

**Sermon**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**First Sunday of Lent**  
**February 22, 2026**  
**9:30 AM**

Texts: Psalm 32 & Matthew 4:1-11

Theme: Bless the Lives We Actually Have: Blessed Are the Imperfect

[prayer]

Some years ago, I was reading the works of black theologian and civil rights leader Reverend Howard Thurman, and I came across this quote: “What the world needs is more people who have come alive.” We are sometimes tempted to think of spirituality as something we practice so we can eventually transcend or overcome our humanity. Thurman’s spirituality is the opposite; it emphasizes human beings becoming *more* human, not less. This is really the whole project of salvation – God healing our humanity from the blight of sin so that we can be *wholly* and *perfectly* human, as God intended.

When we talk about sanctification as Methodists – the spiritual process of “going on to perfection” – we are talking about that work of healing as God redeems and restores us. Lent is a season in the church calendar when we slow down and acknowledge that we are very much still works in progress in desperate need of God’s grace.

Progress and transformation are the spiritual language of salvation. Where we get ourselves into trouble is when we confuse the work of God’s transforming grace with our modern self-help culture. Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie write that this culture takes “a very precious truth about faith – that we can grow closer to God and become more fully human – and transform[s] it into a capitalistic imperative. EVERYTHING is possible if you attend this seminar! Or buy this serum. Or commit to this new series of habits. This form of perfectionism argues that we are capable of anything at the right emotional, mental, and physical price...We don’t need to be saved at all. Everything you need is already inside of you.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. *Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection*. New York: Convergent Books (2022). Page ix.

Perfectionism is fundamentally an attempt to control what is not ultimately controllable. It is an attempt to avoid pain, shame, sorrow, and fear. These things, though, are part of being human. Our Lenten sermon series, “Bless the Lives We Actually Have,” is about embracing our humanity in all its beauty and brokenness. We embrace our humanity rather than resist it so that God’s healing grace can enter in.

We start this week with Satan’s attempt to get Jesus to reject his own humanity. As a recovering perfectionist, this story always gets my goat. Here is Jesus, piously rejecting bread after forty days of literal fasting (not the figurative kind, folks), while I can’t resist the box of chocolates in my cupboard for more than twenty-four hours.

This story never feels fair...*if* we read it as Jesus overcoming human weakness. But this story isn’t really about that. It is about Jesus proving what kind of God he is. God has claimed Jesus as God’s Son, anointed him as God’s Messiah. Now God asks Jesus to prove he is the Messiah by demonstrating he understands *how to be* the Messiah.

Each of the tempter’s temptations focus on an aspect of the Messiah’s power. He tempts Jesus to slake his hunger by miraculously turning stones into bread. He tempts Jesus to make a religious spectacle of himself by calling upon heaven’s legions to rescue him from death. And he tempts Jesus with immense political power to bring about the kingdom of God.

At each turn Jesus rejects the tempter. But these three temptations are just the introduction to the real temptation God has planned. The real temptation Jesus faces is the temptation to deny the weakness of his humanity, to choose his power as the Son of God over his poverty as the Son of Man. Each of the tempter’s offers begins with the Greek word *ei*. It is most often translated as “if,” but it can also be translated as “since.” “Since you are the Son of God, then do these things.” The temptation is for Jesus to take advantage of his divinity.

Jesus instead chooses the path of humility. Because it is his humble humanity, as much as his divinity, that saves us. This is the great mystery of our faith: That the Son of God was born like us as a human being, lived among us as a human being, suffered alongside us as a human being, and then died for us as a human being.

Jesus shared the weakness of our human condition, our human limitations, “so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15).

Jesus defines his messiahship in the terms of the cross – a complete identification with what it means to be human. He is not a Messiah that delivers his people by exercising power, but a Messiah who delivers by walking with us in the wilderness of our imperfections and weaknesses. Instead of turning stones into bread, he shares meals with those who are marginalized and excluded. Instead of standing on the pinnacle of the temple and enlisting the help of angels, he overturns tables to protest the temple’s entanglement with greed. Instead of enthroning himself as emperor over all the earth, he speaks truth to power and is executed on a cross. To be the Son of God is to live and die as the Son of Man.

In response to each of the tempter’s offers, Jesus quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy Moses presents the divine law to the Israelites. The law is a gift from God intended to order and sustain life. For forty years Israel wandered in the wilderness, relying on God for food and water. This wilderness sojourn prepared them to receive the law by humbling them to God’s sustaining presence in their lives. So when he quotes Deuteronomy to the devil, Jesus is making it clear that the Messiah chooses reliance on God over self-reliance/self-help. Though he has been endowed with divine power, Jesus humbles himself and sets aside that power, choosing instead a testimony of insufficiency apart from God. “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (v. 4; cf. Deut 8:3). Jesus is perfect in resisting temptation. But he is perfect by embracing his dependence on God. He rejects the idol of self-sufficiency and chooses to trust God alone.

Part of being human is acknowledging that we have limitations. In our psalter reading today the psalmist declares, “Count yourself lucky—God holds nothing against you and you’re holding nothing back from him” (v. 2 The Message). The psalmist points out that hiding our humanity from God only compounds our weakness, but when we tell the truth, when we trust God with our mess, we allow ourselves to be fully known and loved by our Creator.

Lent is a season to repent from our illusions of perfection and instead acknowledge our humanity, our failures, our sins, and our utter dependence on God. The blessing of acknowledging our imperfection and knowing our limitations is that we can better see our need for God's grace. After he rebukes the tempter, Jesus is cared for by angels. He is comforted in his loneliness and pain. Once he overcame the temptation of self-sufficiency, Jesus was able to accept God's love and help.

To be a child of God is to have the same kind of trusting relationship with our Parent in Heaven as Jesus had. Jesus came to show us a better way of being human, and that way finds strength in acknowledging our weakness and relying on God to provide for, sustain, and deliver us. Lent is not a project in spiritual perfection. Lent is when we ask God to show us and the world as we truly are so that we can be intentional in acknowledging our need for Him and drink deeply from the well of His grace.

This Lent, will our testimony be one of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and rejection of God's Spirit? Or instead, when we feel the temptation to try and escape our humanity, can we instead ask God to bless us through our imperfections and weaknesses? Jesus's time in the wilderness teaches us that we are not healed by rejecting our humanity. We are healed by accepting it and letting God's grace sanctify us. God's love transforms – perfects – us in God's image, not the world's image. And God's definition of perfection is the maturation of love in each of us, driving out our fear and shame (1 John 4:18). One day we will be freed from the limitations of our humanity. But in the meantime, God walks with us and offers us the possibility of grace.

Blessed are the imperfect...for we are God's work in progress.

Amen.