

**“Your Best Life Now, with John the Baptist, Part 2”**  
**Mark 6:12-30**  
**February 4, 2024**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

**The Reading of the Word**

We return this morning to the Gospel of Mark. And we’re looking, for a second time at the story of John the Baptist’s interactions with Herod and Herod’s household.

To see that clearly, we’re going to need to recap a bit of what we discussed last week.

But to begin, let’s look together at our text: Mark 6:12-30.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Mark writes:

<sup>6:12</sup> So they [the Twelve] went out and proclaimed that people should repent. <sup>13</sup> And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

<sup>14</sup> King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.” <sup>15</sup> But others said, “He is Elijah.” And others said, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” <sup>16</sup> But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.” <sup>17</sup> For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. <sup>18</sup> For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” <sup>19</sup> And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, <sup>20</sup> for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

<sup>21</sup> But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. <sup>22</sup> For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” <sup>23</sup> And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” <sup>24</sup> And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” <sup>25</sup> And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” <sup>26</sup> And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. <sup>27</sup> And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison <sup>28</sup> and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. <sup>29</sup> When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

<sup>30</sup> The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

This is the Word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

### **Prayer of Illumination**

Lord, like the psalmist,  
When we think of the direction you give us through your ancient word,  
we take comfort, Lord.  
Let your word be now our joy and delight,  
as we attend to it here in your house,  
so that we would remember your revelation as we go from here, day and night,  
that we may cling to and follow it.  
Give us that great blessing,  
of walking in your ways, by the power of your Spirit  
Grant this, we ask, in Jesus's name. Amen  
[Based on Psalm 119:52, 54-56]

### **Introduction**

This is our second Sunday in this text, and so a recap of some of what we talked about last week might be helpful.

So first, let's remember from last week the context in which Mark tells this story of John, Herod, Herodias, and others.

The context Mark creates here is a structure that commentators sometimes refer to as a Markan Sandwich. This is where Mark begins one story, pauses that first story to tell a second story, and then returns to the first story to conclude it. So the second story is wedged into the middle of the first story. And when Mark does that, usually the middle story is meant to tell us something about the outer story. [Edwards, 11]

And though it's a little subtle, commentators note that we have such a Markan Sandwich here. Right before Mark tells us about John the Baptist, he's telling us about Jesus sending out the twelve Apostles to call others to repent – to stop running away from God, to stop rebelling against God, and to instead turn towards God in faith and obedience. Jesus sends them out to call people to repentance. The Twelve go out, then do what Jesus tells them to do, and then they return to Jesus. But between their doing what Jesus told them to do, and their returning to Jesus, Mark has wedged this story about John. Verse thirteen seems like it should flow right into verse thirty – but Mark instead decides to make a sandwich here.

And what we said last week was that the reason Mark seems to do that, is that rather than describing the ministry of the Twelve in order to give us a model of how to do ministry, and what to expect from others, Mark seems to have decided to direct our attention to John instead. He wants John to

serve as our model. And he wants the responses John received to help set our expectations for how people will respond to us.

By sandwiching this story about John the Baptist, within another story of Christian witness and ministry, Mark is holding out John the Baptist as a model for us, of first, how to do faithful Christian ministry, and then second, of how other people might respond to us. [Edwards, 177]

All Christians are called to be Christ's witnesses in the world. That will look very different from person to person, but we are all called to that. And Mark tells us here to look to John if we want to learn more about how to do that well, and what to expect when we do.

Last Sunday we looked at the first half of that – we considered what we learn from John about how to do faithful Christian ministry well.

And what we saw was that in this passage, John the Baptist is speaking the truth in love, with persistence, with a personal focus, and regardless of the consequences to himself.

That's our model for how to care for and minister to others spiritually: speaking the truth in love, with persistence, with a personal focus, and regardless of the consequences to ourselves. We dug into that last week, and that sermon is on our website if you missed it.

But today, we want to ask: When we do follow John's example, when we imitate how he did ministry, when we faithfully bear witness to Jesus and the gospel, then how can we expect people to respond? What can we expect the outcome to be?

And when we come at it that way, we see that this passage here holds out four ways that people might respond to us when we speak spiritual truths to them in love. We see that when John ministered faithfully, some responded with faith, some with hatred, some with real interest but no ultimate transformation, but all seemed to experience effects of his ministry long after he was gone.

### **With Faith**

So first, some responded to John's ministry with faith.

This is not the focus of this passage, but it is highlighted, and we should not miss it.

Verse 29 tells us that after John was executed, his disciples came and took his body and buried it.

It's a small line and we can easily skip right over it. But we shouldn't. Because it's there, I think, to encourage us. There was real fruit from John's ministry, and Mark wants us to see that. Because just as we can tend to skip over the encouraging fruit of John's ministry, I think we can also be tempted often to skip over the encouraging fruit of our own ministry and witness to others.

But contrary to that, Mark tells us three things about the fruit of John's ministry – three things about the faith of those who were positively influenced by John.

First, he simply reminds us that such fruit existed. John had disciples. He wasn't just rejected, but there were faithful believers whom he had helped grow in the faith, as members of God's people. He may have had enemies in Israel, but with that, he also had success and saw fruit from his faithful ministry.

We can sometimes overlook that when we think of John's ministry. But I think we can sometimes overlook that when it comes to our own ministry as well.

It's easy to notice and to lament those who have rejected the faith ... but to pass over, with little recognition, those we know who have accepted and grown in the faith.

As a church, we need to take note not just of those who leave our fellowship ... but we also need to take note of those who join it. As a church we need to lament and pray for those covenant children who have wandered from the faith. But we also need to look around this congregation more often, to note how many adult covenant children are here today, and to give thanks for the fruit that the Lord has brought from this church's ministry to those covenant children.

In a similar way, as individuals, we should grieve over the times when we have spoken the truth to others in our lives and they've rejected it. But we need to not take for granted the many times we've spoken difficult words to someone, and they responded by repenting of their sin, by growing in faith, by drawing closer to the Lord.

When it comes to John's disciples, Mark first reminds us that we need to make sure we don't miss the fruit that the Lord brings from our work. So take a moment. Look around. And give thanks for it.

You can do it right now if you like.

Second, Mark reminds us here that John's disciples didn't just become believers, but they persevered in their faith through difficult circumstances – through a difficult time, when in many ways the culture was set against them. Even after John's arrest and execution, his disciples had not abandoned him. The faith of those shaped by John's ministry was sturdy.

We can take the Christian perseverance of others for granted. But at a time when the currents of the dominant culture are often set against Christian faithfulness, we should not take such perseverance for granted. It took counter-cultural perseverance for John's disciples to maintain their faith ... and it takes counter-cultural perseverance for believers to maintain the faith today. And we need to recognize that.

I want us to grow as a church – that is my hope and prayer – it's something I labor for. But we need to recognize that we are living in the largest and fastest shift of Americans out of the church in American history. People are streaming out of the Church. And in a time like that, to even just maintain our people in the faith and in our fellowship, is something to give thanks for.

Thirty years ago stable, flat worship attendance numbers from one year to the next were often seen as a sign of stagnation. Today stable numbers in worship attendance should be seen as a sign of the Spirit's work and blessing among us. It should be seen as a sign of resilience, and perseverance,

in a time when the Church in our country is retracting like never before in our country's history. Because in any age – but especially in ours – we cannot take perseverance in the faith, or the maintenance of the Church for granted. It is the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of our work of ministry. And so we should recognize it, and give thanks for it.

Third, one final element that Mark highlights here about the faith of John's disciples, is their courage and their willingness to face public consequences for their faith. John had just been executed by Herod. It took courage to show up at the prison, to identify this supposed enemy of the King as your spiritual leader, and to request his body for burial. But they did it anyway. John had modeled faithfulness and spiritual courage to them, and it had born fruit in their own hearts and lives. And Mark wants us to see that and admire that.

And we probably need to be more intentional about admiring that in others too. When others – especially those you have prayed for or ministered to, whether as their spiritual mentor or simply as their spiritual friend – when others show courage in their faith in a hostile world, do you stop and see it, and admire it, as Mark does here, with John's disciples? Do you praise it and encourage it?

It is, of course, a time-honored tradition that goes back centuries, for each generation, as it gets older, to look at the generation or two behind it, and lament all the ways those younger generations are not as good as they themselves are. It seems to be built into human nature.

But if the spiritual landscape of our culture really has shifted so much in the last 20 or 30 or 40 years ... if the world around us is so much more hostile to our faith than it was a generation or two ago ... then I would say to those who remember a different time: Don't just lament the age that the generation or two after you are living in ... and don't just see the ways they are different from you. But see their courage and faith to enter the workplace as Christians at a time when that takes more courage than it did 20 or 30 years ago. See their courage to identify as Christians in the public square when that is more of a minefield than it may have been when you were their age. See their persistence and courage to raise their children as Christians in a world that pushes against that and lays obstacles for that in so many different ways – with challenges that hadn't even been invented yet when you raised your children.

Don't just praise the past. But praise these young people around you today who are showing courage in how they live out their faith. And encourage them to their faces. Tell them that they are dealing with temptations and obstacles you didn't have to deal with. And tell them you admire the faith and courage they are exercising to follow the Lord in this world despite the costs.

Whether it's how they navigate the world, or how they raise their kids, or how they seek to find a Christian spouse, or something else ... I don't think you realize how much it would encourage those younger than you to hear that you see and admire their spiritual courage. To simply say: "I'm so encouraged to see your faithfulness in such spiritually challenging circumstances. I never had to deal with this or that challenge. But you are doing it so well."

But it's not just about encouraging those younger than you. You who are a bit older should be encouraged as well. Because in so many cases, that spiritual courage is the fruit of decades of work that your generation poured into covenant children and converts to the faith. It's the fruit of your

work of discipleship towards them. Stop, and see it, and be encouraged by it. The Lord has brought fruit from your labors.

Living in a time like we live, and reading a story like this one about John, it's easy to miss the fruit the Lord is bringing about, in the midst of the challenges and the losses. But Mark points to it here. And we should not miss it.

So the first thing we see is that when John ministered to others faithfully, some responded with faith – with sturdy and courageous faith. And the Lord often does the same thing through our ministry to others as well, as we speak biblical truth to them in love.

That's the first thing we see here.

### **With Hatred**

But then second, we see that while some respond with faith, others respond with overt hatred. And in this category we have Herodias.

And Herodias is, in many ways, the driving force behind what happened to John here.

In verse 17 we learn that it was “for the sake of Herodias” that Herod had John arrested. In verse 19 we learn that for some time Herodias wanted to see John killed. And from the episode on Herod's birthday, we see the maneuvering and manipulation Herodias was willing to do to attack John. From this glimpse of Herodias that we get from Mark, it appears that she never really had ears to hear John's words – his call to repentance – but she hated him from the beginning for the witness he bore. And this is, indeed, how some will respond to the gospel and the call to repentance.

When we speak the truth in love, then sometimes people will respond with hatred towards us. That too is a biblical truth.

And there's two dangers we can fall into when it comes to this truth. One is to deny it. The other is to revel in a false version of it.

First, some of us are tempted to deny it. Some of you, if you're honest, you believe that if you were truly loving, if you did things just right, then no one would ever hate you, no matter what biblical truth you had to speak to them.

Now ... exhibit #1 against this assumption is Jesus. Jesus was more loving than you will ever be. And they nailed him to a piece of wood and killed him. And you will not do a better job of loving people than Jesus did.

I remember an older pastor essentially saying to me and some other younger pastors once, that while we should seek to do all we can to love and serve others, at the end of the day, no matter how many hungry people we fed, no matter how many homeless people we served, no matter what good works we did, at the end of the day some people were still going to hate us for our faith. They

would still see us as bigots – as part of what’s wrong with the world. Because of our Christian beliefs.

You can’t do enough good works to avoid the possibility of people responding to your faith with hate. We cannot deny this possible outcome. Instead, we need to face it squarely. It should no shock us, even if it upsets us.

So, one danger is denying this reality.

But another danger is to revel in a false version of this truth.

I’ve mentioned this before, but from time to time I remember an old satirical Babylon Bee article that was titled: “Man Unsure If He’s Persecuted Because He’s a Christian or Because He’s a Massive Jerk.”

The article quotes the young man: “I want to say it’s because I believe in Jesus, but I’m also super obnoxious, I guess,” Richert told reporters. ‘It could be for either reason, and I’m just not entirely sure which. [...] I’m stumped. It’s a total toss-up.’”

The article continues, saying: “According to Richert, he’s constantly suffering persecution and exclusion in the workplace, among his family members, and even at church—and he’s never entirely certain if it’s his reprehensible personality or his love for Jesus [that] is the cause.”

The article is funny ... because it has a little bit of truth to it. If some Christians think they can avoid the anger of others by doing good works, then others can think that whenever people are angry at them, it must be because they are being faithful. But that’s not necessarily the case.

As we said last week, the details of Herod’s response to John – the fact that Herod heard him “gladly” (we’re told in verse 20), that he respected him (as we’re told in verse 20), and that he was “exceedingly sorry” to lose him (we’re told in verse 26), all shows us that John wasn’t being a jerk to Herod. His words, heard honestly, were not just hard truths but also words of love. The gospel was offensive to Herod, but John did not seek to add to the offense himself. Sometimes we add to the offense with our own sin or callousness or arrogance, and when people get upset by our sin, we assume our sin must really be virtue.

When Jesus or the Apostles or the prophets experienced true persecution – when they received anger or hatred from others that was truly because of the gospel ... they didn’t ordinarily revel in the anger and hatred of others. They might have rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord. But they didn’t ordinarily delight in the hatred or anger itself.

In any case, hatred is a second response we may face when we speak the truth in love. We need to be careful not to deny that possibility, or to revel in a false version of it.

### **With Real Interest, but No Ultimate Transformation**

Third, when we speak the truth in love, some will respond with real interest ... but no ultimate transformation.

This is what we see in Herod. And this can be the most discouraging kind of response for us to experience, I think.

The picture of Herod here is actually fairly nuanced.

First, Herod responds to John with real interest, and a seeming conviction that John has some connection to spiritual truth and to God.

Herod heard John gladly, we're told in verse twenty. Which, as we said last week, seems to imply that he heard him willingly, summoning him from prison to hear from him. Herod was interested in what John had to say about spiritual matters. Enough so that when John's fate was sealed, were told in verse 26 that Herod was "exceedingly sorry."

But it's more than that. Because we're also told in verse twenty that "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man." Mark tells us that it wasn't just John's popularity that Herod feared, but that he actually recognized John's righteousness and holiness. And Herod clearly thought John had some connection to the supernatural, since he believed that John might be raised from the dead, as he states in verse sixteen.

And yet, at the same time, Herod was also greatly perplexed by John's words, we're told in verse 20. For all his interest, he remained confounded by John's message. His heart was moved enough to be interested, but his heart was not transformed enough to understand and respond with repentance and sincere faith.

But with that, Herod also acted against John. He had him arrested in the first place, and then, even as he heard him gladly and respected him and believed something supernatural was going on through him, Herod still did not release John – he kept him in prison.

There was a frustrating and contradictory set of responses all at work inside Herod when it came to John's words of spiritual truth. Attraction was mixed with repulsion, gladness with anger, interest with perplexity.

And it's unclear exactly how long this went on.

But in the end, it was Herod's other loyalties won out over his interest in God or in what John had to say.

In the end, despite his interest, Herod's loyalty to his wife, his indulgence towards his step-daughter, and his concern about what others – especially the elites in his world – would think about him, all lead Herod not only to arrest and imprison John, but ultimately to have him killed. Those earthly loyalties, in the end, outrank Herod's interest in, or commitment to, the Lord. That's what we're told in verses 17, 22, and 26.

And as Christians, we should not be surprised to encounter the same patterns in the people we speak to. And it reminds us of the limitations of our influence over other people. It's unlikely that any of us will ever be better witnesses than John was. But even he could not control the outcome of his words – he could not himself change Herod's heart, or realign Herod's priorities. Our role is to bear witness. What happens in others' hearts is between them and the Lord.

And often it's earthly loyalties that pull people away from the Lord, despite their initial interest in him. John experienced this with others. Jesus experienced this with others. We will experience this with others. It doesn't mean we have failed any more than they did ... though it is a sad outcome. And as people reject the Lord, they may also reject us, as his people. We should not be surprised by this, even if we are grieved by it.

And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian ... or if you'd call yourself a Christian, but you haven't really been living like one ... then you need to consider whether you might be a bit like Herod in this respect. Not that you're willing to have anyone killed, I hope. But rather, that at the end of the day, despite your spiritual interest, if knowing God through Jesus Christ means upsetting friends and family members, if it means offending those close to you, if it means losing social standing or career opportunities ... then in the end, you'd rather have those things than know your Lord and Maker.

Eternal life hangs in the balance of this question. Knowing and being loved by God is set against turning from God and setting your heart against him. Do not give up eternal peace with God, for temporary peace with this world. The structures and standings of this world will all pass away, and what will remain is where we stand with God. Do not be like Herod, but rather turn to the Lord, and live.

So the third thing we see here is that some will not heed that call. Despite real interest, they will not come to the Lord in the end.

### **With Effects Even After He's Gone**

But fourth and finally ... what we also see here is that many people seem to feel the effects of John's ministry – of his words to them – long after he has gone.

We see this with John's disciples. We may speculate about it with Herodias and her daughter. But Mark makes this point especially clear with Herod.

John is dead by verse sixteen, when Herod hears of this new trouble-maker, Jesus of Nazareth. But even as he hears about it, Herod can't stop thinking about John. He hears that Jesus's disciples are preaching a message of repentance, and that immediately seems to trigger in Herod's mind John's personal message of repentance to him. He's still thinking about it. He hasn't forgotten. And it shapes how he thinks about Jesus. Even if Herod's conclusions are wrong, the words of John have stuck with him.

And what brought those words of John back to mind is the ongoing ministry of Jesus. John may be gone. But Jesus is still at work in the world. And his work brings those past words of John back to Herod's mind.

And in a similar way, when we, as God's people, speak the truth in love to others ... it can often feel like as a conversation ends, or a relationship ends, then our words fade into nothing. And humanly speaking that could be true. But for us too, Jesus is still at work in the world, long after our role is over. And often, he uses the words of his people in his work – even words spoken long ago.

And this point is sort of personal to me.

I've told the story of my conversion a number of times, and I'm not going to retell it all this morning. When I do tell it though, there's someone I often mention in passing who actually had an essential role in it all.

In my sophomore year of high school, through some unexpected circumstances, I started asking questions about the Bible and Christianity. I was not myself a believer at that point. But a bunch of questions about Christianity had emerged for me, and I had some Christian friends, and so I started asking them these questions. The questions weren't meant antagonistically, but they probably sounded that way. What I was hearing about Christianity just didn't make sense to me, and so I was asking my Christian friends to explain it. But every time they tried, I'd push back with more questions or objections. So far, I really wasn't buying what they were saying.

And then, in the middle of one of those discussions, as I fired off questions, another student – a girl who at the time I think was a junior in high school, essentially said to me “Look ... I don't know the answer to that question. But what you should probably do is just start reading the gospels in the Bible. And then this should all make sense. That should answer these questions you're asking.”

Now this girl ... was a nice person. But she wasn't exactly the most serious among my friends. She wasn't particularly intellectual. To be honest, she wasn't particularly devout. And I have no idea if she is still a Christian today. I quickly lost touch with her after she graduated. When I thought of her while preparing this sermon, it took me a while to even remember her name.

But that simple sentence that she spoke to me changed my life. It changed eternity for me. Because her words haunted me long after that conversation ended. Because I did what she said. I began to read through the gospels alone in my room at night. And in the process, I became a believer.

For what it's worth, what she said to me wasn't even totally accurate – reading the gospels did not answer the specific questions I was asking that day when we spoke.

But her words were still faithful. They were good. And they changed my life. Not ultimately because of any special skill in her. But because the Lord used her. She was willing to speak a direct word of challenge to me, in love. And the Lord continued to work through those words long after my conversation with her ended, long after I lost touch with her, long after I would struggle to remember her name.

I am here today as a believing Christian. I know the Lord. I have hope for eternity. I have a wonderful Christian wife and three Christian daughters. I am your pastor. All because of simple words spoken to me by a teenage girl 24 years ago. Words that were not themselves profound. Words that were not complex. Words that weren't even totally accurate. Words from someone who was not held in high regard in the eyes of the world or in the eyes of the Church. But those words were effective because they were faithful words, pointed at the truth, spoken in love, and the Lord chose to use them – and to bring real fruit for them, long after the conversation was over. I doubt she knows today how her words changed my entire life.

And if God can do that ... then how on earth can you believe that the Lord can't use your words? How on earth can you believe that just because your conversation with someone has ended, the Lord has stopped working in their hearts and lives, and your words have been fruitless?

Whether you're an adult or a child, a leader in the church or a youth, brilliant or ordinary, the Lord can use even your words, spoken in faith, to change eternity for someone else.

Long after John the Baptist died – long after Herod killed him – Herod was still haunted by John's words. Sometimes when God does that, the words of truth he uses are a haunting: unpleasant words of judgment, as they were for Herod. But other times, those words of truth are the seeds of new life and salvation, as they were for me. We don't know how the Lord will use our words. But we are called on still to speak them in faith.

## **Conclusion**

When we speak difficult words of spiritual truth, in love, to others, we don't know how people will respond. But the story of John reminds us that we are called to serve as Christ's faithful witnesses anyway.

And one thing that helps us to do that is knowing that when we speak such words of truth to others, the Lord will still be at work in and through them, long after our conversation with them is over. Long after our words have been spoken to others, Jesus can still use them to work in people's hearts, just as he did with John's words.

And so, in light of all that Jesus can and will do, let us be people who speak spiritual truth in love to those around us. Just as John did.

And let us trust the Lord to bring about the fruit that he will from our efforts.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

- Bayer, Hans. Introduction and notes to Mark in *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Davis, Jim and Michael Graham with Ryan P. Burge. *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023.
- Horne, Mark. *The Victory According to Mark: An Exposition of the Second Gospel*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003.
- Keller, Timothy. *Jesus the King*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2011.
- Leithart, Peter J. *The Gospel of Matthew Through New Eyes: Volume Two, Jesus as Israel*. Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2018.
- Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church's core value of "Reformed Catholicity"), and also (following the Apostle Paul's example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.