

# Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on  
the contemplative life



## MONEY, MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

*For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* 1 Timothy 6:9-10

My favorite childhood books were the illustrated collections of ancient myths and legends. I loved the fantastical and sometimes grotesque elements in the stories. The adventures of gods and goddesses, and the horrible things they did to each other, swept me into worlds much more interesting than life in small-town Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

Greek and Roman mythologies are similar in some ways and differ in other ways. Greek mythology is a body of tales about gods and goddesses, heroes, and monsters, which thrived between 800 and 346 BCE. Their mythology, told through poetry and drama, is found in the Iliad, written by Homer. A thousand years passed before Rome recorded their mythology. Roman mythology was often written in prose and grounded in Roman history,

institutions, and duty to the state. Remarkable mythological stories of this kind are found not just in Greek and Roman traditions but also in cultures around the world. The Hebrew writings span a vast period, from 800 BCE to the second century CE. The Hebrew writings told new stories, shifting the focus from a pantheon of Gods and beasts to a single God who chose to speak to the Israelites in Canaan. These stories are about the Abrahamic religions. Four hundred years later, the New Testament, written in Greek, emerged, building on the Hebrew scriptures and offering new stories, characters, and focus.

These narratives carry universal meaning and offer humorous descriptions of the folly and fallibility of human behavior. They capture some of the best in us and a lot of the worst. They carry wisdom and warnings, and spot-on assessments of the foibles and faults of the human species. Here in the 21st Century, a character in Greek mythology often comes to mind. Can you guess? His name was Midas,

King of Lydia. Midas accumulated tremendous power and wealth. He was at the top of his game when things began to fall apart. It all started with a wager over who was the best flute player. Minerva, the goddess of the flute, played it skillfully to the pleasure of all the gods. Then the urchin Cupid dared to laugh at the queer face that the goddess made while playing it. Embarrassed and humiliated, Minerva threw her flute away.



Along came another flute player, Marsyas, who was a satyr (half-man, half-goat). He found Minerva's discarded flute and soon played it beautifully.

Apollo, the sun god, also played, and he challenged Marsyas to a competition. Apollo won over Marsyas and his cheering fans. As was Apollo's privilege, he tied Marsyas to a tree and slew him.

Before long, Apollo was engaged in another flute contest. This time, the contest was between King Midas' favorite flautist, Pan, the god of woods and fields, who was well-known for his expertise in playing the syrinx, the shepherd's pipe. This time, Apollo gave Midas the privilege of choosing the winner. Of course, Midas chose Pan. Proudful Apollo was so enraged that he caused large asses' ears to grow on either side of Midas' head.

Midas rushed to his barber and asked him to fashion a hat for him that would cover his donkey ears. The barber was sworn to never reveal the truth about the King's ears, under penalty of immediate death. Time passed, and the shocked barber struggled to keep this secret. He finally went out to a field, dug a deep hole, and shouted down into the hole:

*Midas wears (these eyes beheld them!)  
such ass's ears!* – Horace

This is not the end of Midas' humiliations. Eventually, grass and reeds grew over the place where the secret was buried. When the wind began to blow through the reeds, the leaves murmured, *Midas, King, Midas has asses' ears*. Soon, the secret became the topic of every conversation, reminding us that all secrets are



eventually exposed.

Alas, the foolish King will trip over his pride again. Now meet Bacchus, the god of wine, joy, and revelry, who was raised by Silenus, a satyr, who educated him and accompanied him on his travels. Bacchus loved to ride in his chariot drawn by wild beasts. Silenus, his tutor, followed him riding on an ass. One time, Silenus, who loved wine, as did his master, became inebriated and wandered off the road.

Eventually, Silenus came upon the court of King Midas of Lydia, who recognized Silenus, Bacchus's tutor. Midas sent word to Bacchus, and he was so happy to be reunited with his tutor that Bacchus promised to give Midas any reward he wished. Midas, the avaricious old king, fell to his knees and humbly besought the god to grant him that all he touched might be turned to gold. Immediately, the king put his new power to the test. He reached for a twig from the branch of a tree, and it immediately glittered like gold. However, after a day of turning things to gold, Midas was hungry and discovered that when he reached for his food, it, too, changed to gold, as did his wine. Then, in frustration, Midas reaches out to touch his daughter, and she turns to gold.

The hapless king's thirst for power and money has become a horrendous curse. Reflecting on this ancient tale may reveal some similarities with our contemporary world: the idolatry of self, haughty self-sufficiency, and desires for power, fame, and money persist in 21st-century human hearts. Hidden secrets are uncovered and soon spread, becoming the talk of many conversations.

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Proverbs 16:18-19

The story of Midas is a cautionary tale of unbridled power and wealth. We laugh at Midas and the petulant gods and goddesses, yet civilizations are built on the stories we tell about ourselves, others, and our purpose on this earth. Our mythologies and scriptures reveal our selfishness, envy, and resentment, as well as our deep longing to be accepted, loved, and treated with dignity.

The stories we tell ourselves shape us. They help us know who we are, why we are here, and what we are here to do. The stories give us a moral compass, as they illustrate behaviors and beliefs that lead to goodness,



peace, and love, and those that lead to harm. We come face-to-face with our unfailing ability to be our own worst enemies. Most importantly, we learn that there will be consequences for our actions.

Christianity illustrates the dangers of power through Jesus' encounter with the devil in the desert. God delivered Jesus from his temptations; may God deliver us from ours. Alongside our technical, scientific, and industrial progress, human beings remain like those of the eighth century BCE. We struggle to learn from our mistakes and recognize the goodness of our lives. It is not as if we had not been warned. Jesus turned over the tables in the temple and said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

What we are seeking in wealth, power, and acclaim is as old as dirt. It does not require a lot of money, a doctorate degree, or a million followers on TikTok. It does have a lot to do with our hearts. *Because where our treasure is, there will be our heart also.*

Matthew 19:24

It may seem that the depth of depravity and duplicity has no end. Yet we have been given a will, this desire within us

that strives for more. We have a choice to say yes or no. I will or I will not. What if sheer will and determination are not enough? What if we have it wrong? *For I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

Romans 7:1

What if our spirituality and religion are not about beliefs or cognitive constructs about God? The mystery of God is deeper than our rational brains, and spirituality is about affairs of the heart. The power and flow of love into our world is vast and beyond our knowing. Faith rises not out of our 401K but out of our vulnerability- our failures and weaknesses, our stupid mistakes, and yes, our duplicity and depravity.

Love is not something we achieve and possess. And love is bound to break your heart. Love, tender, like a baby, breaks us, softens our hard hearts, and introduces us to humility. Love is not about the condition of our bank accounts, but the condition of our hearts. Is our heart hard, or soft, open, or closed, forceful or gentle, welcoming or rejecting, repenting, or resenting?

I do not know if one experiences



humility without having experienced humiliation. Jesus told us to follow him in his path of humiliation, grief, and abandonment. Paul struggled with this.

Resurrected Love comes to us in the form of our lives. It reveals our desires, our fears, envy, resentment, selfishness, and our longing for connection and wholeness.

To face our own helplessness is to embrace Jesus on the cross with compassion and love. The Virtue of humility is tricky. Once you think you have it, you have lost it.

*The sacrifice God desires is a humble spirit O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject.*

Psalm 51: 17

Faith is about the power of vulnerability and our deep need to be known and cherished. Love is something we surrender to when we do not know what else to do. To love is to be broken, and we are bound to get our hearts broken. And here is Grace's cue: Pandora's curiosity got the best of her, and she opened the jar, which she had been firmly told not to open, setting free a hornet's nest of evil, plagues, gout, colic, envy, spite, and revenge. Yet down in the jar Hope lay, curled up

in the depths.

Regardless of the host of evils that surround us, there is still Hope. As for Midas, in his grief and desperation, he set out to see Bacchus who had given him his foolish wish. Bacchus showed compassion for Midas, sending him to the river Pactolus and into the river to its headwaters, where he washed off the curse, and the river sands turned to gold.



250 years ago, a story began about the people who had come to live in a new land. The land already had several names and had been home to centuries of people with their own myths and stories.

These stories of how to live together and how to treat and care for the land and its creatures formed a base, a



foundation, about what is important, what they value, and how they will live together. Soon, a different story began to emerge among the newcomers. At some point, that story began to lose credence. The stories, now in fashion, favored those who told them and had the power to impose them on others.

Those evils that escaped from Pandora's box showed up. Greed, lust for power and the belief that some of them were better than others, who ought to be shunned, enslaved or sent to jail.

The promise that everyone would be treated equally was broken, torn in two, and tossed to the wind. The people fought like vicious wolves. The land itself began to suffer as lakes, prairies, and rivers became polluted. The people became ill themselves. Some of their leaders were corrupt and focused only on their own gain.

Now it was time to write a new story, a magnificent saga of suffering, hope, grace, truth, and glory. It would tell how the people grew in their own integrity, justice, and equality. It would be a story of lamentation and remorse. It would be a story about a great feast they had sitting in the presence of their enemies. It will be a story of

redemption and the healing power of Love in our midst.

We are given a task today - to define our values, to build a new foundation of truth and justice. What would you include in the story about the foundation on which you want to stand? What are the ingredients of democracy? What values do you want to live by and even die for? The writing of this story will seem as impossible as ridding Midas of his curse.

Yet, remember Hope in the dark at the bottom of the jar? She is with us. Take her hand and let her show you the stench, the thieves, the lust of men raping children, abuse of immigrants, black and brown people, and bombed cities. The ridicule and censure of those who, through no fault of their own, do not fit within the narrow definition of male or female only.

Here, in the chaos and suffering, we meet Jesus and his cousin, Grace, right in the mess we have made. Jesus is meeting us and loving us in our helplessness. He is saying, follow me through the humiliation and suffering.

This tempestuous time is calling out the best in us. Each of us has something to



offer, even if it's only a few coins, as the poor widow offered. For those who are drawn, prayer, alone or with others, is a very powerful gift. Simply sitting quietly for those who are suffering, whether they are good or bad. Out of that prayer, you may be inspired to do something else. Consider your relationship with power and money. Learn to let go of desires for power and prestige, affection and approval. Let the love of God within you flow into the world like the cleansing waters of redemption.

This is our story. This is our song.  
It is being written in our hearts.  
May love wrap you round and flow  
through you into all the world.

*Loretta F Ross*

You realize that I could spend a million  
a day for the next hundred years? And  
that's if I don't make another dime.

—Bill Gates in **Jackpot**, Michael Mechanic, Simon  
and Schuster, 2021  
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are open to serve a wide range of people. And  
we have a great assortment of the fruits of the  
Spirit ready for you.

#### Stories From Those We Serve

*I treasure your spiritual wisdom, especially in these  
terribly troubled times. Thank you for the gift of  
reflection and thoughtfulness through your writing.  
You are an inspiration to me, and I feel privileged to  
have met you in that coffee shop in Topeka so long  
ago. All the best, Mary Ann Clift*

**Do you have a story or experience over the past  
35-40 years related to the Sanctuary ministry? If so  
we would love to hear from you and share it with  
others.**



**Psalm 51**

O Beloved, You invite me to rest  
in the abode of your heart  
to forgive our weaknesses  
and renew our love.  
Will we respond with hearts  
open wide to Love?  
Those who walk with integrity, who  
are in harmony with your Word,  
and sing the heart's song;  
whose tongues speak truth  
judging not others and  
seeking only the good;  
Whose eyes behold not the outer  
garments of the body,

but see within the inner robe  
of Love;  
Whose own weaknesses are acknowledged  
and brought to light in prayer;  
Those who are just in all affairs of life  
and do not take advantage of another  
Those who dwell in the heart of Love  
who act justly, with integrity,  
will join the Dance of Life,  
will sing the Songs of Joy!  
There family, friends, and, indeed  
the world  
will be blessed by their love.

*Psalms for Praying*, Poet and writer, Ann C. Merrill,  
Bloomsbury Press



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*...the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* Revelation 22:2-3

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