "*also raised with him through faith*." In this Lenten season let these verses remind you that despite all of the chaos happening around you, Jesus is with you, leading you to exactly where you need to be through your faith in Him. And for that, let us gather with gratitude for our God.

**Reflection:**

How can you be pointing yourself and others to Jesus today? What can you be grateful for in your life right now?

1 Peter 2:13-25

**Sermon: The Path of Honor** | Pastor Marcus Lane

**A Heart that Knows the Way** | Monica Heissenbuettel

*"Blessed are those whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion" (v. 5).*

I spend a lot of my time traveling, it seems. Sometimes it's because I have to (going to work, giving a family member a ride to school or the airport, running errands); other times, it's because I want to (going to meet a friend for coffee or lunch, visiting a museum or art gallery, shopping for a gift for a family member, watching one of our daughter's concerts or recitals, boarding a plane for somewhere where the sound of waves is louder than anything else!) Sometimes it's because I'm a church organist and I need to travel on the freeway to get to the church where I play.

In the spring of 2020, it was deemed unsafe to gather in most houses of worship in our country. In the congregation I serve, weekly services were recorded and posted for viewing, and instead of playing the organ on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, I was driving to the church for a recording session on Thursday mornings. It felt very strange, very artificial, and very isolating. I even had a conversation with the pastor about how I felt that God's house should be a haven of peace and comfort and sanctuary for those struggling with fear, anxiety, and isolation during this time: that all the unknowns about this virus were frightening, but coming to God's house for weekly worship would be very meaningful and refreshing. The Psalmist writes: *"As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools"* (v. 5 & 6).

I began to reflect on what it meant to spend time in the House of the Lord ... and how I had been taking that blessing for granted! There have been many times in my life when I have entered the empty sanctuary and have taken a moment to pray, to breathe, to embrace the quiet hush and let His presence settle upon me. I've viewed the Eternal Flame or other focal points such as the stained glass, that are an aid to mere mortals who try to imagine what dwelling in God's presence might be like in eternity.

Psalm 84 captures the heart of one who has not been able to participate in worship in God's house; therein lies a very physical longing, an almost painful pining, to be

in communion with Him and with other believers in Christ who come to *“worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24). The worshiper realizes strength and refreshment in the Lord, finding both in His house. I am reminded of the ebullient joy in the voice of Rebecca St. James. Her recording of Matt Redman’s *“Better is One Day”* on her *Worship God* CD captures this longing brilliantly.

May our hearts ever be trained toward Zion!

**Reflection:**

Where does your heart take you? Do your feet take the path to worship the Lord in His dwelling place? Who will you bring with you?



Jeremiah 3:21-4:4**The Path of Honor** | Pastor Chris Troxel

This week started so nicely. Psalm 84 is such a beautiful meditation on the honor of God and how we reflect that honor when He brings us into His presence.

And now Jeremiah. Jeremiah, the iron prophet, God's instrument to tear down and build up. That's what we read today. This is one of those places where God gets vividly clear on how He feels about sin, and about faith and grace and their lack in His people. It is quite easy to read this as: "Israel, you're terrible, horrible. But, if you start behaving, then we'll be fine." But that's not the case. God is saying this, and He already knows Israel can't turn. Even during the reign of Josiah, one of the most faithful of Israel's kings, exile still followed. Israel never fully returned.

In the Israelites' failure, the Spirit shows us our own. Even as we seek to follow God with all our hearts, we can never fully get there, even on our best days. That is the depth of sin in fractured humanity. This truth about sin leads to one of the primary reflections in Lent: remembering the vitality and life Jesus brings. Jesus succeeds where humanity fails. Jesus is faithful not just as God's son and so fulfilling what Israel never could, Jesus is faithful as a human and so fulfilling what no one else ever could.

When God's righteous accusation hits hard, and rightly so, God doesn't leave Israel there. God doesn't leave you there either. Jesus took Israel's place in His journey to the cross, and He takes yours. You, like Israel, used to deserve nothing but punishment. But now, for the sake of Jesus you get His forgiveness, His faithfulness, fresh grace daily, and the assurance that God's love for you goes so much deeper than your sin. You are truly a child of God, dearly loved. By faith you get to walk the path of honor in the footsteps of Jesus, without fear of failure. May that assurance bring you hope and confidence as you follow Him, sharing that deep, fulfilling love of God walking the path of honor.

**Reflection:**

What do you see, hear, and love in this passage from Jeremiah? What challenges you about God's language here? What gives you hope? How can calling sin what it is in light of God's love encourage you on God's path of honor today?

Matthew 15:1-8**Traditions and Commandments** | Monica Schneggenburger

Like the Pharisees and Scribes, in our individual church congregations, we can become so comfortable in how practices are conducted in our weekly services that when we encounter changes to what we are accustomed to, we can lose sight of the intentions of the gospels. We cling to tradition instead of the content message of Scripture that is universal for everyone. When Jesus came to earth He came to fulfill the law that had been given to the Israelites. While Jesus did fulfill the law through His death and resurrection, the principle of the laws remains. Jesus declared that the laws could be summed up in loving God with your whole heart, soul, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself in Matthew 22:37-39.

The Pharisees and Scribes were so focused on the rituals attached to the laws that they failed to understand the concept of the law. Likewise, we can get clouded by traditions and standard practices and forget to show love to our neighbor, justifying our actions through this or that lens, rather than walking in faith and repentance and allowing the Holy Spirit to equip us daily.

**Reflection:**

God's word tells us to love not just our friends and family but everyone—even enemies—leaving judgment and vengeance to God. Let us pray that our Father will help us to not forget His word for us to love even our enemies over tradition or accepted practices. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Matthew 16:21-23

**His Resolute Promise** | Cecilia Hiros

Picture a loved one and/or your best friend in the whole world. In your image, maybe they're making a goofy face, maybe you're observing them doing something they're passionate about. I'm sure all of us could agree that we would do almost anything to protect this person from harm if it were within our capabilities.

If we look at Matthew 16:22, Peter is striving to protect his loved one in the way that all humans do. For context, Jesus had been explaining to his disciples the details of his death and resurrection, down to the nitty-gritty of who would be causing his suffering (v. 21). In response, Peter says, *"Far be it from you Lord! This shall never happen to you"* (v. 22). Anyone would be scared and sad to hear this news.

Many of us may have first read through Peter's response and thought, "Yea, of course I wouldn't want Jesus to die either"—I know I certainly did. I was then immediately stunned by Jesus' harshness towards Peter, commanding Satan out of his thoughts and rebuking his gaze toward things of the flesh. However, after reflection (and some chats with a few close friends), I realized that God is again showing us his promise. Through Jesus' response we can see that there is nothing, I repeat, NOTHING that will stop Jesus from fulfilling his promise to die for us to save us from our sins and guide us to God's kingdom. Not even one of his closest friends.

I hope it also reminds us that Jesus' promise still holds true today and He has already died for our sins to save us. I hope this devotional motivates each of us to follow in Jesus' resolute posture towards God as we share the Gospel with those that have and haven't yet met God.

**Reflection:**

How are you encouraged by Jesus' response towards Peter? Where are some areas in your walk with Jesus that could be changed by adopting a resolute posture?

**Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus** | Tandy Mazak

We've all heard the saying "Let go and let God," which sounds easy but isn't because we want to be the managers of our own lives. To "let go and let God" means that you are letting Jesus be the manager of your life. It means that you must deny your own ambitions and desires and seek Christ's will.

In the Message Bible, Matthew 16:24 says this: *"Then Jesus went to work on His disciples. 'Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how.'" Here's what we tend to do: When we become believers in Christ, we give him the driver's seat and then promptly hop into the backseat and become backseat drivers. We're constantly giving him "advice," like, "No, turn this way. Stop. Wait. Faster! I want to go that way. I want to see that sight." We tend to fall right back into being the manager.*

In the reading today, Jesus is telling us here to take up our own cross. In other words, every day deny yourself and continue to follow Him which means to seek to be like Him and obedient to Him. Such a demand only makes sense if following Christ is of more value than our interests, our comforts and even our own lives. There is life now and everlasting life later, so taking up our cross only makes sense if what we gain by doing this is of greater value. And it is.

**Reflection:**

What are the details of your life that are most difficult for you to surrender to God?  
What do your actions reveal about who is managing your life?

## Romans 12:9-21

**Carry the Wrench** | James Kleimola

On October 23, 2021, I had the great honor of leading the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) football team onto the field at Doyt Perry Stadium in its game against Bowling Green State University. I was selected to lead the team as part of an EMU decade-long game day tradition called the Wrench.

The Wrench tradition began in 2014 during Chris Creighton's first summer as the head coach at EMU. "We all have adversity of different, varying kinds," said Coach Creighton. "Ultimately [the Wrench represents] our response to adverse situations that really will define who we are and how we live." [i]

In Romans 12:9-21, Paul gives similar instructions with regard to how we are to live: exhibit genuine love, show honor, avoid sloth, be fervent in zeal, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer, contribute to others' needs, bless those who persecute you, live in harmony with one another, associate with the lowly, and don't repay evil.

These are all challenging, but I find the most difficult instruction in verse 19: *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"* When we face adversity resulting from someone who maliciously and deeply hurts us, many elements in our culture urge vengeance. "He hit me first" is presented as a justifiable reason to hit back, and "Revenge is sweet" appeals to our deep visceral urge to seek retribution.

But God's way does not always match our instinctual way, and we must let Scripture change and guide us to be and act as God would have us. Paul urges us earlier in verse 2 *"not to be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Our culture says to seek justified retribution in vengeance; God says trust Him to make all things right. Let Jesus help you carry your wrench as you sojourn, because that's how He has called us to live.

**Reflection:**

Are you tempted toward vengeance because someone has deeply wronged you? Ask Jesus to give you strength to carry the wrench.

[1]<https://emueagles.com/news/2021/11/15/football-give-me-the-wrench-the-story-behind-emus-51-pound-pipe-wrench.aspx>

1 Peter 3:8-22

**Sermon: The Path of Suffering** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

## Psalm 6

**Honestly Yelling At God** | Carley Baker

In prayer and relationship with God and with other Christians, do you hide your emotions? Do you believe that God doesn't want to hear about the anger, fear, envy, and doubt that you are feeling? Do you only share "acceptable" emotions? Have you been walking around with a mask that hides part of you and keeps people from knowing you fully? Who knows your heart and life fully and completely and still accepts and wants you?

In Psalm 6, the psalmist does not hold back his fear, doubt, or sorrow from the Lord. *"Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long?"* (v. 2, 3). Let us learn to honestly ask God ... how long? Our Loving God of the Universe knows the genuine, deep struggles, angers, and hurts that you have. You are not fooling God by hiding the truth of your emotions. Rather you are in all likelihood kidding yourself by not coming to God honestly and fully with your anger, hurt, and disappointment with Him and the world.

Come to God like the psalmist and say, *"Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love... I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes. Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my "* (v. 4-9). The psalmist assures us that we can cry out to the Lord in our need, and at the same time, voice our confidence and assurance that God hears and accepts our prayers.

**Reflection:**

Take a moment to think about what emotions you readily feel comfortable sharing with God and which ones you hide from the Lord and others. Why do you hide certain feelings from other Christians and from the God of the Universe? Do you believe that God wants to know, love, and redeem each part of you?

2 Timothy 3:1-17**The Folly in our Lives** | Kyle Thoms

Does it ever seem like the end is near? Do you listen to the nightly news and think, what is this world coming to? Do you browse your most used social media platform and wish you never did? The brokenness, pain, selfishness, deceit, and power all seem to be relevant in our everyday lives. We see it at home, work, school and in our daily interactions.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he writes in chapter three that there will be *"terrible times in the last days."* He goes on for the next nine verses detailing what godliness will look like in the last days. Paul urges Timothy to beware of these people and avoid them. In verse 9, he specifically says that these people will *"not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone."* What folly is in your life? Do you keep God in a box? Do you speak slander of our neighbor? Are you deceitful? We all do.

Paul wrote his last letter (2 Timothy) from prison as he knew his life was near. God's grace is the central message in all of Paul's letters. Paul concludes chapter three by urging and encouraging Timothy to proclaim the message of God's grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus. This grace was given to us from the beginning, in our infancy. Paul tells Timothy to *"continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of."* He continues in vs. 15, *"how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we can eliminate the folly in our life. We can face persecution as a redeemed child of God. We can stand in confidence knowing that God's grace is free and enough. Paul concludes chapter three with a verse many of us probably learned in confirmation class. I have it highlighted in my confirmation Bible, *"All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* God's Word is powerful. It helps us overcome the folly in our life and the trouble in this world.

**Reflection:**

What is the folly in your life? How can you stand on the word of God to defeat sin in your life?



## Matthew 18:1-6

**Self-forgetfulness** | Jeff Barber

As a kid growing up on the Eastside of Detroit, I needed a summer job. I started caddying at age 13. I learned quickly when to speak, stay quiet or say "yes sir, good shot", even when he shanked one into a bunker. I remember the less than feeling of being a "have-not" in a rich environment. Now, as a business owner, I haven't forgotten that feeling so I aspire to be a servant leader. As Dan Allender wrote, "lead with a limp."

In Matthew 18, the disciples ask Jesus *"who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* Jesus answers by calling them to become like a child or you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. How extreme, especially given the culture during Jesus' time on earth, children were considered the least of these. Jesus told the disciples to emulate them by giving up our selfishness and pride and become dependent like children. He calls us to be humble like a child. Jesus is telling us to realize our need for our Savior. So, how do we become completely dependent on Him?

As Timothy Keller wrote "the essence of Gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less." True humility is our ability to be self-forgetful, to take more interest in another's well-being without concern of what we want to say or how we look. As we join with Him in His kingdom work, by His grace we sacrifice our earthly wants for God's greater path marked out for us. This sacrifice is nothing compared to Jesus' ultimate penalty on the cross as He suffered, separated from God, for our sins. This season, as we wait to celebrate His rising, let us remember that this momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

**Reflection:**

What are ways that you can be self-forgetful?

## Matthew 19:16-30

**Upward Call** | Paul Zuellig

I have read this familiar story many times over my life, yet, as are many things of God, it is a story that speaks on many levels to us concerning our journey to the Father. Reading this story over these past days, I come back to that moment when the young man stands before Jesus. He is earnest in his desire to follow God (*"What do I still lack?"*). He recounts to Jesus all his good and worthy deeds (*"All these I have observed"*). He looks to be a godly man, even a holy man, yet here he is, before the rabbi, Jesus, seeking something more than his rule-keeping life has provided.

Then Jesus speaks. He gives the young man the answer he has sought. Jesus calls him to go in a direction he had not seen or could imagine. Here is the turning point for him, as for us all. Will or can he surrender his plans, his possessions, his will, to Jesus, and follow Him? In that moment, the young man counts the cost of losing himself to Jesus, and he cannot. Thus his search ends, as the call of faith proves too high for him, and he turns away from Jesus in sorrow.

It seems to me that we all, who aspire to follow Jesus, have had and will have these decisive moments—to follow Him or not. These are often "small" things, yet our decisions will either lead us "Jesusward" or away from Him.

This season of Lent reminds us that the life Jesus gives to us comes with a cost—the path to and through the cross—that place where faith strengthens us to loosen our grip on our lives and take hold of that life which is *"life indeed."*

*"...because we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal"* (St. Paul).

**Reflection:**

Are there things in your life that hinder your pilgrim journey to Jesus?

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

**Power in Imperfection** | Elizabeth Jahn

Several years ago, I traveled to Japan with my MBA program cohorts. We visited a remote area of Hida-Osaka and met with a potter. It was my first experience at a potter's wheel, and this wheel was guided by the hands of a Japanese artist who didn't speak English. In Japan, what is seen as beauty is sometimes different from our Western view of beauty. The Japanese treasure the imperfections and irregularities in pottery. There is even a special form of pottery called Kintsugi, where cracks are mended with gold. This process highlights the imperfections and makes the pottery more valuable.

Similarly, God uses our imperfections for His purpose. In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul calls us jars of clay. It's through each of us as vessels that others are able to see *"the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"* (v. 4). We are called to be the light in the darkness, but it isn't our light. It is God shining through us. He uses the cracks in our vessels of clay to allow others to experience His power and glory.

Paul highlights that we will be *"afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed"* (v. 8-9). During these times of struggle, our vessels of clay go through dramatic transformations, much as pottery is transformed in a kiln. Those times aren't easy, but they can be powerful. They can be ways that God allows us to connect with others. They can demonstrate how God's light is able to shine into the darkest of places.

We may want to mask our imperfections, but imagine the ways in which the glory of God can work through us. Paul encourages us not to lose heart. *"Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day"* (v. 16). God renews us by pouring His light into our broken vessels and by perfecting us in our weaknesses.

**Reflection:**

How often do we try to hide our cracks and imperfections? Are there ways in which God may want to use those cracks to shine His light through to others?

**Truth from a Beloved Children's Film** | Margaret Baker

When our children were young, one of our go-to family movies, to which we still refer(!), was "Pollyanna," (the 2003 British version). Sadly, "You're such a Pollyanna," has become an insult. It refers to a person who is dangerously naïve and hopelessly out of touch with the reality of evil in the world. To call someone a Pollyanna is tantamount to saying, "How can you possibly rejoice when the world is obviously sick and full of terrible events daily, if not hourly? What's wrong with you?" Well, judging from his writings and descriptions of his persecution and trials, Paul knew something about a sick and deranged world. Yet here in Philippians 4:4-9 he exhorts us twice to "*Rejoice!*" He then goes on to remind us to pray with thanksgiving, rather than spend our time worrying; to feel free to present specific prayer requests to God; and to meditate on the lovely, the admirable, the noble. He is telling us it is OK to be a Pollyanna. And he does not want us to be quiet about it. "*Let your gentleness be evident to all,*" he declares. In other words, "Don't hide your gentleness under a bushel."

This word, "gentleness" (*epieikes*) has a wide range of meanings that include humility, patience, forbearing, calm, and reasonableness, especially when confronted with hot-tempered, even violent people (thanks, Pastors!). If ever there is a quality needed today, this is it! And if ever there were a people who could exhibit this kind of supernatural calm, we believers are it. Why are we particularly suited to demonstrate it? "*Because the Lord is at hand!*" Paul reminds us (v. 5). He has come, is here, and is coming again. His peace, which we cannot understand with human reason, will guard our minds and keep us focused on ultimate goodness and nobility, Jesus Himself. And the God of peace will be with us always. He cheers us on as we confront sin and sinners with *epieikes*, bolstered by the fact that He also exhibited this quality for us on the cross, where he confronted our sin and disobedience with forbearance, calm, and humility. And as my husband and I often remind each other in the trials we face on these life journeys, He is on His throne. So together with Pollyanna, Paul, and Christians across the ages we can rejoice, be glad, and say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!" (1 Chronicles 16:31)

**Reflection:**

When have you seen a fellow believer exhibit this winsome quality of *epieikes*? Give thanks for their obedience and ask God to give you the courage to emulate it when you are next in a situation of confrontation.

1 Peter 4:7-19

**Sermon: The Path of Community** | Pastor Marcus Lane

## Psalm 133

**When Brothers Dwell in Unity** | Anna & David Dickhudt

This Psalm reminds us of the rare beauty of human unity, when we have a fleeting glimpse of something perhaps close to what God intended for humankind, namely to live together in love and harmony—*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”* Psalm 133:1

The next verse goes on to paint a picture a bit more difficult for our Western culture to appreciate, which is a picture of anointing oil running down the head and onto the beard and garment of the high priest. This precious and fragrant oil was specially mixed according to God’s instructions to the Israelites in Exodus 30. The picture is one of an anointing ordained by God, in abundance and holy, which covers and surrounds us, and fills us with its pleasing aroma.

The last verse of this Psalm is again perhaps something more familiar for our Western culture, that is, the dew on a mountainside, which sustains and nourishes life with its moisture, just as God provides for and blesses us daily and richly.

We are encouraged with this Psalm to strive for the blessings provided when we can enjoy God-pleasing human unity, but when we fail, through the certainty of the Gospel we can be assured of our salvation through the work Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

**Reflection:**

Take a moment to remember and savor a time when you felt the beauty of human unity. Then take a step in that direction today by sharing kind words with a family member, coworker, or friend.

## Matthew 20:1-16

**Unfair Grace** | Becky Johnson

Fairness. Equity. Wages. These are words that we can relate to. A person deserves a fair wage. If one works harder or longer, one deserves more pay. This is the world we live in. There should be no discrepancy in salary based on gender or race. Isn't that what people are fighting for? Let's be honest. Doesn't this parable rub you the wrong way? Why should the laborers who only worked one hour get the same pay as those who worked all day? It feels unfair.

I remember having a conversation with a guest at an Alpha Course years ago who was bothered by the idea that a criminal who turns to Jesus shortly before they die would receive the same payment or reward (heaven) as the person who had followed God their whole life. That just did not make sense to them and felt so unfair. Don't we often feel this way, too? Listen again to the words of the master. *"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"* (Another translation reads: *Are you envious because I am generous?*)

Our sense of unfairness is based on the idea that we should get what we deserve. More work, more pay. Getting what we deserve.

Is heaven what we deserve? Is God's love something we have earned? This parable suddenly reveals our hearts. Do we give lip service to saying we are saved by grace, but actually don't fully believe it? I deserve for God to love me because I serve in the church, I try to keep my nose clean, I follow His laws (well, most of the time). Like the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son, do we resent God's generosity toward others because we haven't fully recognized God's generosity towards us? Thank God, He does not give us what we deserve! This is His upside-down Kingdom: the first will be last and the last will be first. Those who deserve punishment will receive the lavish, generous, grace of God.

**Reflection:**

In repentance, bring to God the ways you have begrudged or been envious of His generosity to others or have taken for granted His generosity towards you.

**What in the World Do I Write?** | Jenna Wylly

We all have had or currently have that one friend who is overdramatic, who is a know-it-all, or who is always getting off track with things that don't even make sense or seem relevant. Do you have any friends who instantly come to mind? Do you think you're one of these friends?

In Matthew, Jesus foretells his future all the way through his death and into the afterlife. The trick here is, He did it in two sentences! Imagine how your friends would look at you if you were to tell them how you were going to die in two quick sentences just as a conversation starter on a road trip. Your friends probably wouldn't give much merit to what you're saying, and maybe they would laugh at you or just ignore you.

Originally when I was writing this devotion, I was stuck. The verse is so important, yet semi-vague; it's all encompassing of the whole theme and idea of the Bible in two sentences. Since I couldn't figure out what to write, I asked a friend of mine who is not a confirmed Christian what his perspective on the verse was and what he thought about what Jesus was saying. I read him the verse to get his reaction. He said, "Wow, that's a big stretch from a guy who's used to just turning water to wine and smaller stuff like that." I then ask him how he thinks Jesus' disciples would have reacted. He said, "Well, wasn't Jesus known for doing miracles, like something with fish and bread? If his disciples had seen all that, you'd think they'd trust him and his powers, right?" I wanted to say yes, but I had to be honest and mention all of the times Jesus' disciples (despite seeing his miracles and knowing what he was capable of) doubted Him. I said, "Well, they were just humans after all." Why is that an acceptable excuse?

My friend is right. If we have read the Bible and have documentation of the capabilities of God, then just like the disciples, we shouldn't doubt Him. In short, we will never be perfect, but we can always strive for a stronger trust and bond with God AND work to always share the Gospel with others; otherwise, I would still be staring at a blank page hoping for a devotion to come to me.

**Reflection:**

Do you feel as though you're sharing God's Word at every chance possible? Are there areas in your life you can work more to lean on God and trust His plans?



Matthew 20:20-28

## **A Mother's Request** | McKinley Schmitz

The title above matches the title in my study Bible, but it means more than that to me. If any of you have the pleasure of meeting my mom (well, both my parents but the title isn't called "A Father's Request", sorry Dad), you see why she is my guiding light in most things. She is my role model in what it means to be a friend, an advocate, a faithful woman, and so much more. But I think, most importantly, my mom has shown me how to love so fiercely that it casts out some of the shadows of my darkest times and walks with me through them.

I see the love of my mom in this passage. We read that the mother of James and John ask Jesus to grant her children the honor of sitting at His right and left side in the kingdom of God. Who else but a mother would believe in her children so much that she sees them as the best candidates to hold these coveted spots?

While the passage never mentions her again, I thought of her when Jesus asked her sons, "*Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?*" (v. 22). This is a figure of speech to mean "experience" the suffering that Jesus is preparing for. While they replied that they could bear what was coming, I pictured their mom thinking this through. Just because you believe that your child is destined for great things and can accomplish anything, does that mean that you wish those trials on him/her? Of course not.

A mother's love supports and protects her child and is full of forgiveness and strength. Just as the mother of James and John knew what it would mean for her children, so did the Lord when sending His only Son to earth. However, His love surpasses that of a mother—He allowed His Son to suffer on a cross because He loves us. Friends, we all come across events that will test us, but know that you are loved fiercely and that love will be with you no matter what.

### **Reflection:**

How are you showing your love for others as God loves us? Consider ways to love more boldly to support those around you.

Galatians 6:1-1**Living for One Another** | Vanessa Lane

Nobody likes getting called out. When someone confronts us with an offense, we can feel defensive, embarrassed, and angry, among other things. But have you ever experienced being confronted by someone whose love for you was as clear as the mistake you made? When someone's love for you is evident, confrontation can actually be experienced as a great blessing.

As a part of a ministry family, I've seen this lived out among the various church communities to which we've been called. One of my favorite things is experiencing a mix of mature and young Christians who serve the Church and community together. When Christians of every age walk together in love toward one another, even moments of conflict and confrontation can be evidence that God's people are for each other.

This is exactly the kind of attitude Paul calls the Church to have toward one another in Galatians 6. Whether it is showing someone their sin in order to restore them to the community (v. 1), supporting those who serve the Church in various ways (v. 5), or constantly striving to do good to one another (v. 10), the Church is called to be a people who are always for one another.

In Galatians 6:2, Paul tells us why we are called to live in such a way: *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* When we bear one another's burdens, we show each other what Christ looks like. When we carry out our callings for the sake of others, rather than ourselves, our lives become reflections of the life of Jesus, the One who lived for us, who took our burdens by going to the cross.

When we live for one another, we show the world the One who lived, died, and rose again for us.

**Reflection:**

Where is there a feeling of forsakenness in your life where God is inviting you to seek him and praise him? How might God use that suffering to draw you to himself?

## Matthew 21:1-11

**Shaken** | Corrine Forbes

The Triumphal Entry. The Procession of the Prince of Peace. The Royal Welcome. The Beginning of the Passion of the Christ. There are many titles used and ways to visualize Jesus's entrance into the holy city of Jerusalem roughly 2000 years ago. It was springtime, and many pilgrims had traveled to the holy city in preparation for the Passover celebration. In an act of royal homage, cloaks and colorful clothing were laid down to cover the streets. Palm branches, symbols of victory and triumph, were waving in the air and also lining the streets. Large crowds welcomed the procession with shouts of *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."*

To fulfill the Old Testament prophecy, Jesus made his entrance into the city, riding in humility on the back of a borrowed donkey's colt, a beast of burden. He knew that his time had come to claim his title of Messiah. Scripture says: *"As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, What's going on here? Who is this?"* (vs. 10, the Message translation). The whole city was shaken and unnerved with Jesus's grand entrance. As a lifelong Christian, I've strangely never noticed this detail about the crowds that had gathered! These words are usually reserved for a range of deep emotions. Anything from extreme elation, but more commonly, to something profoundly unsettling or disturbing. They knew that something big was about to happen. They were experiencing something life changing. They could feel it. When was the last time you've experienced these emotions? For me, the past few months have produced this emotion due to a serious medical emergency that I experienced and have been slowly recovering from. For others, this might mean the sudden death of a loved one, a devastating diagnosis, bearing witness to a crime or serious accident, or any number of other horrific things this life can throw our way. How do we choose to respond? Let us be reminded of Jesus's royal entrance into Jerusalem. He entered in obedience, knowing that the outcome would yield an eternal result.

**Reflection:**

When we are shaken or unnerved in this life, do we turn to Jesus, our Prince of Peace, or to the things of this world? When trials come, do we remember his triumphal entry and the fact that he has already won the ultimate victory over the tragedies of this earthly life?

*"Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." Hebrews 12:28*

1 Peter 5:1-11

**Sermon: The Path of Humility** | Pastor Gabe Kasper



Philippians 2:1-11**Suffering and Humility** | Norma Polk

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul was obviously an outspoken and faithful follower of Christ and a prominent Christian leader. Unfortunately, that didn't always go over well with the Romans, who often persecuted Christians to the point of death. In fact, most of Jesus' disciples died a violent death. But despite this harsh persecution, Paul draws strength, comfort and joy from the body of Christ. Ultimately the source of joy and encouragement is Christ Jesus who clearly wants us, the members of His body, to encourage one another, as we go through suffering.

We also want others to experience the sweet salvation that we experience, and so we share the Gospel with other people. Unfortunately, sharing the Christian faith can itself sometimes lead to persecution! So, how on earth are we supposed to be joyful when we are suffering as a result of being Christians or for sharing Jesus with others? In verses 3 to 8 of this passage, God tells us that the key is humility. By considering others as more significant than ourselves, we can experience joy and contentment. Humility allows us to look to the interests of others, not only our own. We are to encourage and love one another in Christ. And how can we do that? By imitating Jesus' humility.

Think of Alexander the Great, whose empire extended from Macedonia (modern day Greece) in the west to India in the east. But that enormous empire was only a drop in a bucket compared to the power and dominion of Jesus—He has dominion over the whole universe! Yet, despite His great power, He came down to earth, was born as a human baby, and ultimately obeyed His Father by going to the cross to die to save us! Now THAT'S humility! Unfortunately, human beings aren't capable of that kind of humility in our own strength. We need Jesus to mold us and shape us into His likeness, so that we will be humble enough to care for one another in the midst of any kind of suffering.

Because of Jesus' humility, He was glorified, and all creation will ultimately bow down and worship Him. And if we follow his example and humble ourselves, God can and will use our witness to lift up Jesus, so that the world can see that He is the living God, not just another good man with another good teaching.

Let us therefore joyfully suffer for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us share the Good News in Christ, despite mockery, or even persecution. Let us be humble and care for one another so that His name will be glorified!

**Reflection:**

Do you know anyone who suffers because of Christ? What can you do to encourage and comfort that person?

Matthew 26:1-5**Courage is the Face of Fear** | Jay Naab

What kind of people do you think of when you think of “leadership”? Of “courage”? Of “sacrifice”?

Many people and professions are sure to come to mind, but for me, I always think of the battlefield. I've never been near one myself, so my mind goes to the movies. I imagine a man jumping on a grenade to save his platoon or some brave soul embracing his fate so his fellow soldiers can advance and the mission can be accomplished. In these scenarios, we see people actively choosing torture and death so that others may live.

We find the ultimate example of this heroism at the beginning of Matthew 26 as Jesus gathers his disciples to inform them of the precise sequence of events as it is about to unfold. He informs them when and how he will be taken from them and the brutal fate that awaits him (v. 2).

One could only imagine the energy among the disciples hearing this news and the days following. They all had to have been plagued with feelings of fear, anger, doubt, and anxiety. They must've had difficulty sleeping and been ready to fight or to flee. They needed a leader to keep them together.

They had one. They had the One who was going to shoulder their burdens (and ours) by taking it all on Himself. He would take all they would throw at Him, on his terms, and endure desertion, denial, and betrayal in the process. Throughout it all, He was in control, courageous and steady. In contrast, the cowardly high priests conspired to arrest him at a “safe” time (verses 3-5).

As we aspire to be one with Christ, I think we can learn from Him in this moment. As He faced down betrayal, injustice, and even death itself, He remained in control. He was there for others. He was steadfast and resolute. That's a leader. That's courage. That's a sacrifice.

**Reflection:**

How can you be more like Christ in anxious or uncertain times? How can you share Him with those who feel leaderless and alone in this world?

**A Beautiful Thing** | Amy Robson

I recently attended a wedding at a cathedral in Detroit. The stained glass, painted covered ceilings accented with gold, endless recessed nooks with lifelike statues, and ornately carved pews took my breath away. On one hand, I was awed by the splendor; on the other hand, I was overwhelmed as I thought of the time and money that had gone into creating and maintaining this church while there was so much poverty surrounding it.

In today's reading, the woman (Mary, in other gospels) lovingly honors Jesus by pouring expensive perfume on His hair. While anointing was not uncommon, what Mary does is excessive in amount and quality. Like me in the cathedral, the disciples focus on the excess or waste and rebuke her, righteously declaring that the money could have been used to serve the poor. Jesus, however, the One who told the rich young ruler, *"You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven"* (Mark 10:21), had a surprising response. He rebukes the disciples and defends Mary's act of love, calling it a "beautiful thing." He not only experiences her gift but knows her heart because He is the One who created it. Mary's act was not a dramatic, sentimental moment; rather, her "excessive" worship was a meaningful part of God's sovereign plan: *"[S]he did it to prepare Me for burial."*

A couple of things impress me about this passage. Mary, unfazed by the presence of the disciples, doesn't ask permission but boldly approaches Jesus and pours the nard on His hair. It seems so personal, but neither Mary nor Jesus are self-conscious about it. Mary's outpouring of the perfume is an authentic outpouring of her heart. And Jesus not only graciously receives her gift but also elevates her: *"Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."* Jesus's desire for our whole-hearted devotion and close friendship is inspiring and humbling. He doesn't just want us to serve others; He wants us to be His closest friends.

**Reflection:**

While we're not going to build a cathedral or physically anoint Jesus, how can our worship be "excessive," like Mary's? How can we create our own "beautiful thing" to honor our Savior and Defender?



John 13:1-17

**Sermon: The Path of Love** | Pastor Gabe Kasper



7 Last Words

**Sermon: The Path of Death** | Pastor Gabe Kasper, Pastor Marcus Lane,  
Justin Goodrich



**Why Have You Forsaken Me?** | Pastor Marcus Lane

Most of us very readily identify with David's cry at the beginning of this psalm. We don't have to look far to discover David's feeling of forsakeness. We cry out to God in the midst of sin and temptation, but it seems like we never get an answer. Fear and anxiety overwhelm us. We look at the world and see warring and violence. It is easy to speak right along with David, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you forgotten me? WHERE ARE YOU?"

But what is difficult for us to understand is how, in the midst of this suffering, David can still praise God. These two things seem mutually exclusive. Praising God is for when times are good, right? Can't he fix my situation first? But David's praise in the midst of suffering confronts us and says that praising God is not just for when we are on top of the world; it is for when we are in the gutter too. How is this possible?

It is possible because we have a God who entered into the gutter with us. We have a God who does not cast us off when we feel trapped by our own sin, but who says, "Come to me." We have a God who enters into our fears and anxieties and He makes them his own. He meets us in suffering and affliction. He meets us in our forsakenness and makes our cry His own. As Jesus shouts, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" from the cross, we discover God has not forgotten us. He draws near to us in the midst of our suffering. In Jesus, God has already done everything necessary to overcome our sin, our fears, and the brokenness of our world. In Him, God is putting things right.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "*All the promises of God find their yes in Him*" (1 Corinthians 1:20). Every promise that God has made to hear our cries and put things right is fulfilled in Jesus.

For that we can praise Him.

**Reflection:**

Where is there a feeling of forsakenness in your life where God is inviting you to seek Him and praise him? How might God use that suffering to draw you to Himself?

John 20:1-18

**Sermon: The Path of Life** | Pastor Marcus Lane



## About Our Writers

### **Carley Baker**

Carley is married to Todd and in her free time she enjoys drinking tea, swing dancing, writing poetry, and cooking!

### **Margaret Baker**

Margaret is married to her dream man, David, with whom she shares five fascinating children. She loves walking with friends, swimming, reading, accompanying young instrumentalists, editing college essays, teaching writing, and playing Scrabble with her husband.

### **Todd Baker**

Todd is married to Carley and in his free time he enjoys watching movies made before you were born (yes even you), swing dancing, and drinking chocolate milk.

### **Jeff Barber**

Gets to work at a sales engineering consulting firm, married to the lovely Jennifer for 32 years with four children and enjoys time up north, reading, hiking, and Orange Theory Fitness.

### **Patsy Bruenger**

Patsy has been happily married for 26 years to John, whom she met when she had just about given up ever meeting someone she could marry at church. They have an awesome college-aged son and two cats who keep them entertained. She has spent most of her career working in the health field, currently managing regulatory agreements for data registries in cardiology research at Michigan Medicine.

### **Anna & David Dickhudt**

Anna is in her third year of the WISD Young Adult Program and is one of the MLI interns at ULC this year. Anna enjoys Zumba and Special Olympics sports for exercise. David is Anna's dad, who works as Finance Director at a nonprofit in Chicago and enjoys biking year-round in Ann Arbor whenever he can.

### **Dan Dolsen**

Dan is real estate advisor for the healthcare industry and lives with his wife Kristin in Harbor Springs. He also founded and leads a faith-based organization called, The Fatherhood Project- Building Great Dads. And as a dad, he has three married children and two grandchildren.

### **Corinne Forbes**

Corey is a medical scientist for a large regional reference laboratory as well as a devoted mom to Sophia (12) and Andrew (8) and wife to Adrian (22 years). She loves creating in the kitchen, sipping good coffee, reading, traveling and dreaming up new adventures to embark on with her family and friends.

### **Larry Frank**

Baptized October 1937. Those strong words protecting me forevermore—in Grace!

**Bob Grese**

Bob is a Professor Emeritus in UM's School for Environment and Sustainability. He and his wife Susan live on the west side of Ann Arbor where Bob loves gardening with mostly native Michigan plants.

**Monica Heissenbuettel**

Monica is married to Bruce; together they have two nearly launched daughters. Monica enjoys walking in a wooded park with Ziggy, the family Corgi, playing the church organ, teaching preschoolers and piano lessons, and playing Phase Ten with whoever is interested!

**Cecilia Hiros**

Cecilia is a 2nd year PhD student in Music Theory at the University of Michigan. At ULC, she is best known for playing the harp. In her free time, she enjoys playing video games and riding motorcycles.

**Pastor Ken Huner**

Ken is the Dean of Instruction for the Michigan School of Missional Formation and fills in for Pastors at other churches from time to time. Ken is married to Kim Huner, his bride of 47+ years, and they have 4 sons, 3 daughters-in-laws and 7 precious grandchildren. He enjoys playing golf when possible with Thad Polk, Ray Kelly and Ryan Peterson.

**Elizabeth Jahn**

Currently completing an MBA/MSLOD dual degree program in Leadership & Organizational Dynamics. She has worked at the University of Michigan for 27 years and is a Michigan football season ticket holder. She enjoys traveling and looks forward to returning to Japan and Oregon this year.

**Becky Johnson**

Becky Johnson is happily married to Tom and works at Ann Arbor Christian School as the Spiritual Life Coordinator.

**Pastor Gabe Kasper**

Gabe is the Lead Pastor at ULC. He's married to Melissa, has three great kids, and will beat you in ping pong.

**James Kleimola**

James is an equipment manager with the Eastern Michigan University football team. He lives in Ypsilanti, works part time at Chick-fil-A, and enjoys playing the guitar.

**Pastor Marcus Lane**

Marcus is the campus pastor here at ULC, husband to Vanessa and dad to Della and Jude, and has experienced a lifetime of suffering cheering for the Minnesota Timberwolves.

**Vanessa Lane**

Vanessa is married to Marcus and mom to Della (age 7) and Jude (age 4). When she's not working, Vanessa can be found watching her kids play soccer, leading Girl Scouts, or reading.

**Tandy Mazak**

Risk Manager for Ally Bank. Married to Jim and dog mom to Scarlett. Gathering volunteer leader.

**Allie Milot**

Organically grown in Ann Arbor, Allie is a cat mom of three, social media manager at Concordia University Ann Arbor and a thrift store fanatic. You are most likely going to find Allie with a camera in her hand, as photography is one of her greatest passions (and a main function of her job).

**Jay Naab**

An avid sports fan and friend to all, Jay is a lifelong learner who is always looking to build the relationships in his life. When he's not managing his family's business, he is often found living the good life with his wonderful wife, Antoinette, and three energetic children, Jay enjoys playing golf and listening to podcasts.

**Rachel Olson**

Rachel is a graduate student getting her Master's in Social Work at the University of Southern California with the goal of being a therapist. She enjoys playing with her dog and cat, watching "The Office," and painting.

**Norma Polk**

Was a Muslim before the Holy Spirit opened her eyes to Jesus using her brother. Has been happily married for almost 32 years to Thad Polk and they raised three children together. Enjoys golfing, traveling, and cooking. Her happy place is the theater where she designs sets and costumes.

**Amy Robson**

Amy met her husband Brian in the choir at St. Luke, and they have been married for 36 years. They have three adult children, scattered about the country, but whom they feel fortunate to be able to see regularly. Besides hanging out with family and friends, she enjoys reading, staying active, thrifting, and playing games.

**Monica Schneggenburger**

Mother of three sons and six Grandchildren. She loves to study The Bible and share with individuals seeking God. She is the owner of a private home care business called Empowerment Care.

**McKinley Schmitz**

McKinley is a senior from Concordia looking to graduate in May (ask her about it at your own risk, she's nervous about it). She has spent the last four years in classes (which were fine), rehearsals (which were great) and being with her friends (which was the best).

**Lydia Schroeder**

Lydia is a recent graduate of Concordia University Ann Arbor, who majored in Elementary Education and received her Lutheran Teaching Diploma. She loves to run, is a coffee fanatic, and enjoys spending time with friends and family!

**Kyle Thoms**

Proud CUAA grad. Dad to Elliot. Husband to Rachel. Loves sports and Common Cup coffee.

**Rachel Thoms**

Rachel is a staff member at ULC. In her free time she enjoys decorating, reading, gardening, FaceTiming her parents and siblings, and hanging out with her husband, Kyle, and her handsome baby boy, Elliot.

**Pastor Chris Troxel**

Chris is a pastor planting a new church in the heart of Ann Arbor: Emmaus Lutheran Church. Find out more about Emmaus—and Chris—at [emmausannarbor.org](http://emmausannarbor.org)

**Jenna Wyly**

Jenna is a photography student at the College for Creative Studies, Detroit. One of her favorite parts of ULC is getting to drink coffee in church and having a meal afterwards!

**Nathanael Zuellig**

Nate is currently working as Assistant Worship Leader and Artist in Residence at ULC. He also enjoys making maple syrup and teaching kids how to rock and/or roll.

**Paul Zuellig**

Paul has worked as artist, photographer, and printing press operator in his 64 years. He currently is the mailman at St. Joe's Hospital. He enjoys life's moments with his wife, Joanne, and their four children. Spare moments will find him enjoying his "museum"—collection of art and other objects of interest.