

MARCH 15, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON "Pop Pop's Wisdom" Acts 8:9-23, Romans 12:1-8, Mark 12:28-31, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-13

This morning at the end of the message I'm going to share some of my grandfather's thoughts about church. I'm going to offer you some of my "Pop Pop's wisdom". Leading up to it we're going to unpack something very important in our day and age. It is both a need for awareness and a call to action.

There are two terms I want to define. Consumerist faith and Consumed by faith.

Consumerist faith is a growing problem in America and around the world. While it's a problem, we actually shouldn't be surprised. Most all of us at this point have been raised to be consumers and to expect much of the world to run on a consumer kind of mentality.

We live in a world where we exchange resources for goods and services. Since we're paying for things we expect to get what we want. It's why we choose to place our time and money different places from one another. We all have individual passions, preferences, wants and needs. So we seek out the places, people, things, and experiences that match us. Most of us know that so long as we have enough money just about anyone will be willing to sell us whatever we ask for.

In a consumer world, we have things done for us. I pay you to do x, y, or z and expect certain results from that. There's nothing inherently wrong with this system.

It's fine in an economy. It is destructive in a church.

A church isn't a place where we pay to be served our preferences. It is a community that we actively participate in. We come to serve rather than be served. We come to give rather than take. We come to ask what we can do for God far more than what God can do for us.

God has already done more than enough for us. Anything else we need comes through our deepening our relationship with God and serving our communities in God's name.

Unfortunately what we hear more and more from churchgoers and church seekers is less about looking for a place to pitch in and serve and more and more about what menu items they are wanting to purchase with whatever offering they decide to make or even just by showing up and assuming they are entitled.

Don't misunderstand, the community of faith is certainly here to meet the needs of the community. It exists to deepen people's faith and support the needs around us. Those needs are diverse and many.

The issue happens when the primary sense is "what's in it for me?"

We've seen the advent of the "corporate church". A multitude of pastors and staff are paid to do the work of ministry. They are expected to set everything up in a user friendly format for people to plug into at their pleasure. We literally now have titles like "executive pastor" and pastors referred to as the "CEO" of their church. Language is telling.

Growth in a church is a good thing. Unless it's at the expense of the genuine, authentic gospel. Marketing, branding, and customer service becomes the model. "How do we entice people in, and what itches do we need to scratch to keep them?"

More and more we hear people talking about wanting to go to church and fade into the woodwork. No expectations. Just a pick and choose experience that fits my schedule and convenience.

In this, the experience of faith is more a transaction than a genuine experience.

Scripture is harsh about this kind of faith. Simon the sorcerer is an example of transactional faith. He saw something he liked, the ability to impart the Holy Spirit. Simon thought he could purchase that ability. It wasn't nor is for sale. Faith and gifting are simply accepted and then lived into. Treating it as an exchange for services is not only misguided, it brought on Simon a curse from the apostles.

Jesus Himself warns us to "count the cost" before choosing discipleship. Salvation is a gift, but there is a price to pay. We have to be willing to sacrifice our very lives, knowing that true faith brings transformation. It requires service and sometimes hardship.

In Thessalonians the phrase "if a man doesn't work a man doesn't eat" has been misused often to shame people who need a helping hand because of their life circumstances. This is really about this kind of "do faith for me" attitude in some ways. The people believed Jesus was coming back, so why bother working or doing anything really? Just sit back and let the community take care of them while they wait for Christ's return.

The message was clear. It doesn't matter when He comes back, there's work to be done. There is ministry to participate in. Life and faith aren't to be done FOR us. They are to be engaged and participated in actively BY

us.

Our role as believers is never to be passive. Faith is active.

This is what it means to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is what it means to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. This is what it means to have a consuming faith.

We sacrifice our lives to many other things. Take the tally through the week of where we spend our time. How much time and effort given to a hobby? How much time do we intentionally carve out for entertainment? For exercise? For whatever we indulge that's more choice than need?

None of this stuff is necessarily bad or wrong. The question that we need to ask in addition is how much time and effort we are giving to God. How am I serving? What am I giving of myself so my community of faith is thriving and vibrant?

In every community of faith there are things we want to see. The question is this. What are we willing to do and give to make those things happen? We want to see growth? We want to see more kids and families? Every one of us has to ask the same question. What am I willing to do to make it happen?

In a consumer world, people shop for what they want to be provided. In a life that is consumed by faith when we want to see something in a community of faith that we love and know is serving God in honest practice we build it. If it's worth wanting, it's worth working for.

I know we all want to see our community of faith grow. I know by the reports from the community around us that this community of faith, despite our size, is known for doing the servant work of Jesus. The more we grow the more we can serve. The more we bless the community around us.

I invite all of us this morning to ask the same heartfelt question. What am I willing to do to make the possibilities before us a reality? What effort am I willing to put in to see the things I want to see happen in this community of faith?

Here comes my Pop Pop's wisdom. It's probably why you've sensed the frustration from me as I've watched what's happened in our denomination over the last five or so years.

I remember being told about his attitude regarding his church. He too was frustrated when people bailed over a disagreement, a challenge, when the going got rough or aggravating. His heartfelt sentiment was the if something is presenting the church, we stick together and work it out. If we need to fix something we fix it. If we need to change something we change it.

Whatever it challenge is before us, we handle it together. We stay united as a family before God, redeemed by Christ, and working with the Holy Spirit.

Challenges aren't a call to cut and run. They are opportunities to draw closer to God and one another. They are opportunities to discover what kind of new things God may be doing in our midst.

Like anything, sorting it out requires work. It requires sacrifice. It requires the mettle of true discipleship. It's also an adventure. When you're in it with the right people, it's exciting. It's fun. It's life changing.

We are at a critical time in the life of our congregation. What work am I willing to do? What work are you willing to put in? What work are we called to do together?

If you're worried that we're a small congregation, look to scripture. That first group of disciples was small as well. Look what they accomplished by banding together, putting in the work and following the Holy Spirit. They changed the face of their world. With God's help we can too.

Purpose for Lent

This season of Lent is rich with many things. One that I've been recently meditating on is purpose. This might seem strange given the overtones of repentance and preparation for Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Yet it is perfectly appropriate.

As we reflect on who we are before God and our faith, many realities can unfold. Repentance is changing from who we were more into who we are to be. Purpose is a major piece of who we are to be. As we pare away things that are apart from God's desires and will and add things that draw us closer to God, our purpose defines and redefines.

Sometimes our purpose remains "the same", just more focused and clear. Other times we learn that our purpose is beginning to shift. Something within us is being pulled a new direction and we are called into discernment. Still other times there is a stark break from the purpose we presently follow into something entirely different and new.

All of this discovery is exciting. It further clarifies our mission in this world and our place before God. It can also be scary. If change is in the air that means risk. The unknown is often at least uncertain and sometimes terrifying. If we are following God all of it holds promise and potential.

The beauty of letting this be a season of sorting through purpose is that it helps us define our lives. I know for me purpose is absolutely essential. Without it I feel adrift and lost.

I find that “routine” is necessary for me to have any sense of security. That routine is really a defined sense of purpose. Having classes to teach, sermons to preach, counseling sessions to hold, events to plan and participate in, and all of the other things that define my schedule is a tremendous gift. Daily there is purpose and a goal. For some they want that purpose to be entirely predictable. For me I love that purpose is defined in routine but unpredictable every single day in what that routine will bring about. We’re all different, but purpose is a unifying blessing.

I’ll share this as an introvert. Many people think introverts are always on the wall, in the background, never engaging socially. Most people are surprised to hear that I’m an introvert given how I conduct myself as a pastor. Here’s the secret. Many introverts become comfortable socially when they have a role. When they have a purpose. We know what we’re about, and what our purpose is and so that “shyness” takes a back seat. After we still need quiet and hide and recharge, but in the moment we have energy and life that comes from purpose.

As you go through your own season of Lent, please take time to reflect and discern. No matter what stage of life and journey you are at know that you have a purpose. Is God calling you to dig in to the purpose you have? Giving a sense that change is coming? Or calling you to something more drastic in a change of purpose?

Whatever it is, remember to keep God, Christ, and the Spirit central to figuring it out. Keep faith the guiding light in how to go about whatever is next. Know that when purpose is in keeping with the light of Christ there is always a greater reason unfolding in bringing “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”