

# Redux

## 2024 Lenten Devotional



**UNIVERSITY**  
LUTHERAN CHAPEL



**EMMAUS**  
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**Cover Art:**

"The Redeemer in the Sky of Gaza"

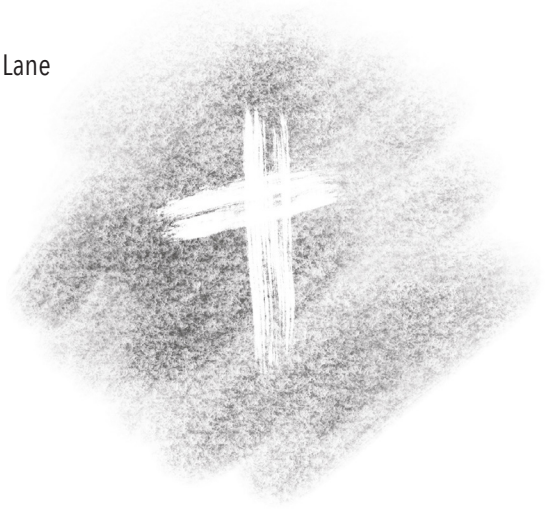
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Jospeh Matar (89) is an internationally renown Lebanese artist. This painting is an expression of his compassion for the people during the war in Gaza. "Hope is part of the artwork; life will resume, and the presence of Christ in a flaming sky increases our hope for deliverance."

Ezra 1:1-9

**Sermon: Report** | Pastor Marcus Lane



Psalm 32**Seeing Clear** | Chris Troxel

What you believe shapes how you think and how you read, what you say and what you do. Not knowing or believing that sin is real and has real consequences is one of those beliefs that can dangerously shape a person's thoughts. Holding this belief, in fact, gives you an automatic disconnect from reality, including from the life-giving words in Psalm 32. You might find yourself describing your experience as David does, refusing to confess sin (v.3). It might even seem as though God is against you! David certainly knows what that's like.

Even better than the best fathers, God knows that you, like his people throughout time, struggle and fail with sin and faithlessness. He doesn't leave you hopeless, however. He doesn't helicopter over you either with constant judgment, criticism, or discouragement. Is His hand of discipline sometimes heavy on you? (v. 4). Of course. But does He also *"guide you along the best pathway for your life?"* (v. 8). Absolutely. This is what His people experienced in the promised land, in exile, in their return, and ultimately in Jesus life, death, and resurrection. It is what His people still experience today. Our Lenten series, "Redux," is all about that: living in the faith, repentance, love, wisdom, and humility that God forms within you in a way that gives life and freedom.

If you've picked up this devotional, it's quite likely you're already wrestling with questions about God and life. If it's the first time you have considered God and what He does, consider the Psalm you read today, and the other daily readings, in light of three key questions:

**Reflection:**

What does this tell you about God? What does this tell you about yourself and/or the world around you? In light of your answers, how will you live now?

**Pray:**

God, move me to believe, repent, and live. Amen.

Jeremiah 30:17-22**Renovation** | Pastor Marcus Lane

If you have had a conversation with me in the last month, you've probably heard that my family is in the process of renovating our kitchen. If you've ever lived in a home during a renovation, you know that the process is a mix of both tiring and exciting. Finding ways to prepare meals with no cooking or dining space is an adventure, but it is exciting to see a kitchen that was rundown, clunky, and dated be restored into something new and beautiful!

This image of renovation echoes what we see God promise his people, Israel, in Jeremiah 30. Israel was rebellious, rundown, and sinful. Because of this, they were sent into exile. The years of exile in Babylon were no doubt tiring and traumatic, but God had larger plans for his people.

His intent has always been to renovate them, to restore them, and to make them new. God promises he is going to take away their shame, restore their health, restore their land, and restore their relationship with him so that they will once again be his people and he will be their God. He wants to renovate what was rundown and make it new and beautiful again.

The promise made to Israel is precisely what God gives to you in Jesus. He calls you to repentance, not to heap shame on you, but because he desires to restore you. God is always working to draw you to Jesus and the forgiveness that has been poured out on the cross the bore for the sins of the world. In Jesus, God is renovating and restoring you so that you would be made new to live as his child with him as your loving and gracious God.

**Reflection:**

Where do you see God doing his work of renovation in your life?

Romans 1:16-17**To Boldly Go Where No One Has Gone Before** | Dan Dolsen

I love Michigan football. I nearly dislike “that school” to the south as much as I love Michigan. I don’t really have any basis for this level of dislike: it’s just the way “I was brought up” (the son of two U of M grads). A number of years ago I was asked to visit “that school” as part of my consulting work. Upon arriving, I hid my true colors (no maize and blue) and it wasn’t until having lunch with a senior executive from the university that my true identity was revealed. Fortunately, I was not taken to the center of the campus and stoned with buckeyes!

Although certainly beyond the level of college football rivalry, the Apostle Paul found himself in a similar plight. He was zealous for his Jewish faith and defended it even to the point of encouraging others to stone those he thought might corrupt Judaism, namely, the followers of Christ. Then Paul encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). This encounter led Paul to proclaim without hesitation or shame, the truth that Christ is Israel’s true Messiah and the Savior of the world! A message Paul knew was a direct affront to both Jews and the Roman authorities. It was a truth that could, and eventually would, lead to him being executed.

It was through the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16) that Paul was emboldened to proclaim God’s plan of restoring all of creation to Himself. Paul acknowledges that this plan began with the Jews, first through Abraham, which was counted as righteous due to his faith in God (Genesis 15:6). Paul points out that it is God’s righteousness that brings life (Romans 1:17), meaning, salvation to both the people of Israel and to the Gentiles. This power of salvation for everyone who believes began with Abraham and is completed through the death and resurrection of Christ!

**Reflection:** As you begin this Lenten journey, prayerfully consider two or three people God inspires you to boldly share Jesus’ love and his offer of salvation.

Ezra 2:64-70

**Sermon: Return** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

Psalms 124**Finding Hope Amidst Global Turmoil** | Zach Marotzke

In recent years, it has seemed that there has been a rising tide of conflict in the world. From the war in Ukraine to the multiple conflicts in the Middle East to unrest in Africa, it can feel that the world has had a worrying trend of more war and conflict that is unprecedented for the modern era.

In light of this, it is easy to feel despair and worry about what the future holds. In times like this it is important to look to the Bible and see how faithful people, like King David, dealt with the struggles of their time. In Psalm 124, the author David lays out who was responsible for Israel's deliverance from its enemies. *"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—let Israel now say—if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us then they would have swallowed us up alive"* (vv. 1–3). In these verses, David the King and military leader of his people reveals that their deliverance from the hands of their enemies was not of his doing, but a gift from God.

So as we become disheartened by crises across the globe or even here at home, we need to take comfort that God is ultimately in control and pray that God provides us peace and deliverance like he did for David in the Old Testament.

**Reflection:** In the face of the escalating conflicts across the globe, consider this: How can the timeless lessons from King David's reliance on God's deliverance inspire and guide our response to the pressing challenges of our modern world?



Matthew 4:1-11**Being Tempted** | Jeaneen Wylly

After His baptism by John, Jesus entered a period of fasting and prayer. At the end of his 40 days and nights, when He was probably at His very weakest, Satan came to tempt Him. I've always been fascinated by the particular temptations that were offered to Him: food (I can't imagine fasting for 40 days!), jumping off the Temple, and getting all of the kingdoms of the world to worship Him. These temptations do focus on our human needs and what we are most likely to make idols, putting them before our relationship with God. For example, even though Jesus tells us not to worry about our lives and what we will eat and drink or what clothes we will wear (Matthew 6:25), I still seem to focus much of my time, energy, and money around these physical needs—my home, car, snacks, and care for my body.

Though I don't believe throwing myself off a high place to see if God will rescue me would be high on my list of temptations, I do often forget to trust Him for my emotional and spiritual support. I often ask others for their thoughts and opinions or look for God's endorsement of my own ideas instead of trusting that He knows me, cares for me, and loves me, and that I don't ever have to put that to any test.

Finally, Jesus was offered the power, influence, and fame that many of us crave. Instead of always being satisfied with the life I have, like the people facing death in Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night," I sometimes want to be remembered for words which "fork...lightning" or deeds which "dance...in a green bay": the understanding and accolades and honor of the people of this world.

Each of these temptations—for physical, emotional, spiritual, or societal security—Jesus counters by reminding the Devil, and us, that God should always be first in our lives: His words are what sustain us; His promises are what give us true peace; and service and worship to Him are what should guide our lives.

When we give into these temptations, which I do every day, I remember that Jesus met and conquered all of them for me, so that I don't have to despair. And as I strive, in the Holy Spirit, to keep God first and defeat these temptations, I remember that we *"won't be tempted beyond what [we] can bear"* and that God will *"also provide a way out"* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

**Reflection:** What are your greatest temptations? How do they take away from putting God first in your life? Thank Jesus that He has overcome temptation for us, and pray that He will continue to help us find the way out from them.

Luke 15:11-24**Coming to Our Senses** | Nancy Koppin

Fairy tales sometimes begin with a young character leaving home. Some are running away from something—or someone. Some are seeking their fortune, or an elusive “something more” than ordinary domestic life. Some are called to a dangerous quest. The tales begin when these characters step beyond the safety of home.

The young man in this parable also leaves home. We don’t know what he’s thinking, but this is what he says: *“Father, give me my share of the estate”* (Luke 15:12). (Or, in The Message: *“Father, I want right now what’s coming to me.”*) His father divides his estate, and before long this son packs up and heads to a *“distant country.”*

What does he do with his new-found wealth? He SQUANDERS it, which is “to spend extravagantly or foolishly: dissipate, waste” (Merriam Webster). Inevitably, the money (and the “friends” it attracted) disappear; he’s facing famine alone and slopping pigs while eyeing their corncocks. Stuck here, with no help in sight, HE COMES TO HIS SENSES! He thinks about those his father employs and makes a plan: return home, confess his sin, ask for work as a hired hand. It’s not entirely clear whether his priority is to restore the relationship or prevent starvation—but it gets him moving in the right direction.

The son takes steps toward home, but it’s the father whose words and actions produce the reconciliation and restoration that follow. He watches for, recognizes, then runs to the son to hug and kiss him. He ignores the boy’s prepared speech and calls for a robe, ring, and sandals to restore him as son. He proclaims a feast of celebration, *“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”* (Luke 15:24). He expresses compassion, forgiveness, love, grace, and joy as he welcomes his lost son home.

So what about us? It’s true that *“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, each of us, to our own way”* (Isaiah 53:6). Yet every time we “come to our senses,” turn, and take a step toward him, God runs out to welcome us home.

**Reflection:** What pulls you away from living fully in your Father’s house? What helps you “come to your senses”?

Luke 15:25-32

**Come to the Party! | Margaret Baker**

One of the great privileges I have had over the past 30 years has been reading the Bible with international women for whom even the most well-known Bible passages are unfamiliar.

"The Prodigal Son" is one of the passages I have taught, and I love seeing the surprise on faces when the Father runs, yes runs to his wayward son in forgiveness. Ah, if the story only ended there.

Yet Jesus has much more to teach us, beginning with the all-important word that follows: "Meanwhile." Jesus tells of the brooding elder son, furious that a party is being thrown for his dissolute brother, whom he certainly never expected to see home. When I teach this portion, I ask my group members to imagine another potential response: "Oh, how I rejoice! My brother is back! I can't wait to share in the party with him! I have had the privilege of enjoying all these years alone being blessed by our beloved father, and my brother has sadly missed out. Now we can celebrate together!" My students inevitably laugh! Who could imagine this? They grasp immediately the reality of human sin and recognize that we all to some degree behave like the older brother at times: ungrateful, self-righteous, and lacking in perspective.

Yet while we can agree that it is almost impossible to imagine a human brother behaving in that hypothetical grace-filled way, we also know Someone who does behave that way. Our Lord, Jesus! We may be far from Him, pursuing our own inclinations, perhaps not "in wild living," but certainly, "in self-directed living." And there is our Father running to us first, then rejoicing that we are back with Him and throwing us a party, ultimately, a wedding feast, with our precious Savior as the bridegroom and host. May we live lives that are dedicated to expanding the guest list for that future party!

**Reflection:** Ask God to guide you in responding in a grace-filled way when another, whom you may not deem "deserving," is welcomed "home."

Romans 3:9-26**Shame on Me. All Glory to God** | David Carlson

*"There is none righteous, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). I would not wish to share with you my greatest moment of shame. Nor would I wish you to share yours with me. But I might ask you to reflect on it, and even celebrate it.

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis probes the depths of our corruption and shame. Shame is at least evidence that we recognize there is something better. Every moment is fixed in eternity, he says. Time does not erase. I am well mindful that God in His mercy forgets, but maybe we shouldn't. After offering the caveat that Peter will forgive him if he is wrong, Lewis believes Peter through all eternity celebrates the shame he earns when he denies knowing Jesus. Perhaps, Lewis says, heaven is an acquired taste. "It may be that salvation consists not in the canceling of these eternal moments but in the perfected humanity that bears the shame forever, rejoicing in the occasion which it furnished to God's compassion and glad that it should be common knowledge to the universe."

**Reflection:** Has a moment of shame brought you to a deeper relationship with God?

Romans 4:13-17**The Wrath of Man** | Todd Baker

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tells a parable of a servant with a great debt. When the servant whose debt is forgiven encounters another servant who owes him money, instead of forgiving his debts as his were forgiven, he puts him in prison until he pays the debt (18:30). Turn on the news or social media and you'll see a lot of people reacting in this manner. There are times when we are hurt by others and our immediate reaction is to hurt them back and not forgive. We are quick to condemn and slow to forgive.

As Paul writes in Romans 4:14, if we were judged by the law we would receive the same fate as the servant thrown into prison. By God's grace he does not judge us as sinful humans tend to judge each other. If it were up to men, our sinful hearts would judge and condemn with whatever law best fits our selfish desires. In a previous sermon, Pastor Gabe said that if we all made tape recorded messages of what we thought was immoral and placed those recordings around our necks we would fail at our own measures. God's law is even more all encompassing than any law that we would throw around our own necks. Thankfully the grace described in Romans 4:16-17 has been given to us by God. Praise the Lord that by His grace and in our faith, our sins are forgiven. We can rest in His grace, free from condemnation.

**Reflection:** Does God's grace illuminate your heart? How does knowing that God's forgiveness covers your multitude of sins affect how you view yourself and others?

Ezra 3:1-2, 8, 10-13; 6:14

**Sermon: Rebuild** | Pastor Marcus Lane

Psalm 8**God's Magnificence** | Kris Palmer

Our minds are always busy, making plans, thinking about the future, the past, and the present. Do you ever drive to a destination that you frequent—like work, school, a grocery store, a doctor's office or church—and wonder upon arrival how you got there? In our busy, overstimulated minds, we often forget to “stop and smell the roses.” What does this commonly used expression mean in our busy lives and why should we care?

Although it sounds like a cliché to use the metaphor about roses, Psalm 8 reminds us of the importance of taking time not only to appreciate God's splendor but to experience it daily in the small and great miracles all around us—when we take time to stop, to listen, and to see, we receive great blessings. How often do we look out the windshield of our car at a beautiful tree, or walk down the street and hear the laughter of children playing on a nearby playground? Do we stop to look at a magnificent sunset or even marvel at the different colors we see on the birds' wings as they fly by? How about receiving a smile from a stranger? Are we paying attention to the many ways God desires to bless our lives? When our minds are racing onto the next project, the next item on our to-do lists, or when we are trying to resolve a problem that doesn't seem to go away, we miss the awesome moments God desires to share with each of us.

*“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (NIV Psalm 8:3–4).*

When David wrote Psalm 8 some believe he was praising God's majesty following his victorious battle with Goliath. That may be true, but I believe this Psalm serves as a larger reminder in our busy lives to slow down and observe God's beauty, strength, wonder, and majesty. The signs—and the metaphorical roses—are all around us.

**Reflection:** The season of Lent is a gift from God: a gift to slow down, to engage with Him in prayer, fasting, and/or giving to others. When we slow down, we make more room for Jesus in our lives and, in turn, we are able to receive the blessings David describes in Psalm 8.

Isaiah 61**The Year of the Lord's Favor** | David Dolsen

My first recommendation is that you should read the passage for today. Then read it again. These words are God's promise to you.

In Luke 4, starting in verse 16 there's an amazing story of Jesus kicking off his ministry. Just after his baptism and being tempted in the desert by the Devil, Jesus enters a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and reads the words of Isaiah 61 to all the people present: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* He then simply states, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

The image is of Jesus stepping strongly into his rightful place in the universe and in history. He takes one of the more stirring prophecies about the Messiah—the Savior—and boldly claims, "It's me. I am here. I am working on this. Right now." In quoting this passage at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus shows us that the promises of Isaiah 61 are what He is all about—they are the reason Jesus came into our world.

As you read through Isaiah 61 we see a long list of all of the ways Jesus wants to bring freedom and life for his people. Good news for the poor, healing for the broken-hearted, freedom for prisoners, comfort for the mourning, rebuilding of ruins, justice for those who have been robbed or wronged, clothing of salvation and righteousness for his children. Look back at Isaiah 61. Which phrases jump out at you and make you say, "I need that" or "I want that"?

Today Jesus wants to speak this set of promises to you again—wherever you are at in your life and with whatever hurts or pains you carry. He again says, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. It's me. I am here. I am working on this. Right now."*

**Reflection:** Take time considering the promises of Isaiah 61. Which ones do you feel the most need for? Speak to Jesus about these areas and ask him to give you hope that He will fulfill his promises. Are there any ways you've seen Jesus bring about Isaiah 61 in your life already? Spend time thanking Him for the ways He has worked.



Matthew 17:1-13**Mountain Tops and Valleys** | Becky Johnson

We all love mountain top experiences—times of great joy, elation, or revelation. Getting into the college of your choice, your wedding day, the birth of a child or grandchild, reaching an important goal, an idyllic vacation, a time of special intimacy with the Lord. And like Peter, we want to hold on to that moment and make it a permanent experience. Life should always be this good!

This Scripture, however, points us to something different. In the chapter before this reading, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection. Peter rebukes Jesus and says that it should not be. Jesus responds to Peter saying, *"Get behind me Satan .... If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."*

That does not sound like a mountaintop experience! By nature we all want to avoid suffering, avoid self-denial, and avoid surrendering to the will of God. Yet in the midst of facing the reality of His suffering and death, Jesus gives Peter, James, and John a mountaintop experience—an experience of seeing his true glory! Why?

To give them hope in the midst of suffering. To reveal the true ending of Jesus' story and our story. Hebrews 12:2 states, *"Who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame ...."* Jesus loves each of us enough to face the cross on our behalf knowing that the cross is not the end of the story. (Can we fathom that we are a joy to the Lord?)

There will come a time when a mountaintop experience will be a continual reality, where there is no sin, no crying, no death. But on this side of heaven, Jesus gives us glimpses, a foretaste of what is to come. Then He calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, trusting His promises of the resurrection to come.

So how do we live in this sin-between time? Listening to the voice of Jesus! The voice from heaven spoke in the midst of that mountaintop experience and directed the disciples to listen to Him. Only by listening to Jesus and His Word can we, like Jesus, endure the valleys of this life trusting that one day God will make all things right.

**Reflection:** What are your expectations for this life? Where is God inviting you to listen more closely to Jesus?

Matthew 20:29-34**Just Ask |** Jay Naab

Have you ever felt unworthy? As if you don't deserve to have God hear your requests? Do you ever feel like the world doesn't care about you or that you're just another number or name on a paper? Of course you do. We all do.

It's very easy in today's culture for all of us, at times, to feel isolated, ignored or irrelevant. Whether we are gathering followers or chasing degrees or promotions, we constantly hear from the world that we only matter if we follow its rules. It's hard. It's depressing. And it's never enough. And it leaves us constantly wondering if we do actually matter. But in Matthew 20 we learn that the world's lies are not true because everyone matters to Jesus.

In Matthew 20, two blind men were sitting on the side of the road (v. 29). As they sat there, a great crowd had gathered and proceeded to the city, following the Messiah. The one who had come to save God's people. The Great Healer. The Wonderful Counselor. He was kind of a big deal. And these two blind men? They were ... not.

In a hopeless attempt to reach Him, they called out, asking the Lord for his mercy (v. 30). They had heard of His healing miracles and were desperate to finally see. The world quickly reminded them of their irrelevance and told them to be quiet (v. 31). Who were they to make such an audacious request of someone so much higher than themselves? But they kept at it. They were in despair and had nothing to lose. And guess what? Jesus heard them. And He obliged (v. 34). But He had one condition. They had to ask (v. 32).

And that's what we have to do, too. When we feel unworthy, unloved, or unimportant, we have to remember there is someone who will listen to us. To love us. And help us get through the problems and burdens in our lives and in our minds. But we have to ask.

**Reflection:** What can you ask Jesus for in your life? How can you remind yourself that you matter to the Savior of the World?

Romans 6:1–10**Set Free** | Allie Milot

Bad habits can be so hard to break. As Christians, through our faith in Jesus, we have died to sin, yet often still live in it. This is an issue that all of us face and the apostle Paul calls us out for it. Realizing that the way we are living now—bound by sin and shame—is not the way we are called to live is an important first step in breaking out of the plateau you may feel your faith has reached.

In Romans 6, Paul reminds us that *“our old self was crucified with him ... so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”* This is essential for us to remember as we battle breaking free from the habits and choices we make that lead us to sin. The work for our salvation in Christ has already been accomplished through the cross. God knew we would never be able to break the chains of sin on our own. As a people, even a faithful people, we would never have the strength to die to sin. That is why God created a way for us to be free through the death and resurrection of Christ. He has set an example before us of what our lives can truly be when, by his grace and mercy, we die to sin and become alive in God.

Today and everyday, lean into God’s truth when he says, through the words of Paul, that the *“one who has died has been set free from sin”* (v.7). Because of this freedom, we are given power by the Holy Spirit to break the habit we never thought could be broken, leave the relationship we feel trapped in, respond in grace to those who frustrate us, quit the job that caused us to compromise our morals, or resist the temptation to turn away from God and his Word. By grace, through faith we are made new, made alive. We are set free.

**Reflection:** Knowing this truth, how are you encouraged to live in the freedom Jesus has won for you? What bad habits will you surrender to God?

Romans 8:1–11**Life in the Spirit** | Thad Polk

Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? More exercise? Better diet? If you're like most people, that resolution might not be going so well. Research suggests that less than 10% of people who make resolutions manage to keep them. In fact, something like 23% of people give up on their resolutions after a single week! Despite our best intentions, we often fall short of our own human standards.

But now consider the standard of God's law as laid out in the Old Testament. Has anyone ever lived up to that standard? According to the Bible, the answer is a resounding no:

*"None is righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:11)*

*"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)*

We may want to live in accordance with God's will, but none of us can do it in our own strength. It's a struggle that can leave us feeling burdened and condemned. However, in today's passage, Paul offers a profound message of hope and liberation.

Paul starts by proclaiming that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (v. 1). This declaration is a powerful reminder that our sins have been fully paid for by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, we are set free from the law of sin and death.

Paul goes on to share that the key to experiencing this freedom lies in living according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. When we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us, we are finally able to overcome the desires of our sinful nature. Instead of being enslaved by our fleshly desires, we can live in obedience to God, walking in His ways and experiencing the abundant life He promises.

The bottom line is that living a godly life is not about willpower. We can't white knuckle our way to godliness. Instead, we need to turn our attention away from ourselves and instead focus on things that are above. As Paul puts it, to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (v. 6). When we do that the Holy Spirit is able to inspire us to overcome our bondage to sin and to live the life of freedom that God intended for us.

**Reflection:** Are there areas in your life where you feel like you're in bondage? How can you apply Paul's message to be set free and live in the Spirit?

Ezra 7:23-28

**Sermon: Retell** | Pastor Marcus Lane

Psalms 40:1-10**God is My Deliverer** | Amanda Fogo and Alison Doerr

Before college, our faith was never anything extraordinary. God landed us both at Concordia University, centering our lives around Christ. We found ourselves wanting more. We prayed to God to lead us to a loving church community to bring us a sense of belonging. Attending our first Sunday at ULC was God dragging us out of our stagnant faith, and bringing us home.

As we grew deeper in our faith, it made it easier to notice those around us leaving the faith. We turned to God to show us how to lead them back to Him.

However, God made us wait in reaching them and instead helped us grow in His unconditional love to equip us to reach them later. As the days went on, God continued to pull us closer to him. The next thing we knew, God planted our feet as new interns at our dream church. With the help of God, we knew this opportunity would prepare us to spread the gospel.

Everything was falling into place: school, relationships, athletics, and our missional work. We found Adopt-a-Student families, spiritual mentors, and truly rad pastors. The willingness of these individuals to support us through our faith walk is an answered prayer by God. Their commitment to us has solidified the idea that we simply cannot do life without God.

It is important to remember that God is always here to listen and to support, and He never expects anything in return. Our relationship with God is not contingent on our actions. We have a firm understanding of what God is calling us to do, and we have been able to live that out with nothing but joy and excitement.

We will never be perfect disciples, proclaiming the word of God (v. 9), but ULC has put us on the right path to mobilize generations on the mission with Jesus.

**Reflection:** Do you know of anyone who has strayed from the faith? What can you do to help bring them back to Christ?

Isaiah 52**He's Got My Back** | Laura Robberts

Isaiah 52:7 says, *"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"*

Good news was coming to God's chosen people. News, coming by way of foot, for some. Swift feet. Dancing feet. Feet filled with joy. News that *"Your God reigns!"* It was the foretelling of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. Can you imagine the emotion? These long-exiled people would be restored! They would be returned to an original state after depletion and loss after suffering years of yearning and struggle.

I have been restored in two ways: physically and spiritually. If you know me, or have at least seen me at church in the past year and a half, you have seen my suffering and my restoration. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in July of 2022, which meant that I would have to have chemotherapy treatments and radiation treatment, for a good prognosis. I surrendered to the treatments in order to have that hope of being fully restored. I have also been brought closer to God and awakened again to know, without a doubt, who my Creator and Redeemer is—to know that Christ died for me, for you, for everyone!

Throughout my journey, I literally felt God everywhere around me, in so many ways. It was amazing! I was reminded of Jesus's suffering—for me. Isaiah 52:12 tells us, *"For the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard."* Jesus goes before me, but he also has my back! I am never walking alone. I never have, and I never will. Nor are you walking alone. We can all draw comfort from these words.

Our Savior has gone before us, died for us, and risen from the dead for us. He has our back! Our God reigns!

**Reflection:** Think about a time when God has restored you. How beautiful were your feet in celebration? Dancing, I hope.

John 4:21-42**Making Eye Contact with Jesus** | Monica Heissenbuettel

This past summer we signed our dog, Ziggy, up for some obedience classes. Ziggy has a lot of enthusiasm and energy, plays an amazing game of soccer, and likes to have a job to do (herding the family cats). We had initially hoped to get him involved in some agility training; however, as we researched this endeavor, we soon learned that he first needed to pass Miss Judy's "Firm Foundations" course before advancing.

One of the goals of this course was to understand the command "focus." We first had to get Ziggy to "sit" (already a champ!) and then he had to "focus," sustaining direct eye contact in order to earn a treat. Since Ziggy lives for treats, he quickly mastered this command, setting up the foundation for further listening and training.

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman and has a lengthy conversation with her, revealing His identity as the Messiah, saying that *"I who speak to you am He"* (verse 20). He had already crossed cultural mores by speaking to someone—a woman!—who was not ethnically aligned with His people. He sat with her, made eye contact with her, and spoke truth to her as she focused intently on His words. He revealed to her how much He already knew about her, and she listened with rapt attention to His teaching about worship. She then ran and recalled to her friends, relatives, and community members all of the things He had said. Because of her witness, Jesus was invited to a Samaritan's home, where He stayed two days. After focusing on Jesus' teachings, this person, too, believed that He is indeed the Savior of the world.

The writer of Hebrews, in chapter 12, verse two, invites us to *"fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Jesus reveals Himself to us in His Word. When we focus on Him, He tells us more about our sin and shame and inner struggles than we sometimes would like to hear! That conviction can draw us closer to Him, as we confess and repent of our sins, and as we seek His will and focus on His teachings to guide our next steps. And we, like the Samaritan woman, can tell others in our circle of friendship and influence about Him and His love and grace.

**Reflection:** What happens when you focus on Jesus? What impact can that focus have on those with whom you spend your days?



Luke 10:1-20**We are Just Little Babies Trying to Walk** | Nathan Janke

When I think about Christians spreading the word of Jesus, the scene of a baby learning how to walk comes to mind. The baby's parent grabs their little hands and pulls them up onto their wobbly legs. One animatronic Godzilla's step after another, the baby walks ten feet and sits down once more. All who witnessed this great athletic feat then cheered wildly and gave the child kudos for "being so big." However, everyone knows that a baby could not possibly walk without the parent's support. The parent does all the important things for the baby to walk: balancing, picking the direction, and holding up the baby's weight. The baby, on the other hand, simply grabs on and moves their legs. When it comes to the mission of Jesus, we are the baby simply grabbing on to Jesus, while He is doing all the real work in others' hearts.

Luke 10:1-20 explains the story of Jesus sending 72 people ahead of him to the upcoming towns to prepare them for the kingdom. The 72 did not bring money, extra clothes, or even sandals. They were essentially, "*lambs in the midst of wolves*," with only one option: to trust the direction in which the Lord was pointing them. In the towns ahead, the 72 experienced God's transformational authority over Satan as they healed the sick and broken (Luke 10:17). The 72 were willing to grab onto Jesus' word, walk in the direction He indicated, and let Him do the real work of His kingdom. We cannot do the internal transformational work of Jesus' mission; only Jesus can do that. We can only get up, grab onto his Word, and walk in the direction in which He is pointing us. Jesus will work through you to do the transformational work in others' hearts.

**Reflection:** Consider what it would look like to blindly grab Jesus, let Him keep you balanced, and lead you in the right direction? In your life, where are you trying to do too much of God's work?

Romans 10:5-17**The Word Of Faith** | Ken Huner

Years ago, when I was in my second year of college at Concordia here in Ann Arbor, a fellow student and I conducted a survey in Livonia as part of a project for class. We literally went door-to-door, asking just two questions (the "Kennedy questions") which were part of an evangelism training course.

They were:

1. Have you reached that point in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today you would be in heaven?
2. I'm not wishing this upon you, but suppose that you did die today and you stood at the gates of Heaven and God asked you the question, 'Why should I let you into my Heaven?' What would you say?

At least for me, the results were astounding. In the midst of all of the varied responses, there seemed to be a common theme. In regards to the first question, the vast majority of the people stated that they were not sure or certain of eternal life and did not think anyone could be. Regarding the second question, the vast majority of people said things like: "I hope my good deeds will outweigh my bad deeds," or "I've led a good life", or "I go to church every Sunday" or "I am an Elder of the church" or similar phrases of what we call "works righteousness."

Our Bible reading would suggest a different type of righteousness, a righteousness that comes from God and is a gift which comes through faith. Even that personal faith is a gift from God! *"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

This Lenten season, ponder how you would answer those two questions. What would be your response? Romans 10:8-9 suggests an answer. Go ahead, if you haven't already so, open up your Bible and read it for yourself.

**Reflection:** During this Lenten Season, how can you share the great news of the Gospel with others?

Romans 12:1-8**Living Sacrifices** | Kyle Peterson

Lent is a great time to think about sacrifices. Some people think about sacrificing something during this time. You may have already given up something, or made a sacrifice. It might be chocolate, coffee, spending, or your favorite TV show. The text we are looking at today makes a powerful connection to sacrifices. The Bible clearly states that we are saved by grace through faith, because of Jesus, who is the ultimate sacrifice to forgive the sins of the world.

The apostle Paul is exhorting his readers (including us) to present our bodies as living sacrifices for God, for this is our spiritual act of worship (v.1). This means to live our lives recognizing what God has done in us. Paul doesn't just want us to limit our worship to Sunday, but all the days of the week. This includes praying, reading the bible, worshiping, and fully listening to God's plan for our lives.

As living sacrifices, Paul also reminds us that we live as a community and all have different roles, just as our body has different parts (v.4). But even though we all are different, we are one body of Christ (v.5). Being one body with one another, we should love, encourage, help, and include others, just as Jesus did to those around Him.

Although we all have different gifts, all are needed in the body of Christ in order to carry out His work. The gifts we have are given by grace so that we can use them, not put them to waste. Each day is an opportunity to use our God-given gifts to His glory and for the benefit and blessing of our families, friends, neighbors, and all those we meet.

**Reflection:** What are the gifts God has given to you? How can you use them to faithfully serve the body of Christ?

Nehemiah 4:15-23

**Sermon: Resilience** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

Psalm 27**Wait Patiently** | Abby Landskroener

We have access to anything we could ever need in a matter of seconds. If you need anything, you can avoid the wait by having it delivered by ordering it online. We are constantly on our phones when we wait in line, hoping to make time go by faster. We are impatient and want things to take place according to our timeline and will. Just like in other areas of our lives, we often expect God to answer our prayers immediately.

Psalm 27 is written by King David, who wrote this in a season of trouble. David expresses his confidence in God as his deliverer and protector by recalling God's goodness as a light. *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; in whom shall I be afraid?"* (v.1). David recalls the Lord as a "stronghold," a place for safety and security. Like David, we have no reason to fear, because the Lord keeps us safe and will preserve us when trouble strikes.

However, David continues to pray for deliverance. He knows that *"the Lord gives and the Lord takes away"* (Job 1:21). David recalls the Lord's command to seek Him in all things and reminds himself of God's goodness and faithfulness. *"I believe that I will look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord"* (vv. 13-14).

Christians are guaranteed that life is far from being easy. When we go through suffering and trials, we become impatient and pray that the Lord takes it away ... now. We tend to want an immediate response to our prayers, but the Lord is never in a rush. Yet, He promises to hear and answer our prayers in *"times of need"* (Hebrews 4:16). Waiting on the Lord is drawing near, and relying on Him rather than our strength alone. Jesus' death and resurrection give us the confidence to claim victory over our sufferings and come to our Father for strength in times of need. *"When I am weak, He is strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

**Reflection:** What is an area in your life where the Lord is growing your patience? How can you continue to seek God in your everyday life? When has the Lord been your stronghold in your life and revealed His faithfulness?

Isaiah 41:8-14**Friend of God** | Jeff Barber

During the Covid pandemic, many of us experienced the most fearful, lonely time in our lives. And in many cases, our reactions were worldly and self-focused. These reactions led, in turn, to another epidemic, one of confused children and anxious parents, chaos in cities, even more divisive politics and global skirmishes. The world was then, and often is now, looking in the wrong places for its answer to loneliness and anxiety.

In Isaiah 41:8-14, God tells us clearly where we should be looking: *"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (v. 10). This verse foreshadows a Savior who comes to earth, lives the perfect life we could not live, is betrayed, suffers, dies and then triumphantly, rises from the dead to sit in His rightful position at God's right hand. Of course! Jesus. He paved the way for us to commune with Him as Abraham did. He is the answer to our loneliness, fears, and anxieties. He is our friend.

Matthew Henry writes regarding Isaiah 41, *"Happy are the servants of the Lord, whom He has called to be His friends and to walk with Him in faith and holy obedience. Let us not...yield to fear; the contest may be sharp, but the victory is sure."*

**Reflection:** Just over 2000 years ago, Jesus changed the world. Today, He is still victorious. We are implicated by what we know. We have all the evidence we need to believe, to be His friends. To not be lonely or anxious. The question is what will you do with what you know?

John 9:1-17, 35-41**Why?** | Rachel Olson

At the beginning of John 9 the disciples ask the question that often plagues the minds and faith of us today: "Why?" The Disciples want to understand the reason that someone might be born blind.

While John 9 took place over 2000 years ago, this sentiment remains the same: people want to understand suffering and understand how God works in suffering. How often do we find ourselves looking at the news headlines, personal suffering, or disparity and say "why God?" Like the disciples, we too want to understand God. We want to know why suffering strikes and what God is up to when it does.

In vs. 3 Jesus tells the disciples that it is not anything that the man or his parents did that caused him to be born blind, but rather that he was born blind that God may be glorified. Being transparent, this verse frustrates me as it is not an answer that satisfies me, and I wonder what the disciples of Jesus were thinking when Jesus said this to them. However, as I wrestle with why God would allow suffering to glorify himself, I find myself reminded that God is God and I am not. The harsh reality is that very often the way that God works through suffering is uncomfortable and frustrating, but even in our lack of understanding and frustration, God is at work bringing glory out of the suffering and vision out of blindness.

Jesus does not lash out at the disciples for asking such questions about suffering, but rather welcomes it. In the same way, He welcomes questions from us. We are invited to wrestle and ask the tough things when suffering strikes, and when we ask such questions, we are not alone. Even when the answers to why there is suffering seem insufficient, we are still not alone. We are invited, when suffering makes no sense, to trust in the One who does comprehend.

**Reflection:** What is currently bringing you to ask "why?" and how can you invite God into your space of questioning?

Luke 11:1-13**Our Father...** | Deaconess Norma Polk

I grew up as a Muslim and as a Muslim, I had to pray five times a day. The prayers are prescribed rituals of body movements and Arabic verses from the Qur'an (the Islamic scriptures). I understood only a fraction of the verses I was repeating because they were in Arabic. I longed for a genuine relationship and real communication with God. I often wondered if Allah heard my prayer.

Jesus taught us, His followers, how to pray, not with empty phrases, not with words we do not understand, but with His own words which connect us to God the Father. As a Christian, I am delighted that I can actually speak to God in my own everyday language! I can pray from my heart; I can develop a communication and relationship with Him—through prayer and by reading His Word—all in words that I can actually understand!

Matthew recorded a more complete version of this prayer. I find that slowly praying through this version line by line can be very powerful. The first part of the prayer puts us in the right place before God, reminding us that we are His children and He is our Father in heaven. Next, He invites us to ask for His will to be done, for Him to provide for our daily needs, and for Him to forgive us (as we forgive others). He also wants us to pray so that we do not enter into temptation, but for Him to deliver us from evil. Meditating on each line and how it applies in my own life today often inspires me and helps me see my circumstances from God's perspective.

What a great Father we have in heaven who will provide for all of our needs! Jesus reminds us that earthly friends will sometimes help us, but we might have to badger them: *"I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs"* (v. 8). How much more will our heavenly Father answer our prayers! He is always eager to help us, if only we would ask.

This passage encourages me to pray with boldness and without fear, not using many words in a language I don't understand, but using my heart and mind, understanding what I ask.

**Reflection:** We say the Lord's Prayer often in the form that is given to us. Have you ever tried to use this prayer as an outline and meditate deeply how each line applies in your own life?



Romans 12:9-21**Be Like Jesus** | Amy Robson

In today's passage, Paul focuses on the qualities that all Christians, regardless of their unique gifts, should have in common. Fittingly, Paul's description of what believers should "look" like is basically a portrait of Christ. He tells the Romans, *"Let your love be genuine" and "Love one another."* God demonstrated authentic love perfectly in Jesus: *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

Paul also exhorts His readers to hate evil, hold onto what is good, and demonstrate zeal. They are to imitate Jesus, whose righteousness and zeal are colorfully depicted in the temple as He throws over the money changers' tables because of their greed and disregard for what is holy. Further, Paul tells us to rejoice in hope and be patient in suffering. No one illustrates this better than Jesus as He willingly, for our sakes, allowed Himself to be captured and nailed to the cross like a common thief. His response to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane is, *"... not my will, but yours, be done"* (Matthew 26:39).

In this letter, Christians are encouraged to persevere in prayer. We are to imitate Jesus, our high priest, who *"always lives to make intercession for [those who approach God through Him]"* (Hebrews 7:25). Like Him, we are also to practice hospitality. He did not send the 5,000 away but considered their comfort and provided food for all of them, with baskets left over! A generous host! Paul's counter-cultural message commands, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"* (Romans 12:14). His words reflect the perfect example of Jesus on the cross as He forgave those who put Him there: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).

As Christians, we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Mary and Martha experienced the compassion of Jesus at the loss of their brother, Lazarus. Even though Jesus knew that in a few short minutes Lazarus would be raised from the dead, seeing his friends' grief, *"He wept"* (Jn. 11:35). Paul tells us to associate with the lowly, as Jesus did. Even though He was the Son of God, Jesus was not above associating with the "lowest" of society. Rather, he engaged in conversation with a Samaritan, a woman, and an adulterer. Despite having three strikes against her, she was neither scorned nor condemned—He simply asked her for a drink of water, which opened up the conversation that led to her repentance and witness, resulting in many Samaritans believing in Him.

Finally, Paul tells his readers, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21). And this is only possible because of Jesus' ultimate victory: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

**Reflection:** In what way, do you imitate Jesus? In which ways would you like to reflect Jesus more? Ask Jesus to help you be more like Him: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13).

Romans 13:8-14**Living in the Light** | Carley Baker

Who doesn't like checking off items on their to-do list? I certainly find great satisfaction in accomplishing goals or tasks that I've set for myself. However, unlike the chores, bills, or obligations that we inevitably face as adults in life, our lifelong journey with God doesn't boil down to a set of chores that we can do once and call it good.

Our verse today starts off by saying, *"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."* O, it sounds good for a Christian to focus their time and energy on loving others. But when can I check off this loving task from my to-do list? Another way to look at this question is to ask ourselves, is God ever done loving us? The answer is no, so our debt and obligation to continually love each other as God endlessly loves us is never finished in this life.

The next two passages say, *"For the commandments say, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."* As Christians, we have a duty to live out the law, not as a requirement for our salvation but rather as evidence and witness to our new life in Christ Jesus. But if we are honest and self-aware, we will readily acknowledge that there are many, many times in our lives when we do not love each other or our neighbors. Indeed, at times, we rather struggle with hatred and disgust towards them.

This is then when Paul encourages us to continue this daily struggle to love each other with the next two verses, *"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand."* Paul wants us to *"know the time,"* meaning he wants us to live in the light of the return of Christ and know that *"salvation is nearer to us now"* and *"the day is at hand."* If we get too focused on our day-to-day stresses and chores, we will fail to realize what the sacred time we are truly living in right now. May acknowledging that reality be our continual motivation to love and sacrifice for each other.

The last verses of today's reading played a crucial role in the conversion of Augustine of Hippo, *"So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus*

Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Augustine wrote in his Confessions that upon reading these verses, "It was as though the light of confidence flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

**Reflection:** How are you "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" and how is this helping you avoid gratifying the desires of your flesh? Do you find any of these Scripture verses inspiring and comforting in ways that are similar to what Augustine experienced? In what ways is it hard for you to live out our lifelong obligation to love others?

Nehemiah 6:13-18

**Sermon: Restore** | Pastor Marcus Lane

Psalms 85**He restored before, He will restore again** | Amy Duncan

Have you ever had a time when you let down someone you loved? This could be a parent, coach, or professor. When I was in my teens I had a habit of fidgeting! Sometimes I would be unaware of the fact that I was destroying something! Looking back, I remember a specific occasion when I was watching TV in my mom's sewing room. The room was complete with all of the trappings of a professional sewing room including a table that was covered by a table-sized cardboard measuring grid. This made her job of measuring much easier and she loved it.

That day while watching TV I mindlessly picked up my mom's seam ripper and proceeded to cut out every other square, making a pattern that looked something like a crazy crossword puzzle! There was no going back, and when I realized what I had done, I felt bad not only because I was going to be in major trouble, but also because I knew I had ruined something that my mom loved! I decided that the best way for me to deal with this was to quickly confess to my mom what I had done. I wanted her to know how sorry I was so I wrote her a note describing my mistake and giving her a coupon for a "goof-proof" kid. Needless to say, my mom was very upset, but she also greatly appreciated my desire to confess and ask for her forgiveness. She recognized that I was genuinely sorry that my actions had led to ruining something she loved and was able to forgive me.

How much more does our Father in Heaven forgive us for our transgressions! The psalmist in Psalm 85 begins with an acknowledgement of our heavenly Father's history of turning away from wrath and bringing restoration to the heroes of our faith. Verses 1–3 say, *"Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin."* Jesus came to restore us to the Father. Because of the cross we are restored.

**Reflection:** Do you remember times in your life where Jesus has restored something that you thought could not be restored? Are there areas in your life that you need Jesus' restoration now?

Isaiah 55:1-13**Purchasing Power** | Peter Bruenger

These days, we seem to live in a world based on self-preservation. Almost everything we do is to make sure that we can continue to live the life that we are currently living. We don't live to work, but it does seem as though we work to live. This grind often feels monotonous and draining to many of us. However, in Isaiah 55, we are called to approach God as people with nothing. The verse states, *"come everyone who thirsts."* This is a call, not to the people who already have something to drink and can provide it themselves, but rather it is a call to everyone.

Often when we get caught up in trying to provide for ourselves, we run the risk of creating a life that is empty. If we provide for everything ourselves, there is no need for God in the equation. However, we all have a need for God, therefore it is rather our understanding of provision that needs to be shifted. God does not tell us to provide for ourselves, but rather asks that we would come to him. In these verses from Isaiah, He promises to provide for us; He invites us to come and "buy", even though we have no money.

Ultimately, we are not able to provide for ourselves in the ways that truly matter, and God is acutely aware of this. That is why he invites us to "shop" for the things we need with money that we don't have. How is he able to do this? Because Jesus already paid for it all. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are given access to all of the amazing wares of God.

**Reflection:** Where are some places that you are trying to provide for yourself? How can you instead allow for God's provisions, even if they are not what you expect?

John 11:17-27**Is He Able?** | Nate Zuellig

Jesus' raising of Lazarus is the climax of all His miracles, and in direct response to it the Jewish leaders resolved to put Jesus to death because many more people started believing in Him (John 11:45-53). From then on, Jesus' passion and death on the cross seemed to be closing in rapidly. He knew this better than anyone, yet He continued to heal and serve others in defiance of fear and in obedience to God's will. What an amazingly courageous life of service and trust Jesus lived!

More than allowing us to be mere bystanders marveling at His life, though, Jesus constantly calls us to believe and trust completely in the power of God as He did. Before every miracle, why did Jesus ask the person He is healing if they believed in Him? He seemed adamant that they became partakers of faith with Him, not just recipients of quality (okay, superhuman) medical care.

Preceding Lazarus' particularly incredible miracle, we find an incredible proclamation of faith from Martha (reminiscent of Peter's famous confession in Matthew 16). She declares, *"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world"* (John 11:27). Remember, too, that this is the same Martha whom Jesus previously corrected, saying, *"Martha, Martha... you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one"* (Luke 10:41-42). It would appear that she got the message, perhaps even that she was transformed by it.

But there was a series of doubts that her trust had to break through first. Doubt said, "It's been four days—sure, Jesus could have healed your brother's illness, but who can heal a corpse?"

"He can—" she replied. "Yes, even now He is able." Doubt tried again, "Ok, you believe in the resurrection of the dead on the last day, sure. But the resurrection of the dead today, right before your very eyes?" With her whole heart, she replied resolutely, "Yes, even now He is able."

**Reflection:** Are there any wounds from your past that you still carry with you, aches that tempt you to think, "Lord, if you had only fixed things back then?" Do you believe that Jesus is able to restore these even now?



John 2:13-22**Cleansing the Temple—God's Way** | Vanessa Lane

Today's text shows us a side of Jesus that differs greatly from the idyllic Sunday school image of Jesus holding a lamb in one arm and a shepherd's staff in another. Jesus, upon entering the Temple courts, lashes out against the money changers and people selling animals. In some ways, it might seem out of character for Jesus to do this. What's the big deal? Couldn't Jesus have just told them to leave? Why is he causing a scene?

Throughout the Scriptures, God has made it clear that his way is different from humanity's way. In our reading, the commerce and commotion was happening in the Temple courts, the only place where Gentiles were allowed to worship. This consumerism was being imposed in the only space where a marginalized group was allowed. Jesus wastes no time in demonstrating how he feels about the weight of oppression and using the good things of God to wield power. God has made it clear that His way is different from humanity's way.

I feel very convicted by this text, because sometimes I conflate the success metrics of the world with success metrics among the Body of Christ. High growth, profitability, and the "move fast and break things" mentality are touted by entrepreneurs and business leaders. Sometimes I forget that success in the Kingdom of God looks different—like a tithe of two small coins or sitting at the feet of Jesus.

In our text, the people surrounding Jesus ask him for a sign to show his authority for driving out the money changers and salespeople. He responds with a controversial statement about tearing the Temple down and rebuilding it in three days. This would have been absolutely shocking to his listeners, since the Temple was the center of their lifestyle and symbolized the presence of God. But, once again, we see that God's ways are not the ways of humans. It was never about the Temple, but it was about Jesus himself.

While it might seem like the sole purpose of this text is to condemn its readers for using the Church for material profits and power, Jesus shows us that when we label our sinful way God's way, we harm ourselves, we harm others, and we lose sight of what God is calling us into as His children. John's account of the cleansing of the Temple is an invitation outside of the systems of the world and into the peaceful reign of Jesus.

**Reflection:** Think of a time when you recognized that God's way of doing things was actually better for you, even if it wasn't what you wanted.

Romans 14:1-9**Stop Judging Other People** | Tandy Mazak

Every time I volunteer to be part of the Lenten/Advent Devotional, I find myself waiting until the last minute because of my fear of being judged by others on what I've written. I pray, do research, and try to find just the right thing to say to provide a meaningful devotion for the day. Am I alone here? I doubt it, but that is what is so great about the reading today.

Paul advises that people should welcome one another and not judge different convictions. He says in versus 2-3, *"One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him."*

While the verses are not an exact analogy to my opening paragraph, they do provide me comfort in that I am welcomed by God. We are not to pass judgment on others whether they eat anything or just vegetables. Or should I (dare) say write a great vs. mediocre devotion. It doesn't matter. If we are in Jesus, then we are one with Jesus. Each one of us will stand before God to be judged by Him.

Paul's passage today centers on this idea of some of us being weak in our faith and some of us being strong in our faith. However, weak or strong, we are still brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to focus on peace, upbuilding and avoiding quarrels with others that may not do things just the way we would do them.

**Reflection:** In what ways have you not acted in godly love towards fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? What steps can you take to keep from developing a critical spirit towards fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29**Let Us Rejoice and Be Glad In It** | Pat Carlson

In Psalm 118 the writer rejoices and praises God for rescuing us from death through the chief cornerstone and foundation of our faith, Jesus. We are to rejoice and be glad in Him in all circumstances.

When I was serving on a couple of mission teams to Latvia I learned a little bit about its history. The Lutheran church was and is the largest religious community in Latvia but had to endure three Russian Soviet occupations from 1940 to 1990 during which time religious practices were denied. To add to the terror families were separated and sent to concentration camps. If you were Jewish you may have been killed. One of our hosts related that her grandmother felt it was so important to be baptized that she took her granddaughter into the forest to have her baptized in secret. When Latvia gained its independence in 1991 through the 'Singing Revolution', a nonviolent demonstration of music and hymns that lifted the country in solidarity, the churches were full again—rejoicing and glad in their rescue. However it wasn't long before the churches were no longer full, complacency set in. This concerned our hosts and church body so much that they sought ways to draw their youth into the fold. So they planned for ESL (English as a Second Language) and choir camps to help the youth and young adults stay connected to God through the Word.

How typical is this narrative in our lives ... self-reliance replaces God-reliance; our comfort lulls us into complacency. Then when challenged by trials we seek Jesus who knows so well our circumstances and offers forgiveness and healing. Once again we give thanks and rejoice in our rescue.

**Reflection:** Has there been a time when you became self-reliant and realized that you have been led into complacency? Can you think of a time when God has brought you back from complacency and to rejoice in it?

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 9-12

**Sermon: Rejoice** | Pastor Gabe



John 12:20-26**It's all Grace!** | Benjamin Brenner

Rejoice means to feel or show great joy or delight. Society rejoices over many things, from when a mother gives birth to when a football team beats another team. John 12:20-26 at first glance does not feel like a "rejoicing" text but upon inspection the gospel shines brightly to all. Jesus, in response to some Greeks looking for Him, foretells His own death saying "The hour is coming for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." At first this sounds really sad and makes me wonder why Jesus had to die. But this was the only way the Greeks, and as an extension, we could ever be with Him.

Glorified means to represent in such a way as to appear more elevated or special. Jesus is glorified in having all peoples come to Him. He suffered so we could share in his righteousness and glory. Jesus' willing sacrifice is truly something to rejoice over—He died serving us so we get to dwell with him! This is pure grace!

Now in this grace we get to live out the rest of Jesus' words *"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also"* (vv 25-26a). Jesus, when He would call people during his earthly ministry, would tell them to leave everything and to follow him. He directs us to do the same.

On the cross Jesus cleared all barriers between Him and us. So in the words of the author of Hebrews I invite you to cling to Jesus *"lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1b).

**Reflection:** Has anything sad happened in your life that God used to turn to good? How is every part of your life 'grace' in Christ, even the bad?

John 12:27-36

**Meditation on John 12:27-36** | Nate Zuellig

*"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*  
(John 12:27, 28)

Lord Jesus, as You marched toward suffering and death, You tell us that You too felt deep dread, so much so that You sweat blood in Gethsemane. But Your love and absolute trust in the Father was even stronger. Lord, teach us to love others courageously in this same boldness and faith.

*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"*  
(John 12:31, 32).

Lord Jesus, help redefine the word "judgment" in our minds. Your judgment is perfect. It flows from Your merciful heart and exacts justice for the poor and the oppressed. It removes the barriers that prevent us from being united to You completely in love. Lord, teach us to trust Your good judgment above our own and continue to draw us, shattering every barrier that gets in the way.

Then Jesus told them, *"You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light"* (John 12:35, 36).

Lord Jesus, You are immersed in light. You knew where You were going—that You would soon be resurrected, but that you would have to go through unimaginable pain and die before You could rise again. But we are so often afraid of walking in light—of knowing the full depth of the chasm between who you have called us to be and where we are. Lord, give us the courage to be children of light—to live in pure honesty, knowing that we need a good Father and relying on Him instead of our own strength.

**Amen.**

Matthew 26:6-13**Worship, Not Waste** | Gillian Miranda

One of the first things I thought of when reflecting on these verses was “what is as important to me as the ointment was to the woman in this scripture?” Easy—my time. Time is so precious to me that I hate wasting a minute of it. I like to plan details of my day in my Google calendar, planners, lists, my own head, etc. And sometimes I get frustrated when things don’t go to plan and my time feels wasted, and maybe I didn’t get to do something that I wanted. In recognizing that, now I’m thinking about how selfless this woman is to give away all of her valuable ointment to the Lord, in preparation for His burial and in worship to Him.

In a book I am reading, called “Liturgy of the Ordinary,” a concept is presented that most of our time spent as Christians, and in life in general, is made up of mundane and repetitive, habitual tasks. We can easily get bored of these things, finding them to be a waste of our precious time and feel as though we could be spending our time doing much better, more important things. But the author of the book challenges readers to recognize these tasks—brushing our teeth, making the bed, working, cooking, cleaning—as all part of taking care of ourselves, the life and body the Lord has given us, and can all be freely given back to Him, as worship. We do not have to confine worship to Sunday church service or to the time we may, or may not, set aside in our days to spend time with the Lord—anything in our days and lives can be given over to the Lord as our worship to Him. And not a minute of it is wasted time or could be better spent elsewhere if it is being given as worship to God and in preparation for Him to come again.

**Reflection:** When you feel tired and burnt out doing repetitive daily tasks that never seem to end, how can you let God into those moments and worship Him through these tasks?

Are you making it a habit to set aside time with the Lord each day—to freely give up something that may be precious to you in worship and preparation for Him? Not only during Lent, but in your continual daily life?

Ezra 6:19-22; Matthew 26:26-29

**Sermon: Reclaim** | Pastor Gabe Kasper





John 19:17-30

**Sermon: Redeem** | Pastor Gabe Kasper/Pastor Marcus Lane/Colin Nash



Psalm 30:1-5

**Joy Comes in the Morning** | Pastor Gabe Kasper

*"For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."* –Psalm 30:5

The Lenten season draws to a close today, Holy Saturday. On Holy Saturday, Jesus' body rests in the tomb. As we reflect on that event, we see the words of the psalmist ring true that weeping does indeed tarry for the night. Christ's passion is filled with pain, sorrow, and weeping. His body lays cold and dead in the earth. But, as the psalmist notes, joy comes in the morning! Jesus' body does not stay dead. Tomorrow we celebrate that breath entered Jesus' lungs. He got up out of the grave and showed that He is the conqueror over all that would destroy us.

What we see in this psalm and what we see in Jesus' death and resurrection is a picture of the Christian life. Life is a gift. Faith is a gift. But so often, the life of faith can be marked by pain, suffering, and weeping. So often, the life of faith is living in Holy Saturday. The good news of the Lenten season is that in it we see that in the cross and in the tomb where Christ's body lay our delusions about who God is and who we are, evaporate. And our weeping is met by the promises of a God who may not always act how we want him to, but who has saved us and provides us with everything we need.

The day my grandma died a few years ago, I processed that grief by skateboarding for two hours straight. Pushing as hard as I could off the asphalt. And because I'm not as young as I once was, that activity led to my Achilles being tender for six months afterwards. And yet, every time I felt that pain, I thought of my grandma and the great woman she was and her love for me.

It is the same thing with the cross, and Holy Saturday. In your pain, sorrow, and weeping, you are invited to look to the cross and see the one who suffered for you.

My friend Bob Lenz puts it like this, "If I look at my circumstances, I'll always wonder whether or not God loves me. If I look at the cross, I'll always know that he loves me."

In moments of pain, sorrow, and weeping, may you look to the cross of Christ and see the promise of God's love for you. And above all may you look to the empty tomb and celebrate that joy does indeed come with the morning!

**Reflection:** Are there times in your life where you've gone from sorrow to joy? Where did you see God's hand in those times?

John 20:1-18

**Sermon: Resurrect** | Pastor Marcus Lane



## About Our Writers

**Carley Baker** is married to Todd, and in her free time she enjoys drinking tea, swing dancing, writing poetry, and cooking! Carley is pregnant with the Bakers' first child, a girl, due at the end of March 2024!!

**Margaret Baker** has been married to David for 28 years, and they have five wonderful children, now ranging from 17 to 25. She loves accompanying young instrumentalists on the piano, teaching writing, and helping college applicants find "their" essay. David is her hero.

**Todd Baker** 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 lead an outsourced sales engineering firm, married to Jennifer for 33 years. Father to four children and recently a first-time grandfather. He runs, does HIIT workouts, hikes and reads in his spare time.

**Benjamin Brenner** is a student at CUAA studying in the preseminary department. Ben has a deep love for English and in his free time he's usually listening to audiobooks.

**Peter Bruenger** is an English major at Eastern Michigan University, studying literature and ancient texts. He enjoys music, reading, and doing whatever it is that college kids do these days.

**David Carlson** has been married to Pat for 55 years. In his retirement he enjoys his bride's company, spending time with his children and grandchildren, reading anything he wants, and playing guitar and singing with friends.

**Pat Carlson** is a retired RN, ESL teacher, and short-term missionary leader; married to David; mother of two grown children and grandmother to two granddaughters; loves to play pickleball and to quilt.

**Alison Doerr** is a sophomore at Concordia University pursuing a degree in Nursing. She is on their cross country and track teams and enjoys spending time outside and with her family.

**David Dolsen** grew up going to ULC and now serves as a missionary with University Christian Outreach at UofM. David is married to Annaliese and they live in Ypsilanti with their two funny and joyful children Adelaide and David II. As a family they love going to the park, watching/reading All Creatures Great and Small, and escaping for weekends in Harbor Springs at Grandma and Grandpa's.

**Dan Dolsen** and his wife Kristin have three married children and three grandchildren. Dan and Kristin split their time between Ann Arbor and Camp Dolsen, which is situated in the woods on Lake Michigan just outside of Harbor Springs.

**Amy Duncan** is Director of Worship and Outreach at ULC. She's married to Randy, campus pastor at Concordia University Ann Arbor, has six children, and loves to learn from everyone she meets.

**Amanda Fogo** is a sophomore at Concordia University studying Elementary and Special Education. She runs cross country and track, and in her free time enjoys drinking coffee, and hanging out with friends and family.

**Monica Heissenbuettel** is a life-long Lutheran, happily married to Bruce, mother of two grown daughters. She loves teaching preschool and piano lessons, playing the church organ, hosting gatherings, visiting her daughters, and taking the family Corgi for long walks at various parks throughout the Ann Arbor area.

**Ken Huner** is currently serving as a vacancy pastor in Petersburg, MI. He also serves as the Dean of Instruction for the Michigan District's Deacon/MAP program. He is married to his lovely bride Kim, and he loves golf.

**Nathan Janke** is a senior biomedical engineering student at Valparaiso University who enjoys reading, pickleball, and a nice summer day on a pontoon boat in Michigan.

**Becky Johnson** is happily married to Tom and works at Ann Arbor Christian School as the Spiritual Life Coordinator. She enjoys leading worship, gardening, and spending time with friends.

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

**Nancy Koppin** is a retired high school English teacher. She is married to Gary (45 years so far), and they have three adult children and four brilliant grandchildren. She likes to swim, have ideas, and make things.

**Abby Landskroener** is a junior at Concordia University Ann Arbor majoring in Elementary Education and getting her Lutheran Teaching Diploma. She loves having deep conversations about Jesus and loves coffee a little too much.

**Pastor Marcus Lane** is the campus pastor at ULC. Ann Arbor resident. Husband to Vanessa. Dad to Della and Jude. Lover of ancient theologians and the NBA. Go Wolves!

**Vanessa Lane** lives in Ann Arbor with her husband, Marcus, their two kids, and one dog. She's a start-up founder, product manager, avid reader, and NBA fan who is always down to grab a coffee with you.

**Zach Marotzke** is a senior at the University of Michigan majoring in economics with a minor in history and helps with student outreach for ULC

**Tandy Mazak** is the Risk Manager for Ally Bank where she has been employed for 38 years. Married to Jim and human parent to a Yorkie named Scarlett. Gathering Volunteer Leader.

**Allie Milot** is organically grown in Ann Arbor, a cat mom of three, a graduate student at EMU, and a thrift store fanatic. You will often find Allie in the Common Cup as she goes to school full-time and somehow keeps up with a variety of part-time jobs, one of them being the Common Cup Art Curator!

**Gillian Miranda** is a young professional living her dream. She works in Finance at the University of Michigan and is married to Josh Miranda, her wonderful husband. She loves creating art of all kinds, being active, spending time with friends, and relaxing at home with her husband and dog.

**Jay Naab** is an elder at ULC and manages a small family business. He is a husband to Antoinette and father to Jack (9), Cora (6), Theo (3). He loves learning about people and sports of all kinds.

**Rachel Olson** recently graduated with her MSW from the University of Southern California and is a therapist at Great Lakes Psychology Group in Livonia. In her free time Rachel enjoys time with her dog Snoopy and cat Fergus as well as spending time with friends and family.

**Kris Palmer** is a former film and television writer/producer and business owner who fell in love with teaching elementary school students while in semi-retirement. Kris and her husband, Dave, have been married for 39 years and have two adult children, Michaela and Tyler.

**Norma Polk** is a deaconess who serves as the Director of International Student Ministry at ULC. She is also a costume designer and a set designer for local theaters. She is married to Thad, and together they have 3 children, a dog, and two cats. She loves to cook and sew.

**Thad Polk** 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.

**Laura Robberts** is a wife, mother, a Nana, and a retired licensed carpenter. She also has a passion for jewelry making.

**Amy Robson** 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.

**Chris Troxel** is the pastor and planter at Emmaus Ann Arbor. He's married to Lisa, has three children, and loves the outdoors.

**Jeaneen Wyly** is an ELA teacher at Salem High School where she enjoys diverse discussions on multicultural literature and the humanities. She is married to Jamie, mom to Makayla and Jenna.

**Nate Zuellig** is an Ypsilantii native who enjoys regular things like coffee, reading, hanging out with his Dad, and making children go bonkers at kids' rock n' roll shows. He has been thoroughly enjoying working as Worship Assistant and Artist in Residence at ULC. What's he been up to? Take a listen by searching "Nate Zuellig" on Spotify, or find his poetry on Substack by Googling "Johnfour24."

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment,  
and his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.

~Psalm 30:4, 5



**HE IS RISEN!**