

**Lenten Message Series: Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living**

Feb. 26 - April 12

Series Text: Jeremiah 31:21-22a

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter?”

**Sun., Feb. 29: First Sunday of Lent (Holy Communion)**

Message: Signs for Life: NO OUTLET

Scripture: Proverbs 4:11-15

[11] I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. [12] When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. [13] Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. [14] Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. [15] Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Memory Verse: “Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take.” Jeremiah 31:21

Blurb: The world is full of paths. Its full of roads. It’s full of options. But not all of them lead the abundant life that God intends. In fact, most don’t. So, of all the roads laid out before us, we must be very careful. Not all paths are OK. Some are very destructive. Others do not help us make any progress. Others are total dead ends. We long for life that is full and exciting and powerful and everlasting. We want a journey that goes far beyond the end of our earthly lives. Jesus offers us the finish we long for. So to find our way, we look forward to that, look forward to Him, and then make our way from there.

**Opening Song:** *Show Me How to Live* -Sanctify

**Welcome** -David

**Memory Verse** -David

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take.”  
Jeremiah 31:21

**Worship Music** -Sanctify

*My Lighthouse*

*O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done  
Build My Life*

Worship Prayer -Andrew

L: We are on the journey of Lent. God has given us road signs for the journey.

**P: We are on the journey of life. God has given us road signs for the journey.**

L: STOP. Stop to discern your journey. Stop to reorient your lives. Stop sinning.

**P: NO OUTLET. So many paths in life lead to nothing. We come to see clearly.**

L: NO OUTLET. God warns us not to travel the wrong way of life. We come to hear clearly.

**P: We come to see the road signs God has placed for our life's journeys.**

**Apostles' Creed** "My Version of the Apostle's Creed" by Noah Bonsell -David

**Serve Moment:** St. Andrew's Shelter -David

**Generational Bridge:** Pilgrim's Progress -Andrew

**Message:** Signs for Life #2: NO OUTLET -David

**Sign:** *STOP sign on a stand in the front center of the platform.*

**PP#1:** Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living

Sign for Life: NO OUTLET

Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living. NO OUTLET. Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

**PP#2:** *Image of a telegram, with "stop" throughout, all in front of a large STOP sign background*

Life's a journey. Stop. We're all making our way in the world. Stop. We're trying to find our own path. Stop. Hmm. Kinda sounds like a telegram. Stop.

Well, with this big sign right up front in church, I suppose this is how you have been hearing the whole service so far. STOP! You try to stay engaged with what is going on during worship, but you are continually distracted by the big red sign. STOP!

Distracted? I don't know. Actually, it's kinda the point. Stop. You see, life is a journey all right, and we are all busy zooming along with the frantic pace of our lives. So I've put this big sign here to give us some guidance for what we should do. What do you think that might be? [STOP!]

Very good. You see, we have started the season of Lent. Lent is the 40 days before Easter. And Lent is a journey, too. We're heading toward Easter. It's up there a ways, but we're going towards it.

**PP#3:** *Image for traveling while following the posted signs, or an image for going on a road trip, subtitled, "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take." - Jeremiah 31:21*

“Life as a Journey” is going to be our theme for Lent this year. We’re going to be drawing some of the parallels between the journey of a road trip and our spiritual journeys. Just as when we drive, road signs tell us where we are, help us find our way, mark the path and keep us in the right, so when we journey through life itself as Jesus followers, we discover that God also gives us road signs to do the same for us spiritually.

Jeremiah 31:21-22, “Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter?...”

**PP#4: Stop!**

1. To get your bearings
2. Sinning
3. To recharge
4. To experience the joy

The first and one of the most important of God’s road signs is also the most common driving road sign: God calls us to...STOP. On Ash Wednesday, we learned that God places stop signs all over the place for us. They are critical for our spiritual journeys. Without them, we will certainly end in a crash, a spiritual wreck. Lent is a time to stop is to stop our constant rushing and zooming, our frantic living. It’s a 4-way STOP! We need to get our bearings, reflect where we are, which path we are on, where we are going. We stop so that we can check our route, to orient ourselves, to ask what we really want out of life and where we want to end up. We stop so we can choose the right path.

The second stop is to stop sinning. Stop living ungodly lives. He calls us to be holy. Lent is a good time for repentance, for prayer and fasting, to work on those bad habits that keep us from being the way God wants us to be.

The third is to stop and be refreshed. We need rest in our day, a Sabbath in our week, and a Lent in our year. We are now 40 days to Easter, and we stop our normal lives, we focus on prayer and fasting, and we spend time with Jesus.

The fourth is to stop and notice the blessings. God leads our life’s journeys past some pretty amazing stuff. If we zoom too quickly, we’ll miss the blessings He has place in our paths.

So during Lent, we stop. We pause in our life’s journeys. To notice. To abstain. To reflect even on the journey itself.

To help you remember to STOP all during Lent, there are stop signs for each of you here today. When you come up for Holy Communion, take one with you. Put it on your key chain, or zipper. Stick it to your mirror or laptop. Let it remind you of your lenten call to the four-way STOP!

**Sign:** *Move the STOP sign and put up the NO OUTLET sign.*

**PP#5: Signs for Life: NO OUTLET**

1. God has a good route for your life

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” -Jeremiah 29:11

Life is a journey that begins the moment we first draw breath, and continues until we breath our last. Yet our journey is not defined by breath, for it begins before we are born and continues long after we breath our last. It is defined by our God, who created us, who, as it says in Psalm 139:13,

knit us together in our mother's wombs, who laid out our journeys long before we were even conceived. Psalm 139:16 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." For each one of us, God has given a life's journey. In Jeremiah 29:11 God promises, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." For each of us God has a future. God has a plan. God has a purpose. God has a journey.

The path that God intends is a journey of hope, it is a path of life, abundant and eternal. It is the best option for us, with just the right amount of scenery, of curves around that which will undo us, of steep grades to test and try us and keep us fit, of down-hill slopes to get enough speed. It is just the right combination for the best life, and it leads to our final home in glory.

The Christian life is choosing this path that God has laid out for us. It is a path blazed by Jesus, and journeying on it means choosing to walk with Him along it.

**PP#6: Signs for Life: NO OUTLET**

1. God has a good route for your life

2. We choose which route we take

"Many plans are in a person's mind, but the Lord's purpose will succeed." -Proverbs 19:21

*Perhaps with an image of many paths ahead in the road.*

We don't have to, you know. We are free to travel any road we like, any direction, any path. God has chosen the path He intends for us, but then lets us make the decisions.

And so the world is full of paths. Its full of roads. It's full of options. But not all of them lead the way God intends. In fact, most don't. So, of all the roads laid out before us, we must be very careful. Not all paths lead to life. Not all paths are the way God intended. And so at first we stop. We stop to take a deep look at the paths of our lives.

**PP#7: Signs for Life: NO OUTLET**

1. God has a good route for your life

2. We choose which route we take

3. Not all paths lead to life

"But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it." -

Matthew 7:14

But then, how do we determine which paths are right, and which paths are wrong? Some say that all paths are OK, and that life is all in the journey. But this is not what Scripture says. It says that God has chosen the right path for us. It is the path of abundant life. It is the path to eternal glory with God.

Not all paths are OK. Some are very destructive. Some are dangerous, and we cannot stay on them long without careening off. Others do not help us make any progress, they keep us going in circles. Others are total dead ends.

**PP#8: Image of a large maze, perhaps in front of a person like a labyrinth**

Think of a maze. You all know what I'm talking about, those puzzles where you "start" on one corner and you have to follow through the winding maze, choosing among endless paths, hoping to find the one that leads to the end. You can't cross any of the boundary lines. Only one way will bring you to the "finish." In really good mazes, you can get sidetracked for a very long time. You

choose a path, and at first it looks pretty good. You're eye skims ahead as far as you can without losing track, and it seems to keep on going. Perhaps this is the one that will lead to the "finish." So you try it. You follow it's twists and turns. At first it takes you toward the finish. But then, it starts leading you in the other direction. Then, after a bit, you get that sinking feeling that something is wrong, and...sure enough, around the next turn, BAM! You run straight into a dead end. It looked so promising! You thought it really would take you where you wanted to go. You made so much progress at first. But...NO OUTLET. It was just an end in itself. You were not able to get to where you wanted. I so appreciate this sign, you know, for it spares me the heartache of going "all in" in a direction that will not take me where I want to go. It warns me to not try it, if I have a distant goal in mind.

We do not easily choose God's path. We first choose paths that promise to gratify our selfish desires, to affirm whatever we want, tell us what we desire to hear. We think they can take us where we want to go. We think we can make such progress.

Proverbs lays it out honestly and bluntly. Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end it leads to death."

Is this connecting with you? Have you been trying to make your own way in the world, trying to do right, trying to make the best of it, trying to just keep going? And yet, you seem to get nowhere? You always get stuck somewhere you didn't intend? No matter how hard you try, no matter what you do, it just doesn't work? The progress you try to make slips away so easily? Do you feel trapped? Frustrated? Hopeless? Tired? Sick of trying? NO OUTLET.

A while back, I talked to one of those really good maze players, you know, the ones that do those mazes that fill a whole wall? I told him I could never do what he did. He said that half the battle is simply sticking with it, trial and error. But that is not *all* the battle. There comes a point when trying harder just doesn't work any more. At that point, he said, he uses a little trick. You know what he does? He said when he's stuck, he looks ahead to the Finish, and then he traces his way back from there.

It's a pretty good trick! I've used it myself ever sense. *It is so much easier to find the right path when you look to the finish and find your way from there.* After all, the path you need to take has to go all the way to the finish, and not be an end in itself.

#### **PP#9: Signs for Life: NO OUTLET**

1. God has a good route for your life
2. We choose which route we take
3. Not all paths lead to life
4. Start at the finish

Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly." -John 10:10

That's also true for our spiritual journeys. This is how we can find the right path among so many different choices. Yes, we can try to follow our best judgement. We can continue to try to make progress using trial and error. Yes we can be tenacious and persistent. But at some point it just doesn't work any more.

But here's the trick. As Jesus-followers, we look ahead to the finish. We look to see where we want to be. We want that life of hope and joy, of peace and true happiness, of meaning and purpose, of being all that we were destined to be. That's what we yearn for. We want a path that goes far beyond the end of our earthly lives. We want an outlet!

And there, at that finish, stands Jesus. He stands with open arms, calling, "Come to me all you who are weary and bogged down, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He calls out, "I have

come that you may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). “Jesus said, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

There it is. Jesus offers us the finish we long for. *So to find our way, we look to that, look forward to Him, and then trace our way from there* along the route that actually does take us all the way there.

**PP#10:** Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Proverbs 4:11-15 “I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.”

Focusing on Jesus, and living His way, will get us to the finish. That means going right past so many other options, by which God has graciously put the NO OUTLET sign.

Proverbs also says in 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do NOT trust your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Choosing the right path does not come from our own understanding. Those paths lead to dead ends. We acknowledge God in all our ways...now watch this...“and He will make your paths straight.” He will show us safely through the bewildering maze.

Proverbs also says in 4:11-15, “I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hampered; when you run, you will not stumble. Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.”

**PP#11:** Signs for Life: NO OUTLET

1. God has a good route for your life
2. We choose which route we take
3. Not all paths lead to life
4. Start at the finish
5. Do not follow your instinct

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” -Proverbs 3:5

God’s path for us is one that goes against our natural preferences, our human thinking. It is a path of self-sacrifice, of giving up full indulgence in whatever we desire, of self-control, of doing what is best for others, living in a way that opens the possibility of full living for those around us. It is a journey that is somewhat of a mystery. For God says that the road He has chosen for us is narrow and high. It is difficult and hard. But it is also the path of true joy and abundant life. It is the only path that leads to life everlasting.

So this journey God intends for us is a leap. It is a leap of faith. We decide to trust in God and follow His leading, even when we can’t see how it is good for us, or even if it doesn’t gratify our immediate desires. It is a journey of faith, where we trust God enough, where we believe God enough, to follow His directions, even if it doesn’t seem right to us.

This means that we resist going down the paths that God has signed posted, “NO OUTLET.” It means turning back from the dead end. It means giving up doing whatever we want, traveling however we want. It means *stop sinning*. It means *stop living for ourselves*. It means *stop deciding what is true by judging it according to what makes sense to me*. It means *taking the jump of faith*. It means *trusting in God* enough to just do what He says, regardless of how it seems. It means *acknowledging that Jesus knows what is best for you* and has your best interesting in mind. It means *submitting*.

**PP#12:** *A street (corner?) with tons of signs like “Stop,” “Dead End,” “No Outlet,” and “Danger,” subtitled, “Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.” - Proverbs 2:9*

Lent is a time to heed God’s road signs. He has posted many “Stop” signs. He has also posted many “NO OUTLET” signs to help you. But then, He stands right where you long to be and says, “Look to me! Here’s where you’re headed. Plan your journey from here. Trust me. I am the Way!”

Once more in Proverbs, chapter 2, verse 9. God promises, “Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.”

Amen.

**Holy Communion** -Dan Hair

Prayers of Repentance

Great Thanksgiving

Words of Institution

Prayer of the Holy Spirit

Receiving the Elements

Offering

Song: *Trust* -Sanctify

**Closing Song:** *The Way* -Sanctify

**Memory Verse** -David

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take.”  
Jeremiah 31:21

**Announcements** -David

Wednesday: All church table game night.

**Benediction** -David