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Psalms 1:1–3, ESV

*1 Blessed is the one
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

Matthew 16:26–27, ESV

26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Deuteronomy 8:18–19, ESV

18 You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Carrying crumbs.

Having you ever seen a line of ants, walking along the ground, carrying crumbs of food on their backs? To us, that food consists of tiny bits of somebody's garbage or something that fell from a plant, but to those ants, those pieces of unidentifiable organic material are massive and life-preserving. We imagine them carrying them back to the ant hill so that all the ants can eat, so that the baby ants don't go hungry. There's a picture of ants carrying food on the front of your bulletin today. I apologize for it not being the most spiritually inspiring image to look at on a Sunday morning. They struggle amazingly, each one seemingly defying the laws of physics and biology to bring back enormous finds from their hunting and gathering expeditions. We could anthropomorphize the ants and further imagine that the ants who bring back particularly large crumbs are received by their fellows back at the hill as the bravest, hardiest, and most successful members of their complex society. Perhaps one of the ants, someone who in the past was largely ignored as an individual and lived a somewhat anonymous life, managed to come back with not only a huge crumb, but one made out of pure dark chocolate. Some human had been walking by eating a candy bar and had actually allowed a precious piece of that food to drop to the ground. The ant, we'll call him Tony, who managed to stumble upon that

chocolate and then heave it onto his back and struggle all the way back to the hill with it will be remembered as a true hero and the name of Tony will be passed down for generations. He fed the entire hill in the most luxurious way for an entire week, a big chunk of the lifespan of an ant.

In truth, we don't understand reality much better than ants do. We know that the cosmos is so vastly larger than our earth that we can't even comprehend the size. It goes on essentially forever, and somehow, even though our intuition tells us it must end, it doesn't, not in a fashion we can appreciate. There are also many more dimensions than we can detect with our senses and our minds. Quantum physics tells us that over ninety percent of reality goes undetected by us. We don't actually know what is around us. We don't move linearly through time. Everything takes place in some widely parallel combinatorial way; when Harry Potter tries to step through the brick wall at the train station to get on the train to his school of magic, countless copies of Harry all make the attempt at the same time, with many billions of copies of him not succeeding, but one of those copies of Harry actually moves the atoms that make up his body through the atoms that make up the wall. In some reality, Harry does walk through the brick wall. And our lifespans cover only the tiniest of instants of time, with the cosmos having existed for an amount of time we cannot wrap our minds around, and it

will continue on for an equal amount of time. In truth, we don't even understand how time began or how it can end. The literal truth is that we are very much like those ants, extraordinarily small creatures with absolutely no physical significance in time or space. We are also no more powerful within the cosmos than those ants are outside their little hill.

So, there you have it. Is this a downer of a sermon or not? Have I proved to be the least uplifting pastor you have ever had? Are you going to go home after church today and swear that you will never return? Well, hold on, I have a what I think is an extremely uplifting message today. So, please bear with me.

Consider the most successful person you have ever heard of. Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla and Space X. Madame Curie, who studied radioactivity. Albert Einstein, who has been used countless times as the metaphor for intellectual brilliance. Michael Jordon, considered perhaps the best basketball player ever. Or Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, who is one of the wealthiest people on the planet and sells us everything. We are the ants who only found unidentifiable, modest sized crumbs of organic material and brought them back to the hill. These famous people brought back that huge chunk of rich chocolate. We will not be remembered in the hill. They will never be forgotten in the hill.

But the size of our prize isn't what matters. It isn't how successful we are with respect to other people. It is the journey, taken under the eyes of God. We went out there and found a way to contribute in a positive way to the society that surrounds us. What matters is that we built up God's world - and that we did not damage God's world. Our contributions on this planet are often the smallest when they are the greatest in God's world. Let's look at our quotes for today.

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who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
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2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
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3 He is like a tree
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and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

This is from the beginning of the very first Psalm, and it is perhaps the most important lesson we can gather from the words of the ancient Israelite sages. We must do blessed things with our lives. We must live the way Christ taught us to live. Most importantly, the scale of our lives, in years lived, in money we have made, in possessions we have collected, in the honors that society has heaped upon us, on the envy with which others hold us - none of that matters. We simply

need to find the path to God. We need to walk in the Kingdom of God. We need to just bring something back to the ant hill. Whatever we can bring back, it is not only enough, it is magnificent. We need to ignore a society that sees most of us as radically insignificant and remember that God sees each of us as incredibly important. We are like a tree planted by streams of water. We will yield fruit, we will prosper – in the eyes of God, in the eyes of the only entity that truly matters.

²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. This, passage, our second for today, is very famous, and we have looked at it before. These words are spoken by Jesus just after he fends off the corrupt religious leaders of his day, who have challenged his authority. After this, Peter, the great apostle, accepts Jesus as his savior and Jesus tells Peter that upon the rock of Peter, Jesus will build his church. His church isn't a building. It isn't any kind of earthly object or possession. It is a people of faith who would one day spread around the globe, into a faraway world that people of that time and place didn't even know existed. Next, Jesus predicts his own murder and subsequent resurrection. Finally, preaching to his followers, Jesus declares that if you are the most successful and envied person on this

planet, but you have wandered from the path that weaves through the Kingdom of God, then you have nothing permanent.

Our last passage is from Deuteronomy: ¹⁸ *You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.* ¹⁹ *And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.* You might remember that Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Jewish Torah, the Christian Pentateuch, and in this book, Moses – who himself will not live to enter the Promised Land – is preparing his people spiritually to enter the land that God has given them. Our quote is one of the key teachings of Deuteronomy. Moses tells the faithful, the people whose heritage we have inherited, that they must have God foremost in their minds. We must remember that it is God who gives us wealth, and that if we find ourselves serving the gods of the human world, we are horrifically lost.

Those are our three lessons. First, we must be deeply rooted in our faith and do what our faith tells us we must do. Second, we must not fall to the temptation to listen to society, to our corrupt world, and waste our lives chasing down the things of this world. And finally, we must stay connected to God in our daily lives. We must remember that God is the source of all truly eternal, truly

global gifts. The things that we bring home on our backs, no matter how important we are, only last for the briefest instant and exist in the tiniest of spaces. What matters is what is our hearts. If we live by these three principles, if we are committed in our faith, if we put the things of God's world above the things of this world, and if we keep God in our lives every moment, we will indeed be serving God and God's people. We can do no better than this. By walking in the Kingdom of God, we can exist in the true world, the one that our senses cannot detect. We can also walk into and through eternity. Yes, all we have to do is live in the Kingdom of God, and not the Kingdom of People, and we will be doing far more than if we were the most successful, powerful, worshipped person on this planet. The crumb we carry back to humanity on our backs will be so huge that it is immeasurable. That crumb will last for all of eternity. There is nothing wrong with being successful and powerful in this world – although I don't think it's good to be worshipped – especially if we use our earthly position to improve the lives of others and to bring them to God. But we must resist the powerful temptation to live only for the things of this world. As our society becomes more and more secular, more and more post-Christian, that pressure will only increase. The real shame is that it's a lot easier to please God than to please people. Just walk with God – and you can only succeed. Please pray with me.

God, we know that from an earthly perspective, all we can do is carry crumbs back to the hill. In our worldly lives, some people can achieve astonishing greatness, but their accomplishments will not survive. All that we do for the things of this world disappears completely. Only what we do in your name, what we do in your world - is eternal. Yes, it is blessed to emulate Jesus and contribute to the health, the happiness, and the joy of the people around us. But first, we must remember that it is your world that is infinite in size and spans infinite time. It is only through faith that we can be alive now and forever, and so it is your world that we must walk in. Help us let go of the earthly things that bind us. We must pursue the things of your world. We must not be distracted, like Tony the ant, by trying to bring home the biggest earthly crumb. We must bring home the crumb that feeds our hearts. When we do this, we will find it easy to represent your church in the boldest, most visible way. We will then exhibit for the world the fantastic nature of living by the example of Christ. And then, we will not only feed our souls; we will discover the joy of improving the lives of those who are in need, those who are forgotten - and we will bring others to the faith. That is true success. Thank you, God, for that opportunity to live in your Kingdom here and forever. Amen.