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Showcase Talk – “Our Community: Cultivating the Outward Turn”
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In an act of hubris, I reached for the final rock on the bouldering wall. Exhausted, and unable to find my way back down, my grip loosened, and I slammed onto the floor. My right knee buckled, twisting in such a way that still makes me queasy to recall. *Should I take you home?* asked my date. *No*, I said. *Take me to the ER*. I had torn two ligaments and my meniscus. I would need two surgeries and could not run or dance—two of my favorite things—for nine months after the second surgery.

This happened to me the day before classes began in the Fall of this academic year. During much of the summer I had been preparing to co-lead 21theo, LCM’s weekly theological discussion and education hour. One of the study materials Deanna shared with me was the book *Praying the Psalms* by Walter Bruggeman, which explores, among other things, the language of disorientation characteristic of the psalms. On the way to the ER, Bruggeman’s book came to mind, and I thought: *God is with me in this moment of disorientation*. That recognition rooted me and kept me going through the most grueling moments of pain and healing.

One of the ways in which I felt God with me was through other people. Deanna drove me home every Wednesday night after our discussions when I was on crutches, and checked in with me regularly to see how I was doing. Carolina, my twin sister, took the lead on our co-led Wednesday night discussions on the days I needed to join through Zoom. Oliver offered to make me spikes for my crutches (which I thankfully never needed in the end!) Peggy, on the board of directors, always made sure I was comfortable during Sunday services, helping me prop my leg up on a chair. Rosa, Tyler, and others shared their own experiences of injury and healing with me. LCM showed up for me—through acts of kindness and concrete service—when I really needed it. I am so grateful. LCM also showed up for me when I presented my senior thesis in philosophy. I still remember the look of shock on the other presenters’ faces when a substantial crowd of LCM students turned up to support me.

These are only some of the ways in which the people at LCM have turned outward, toward me. LCM has also been a place for *me* to practice turning outward toward *others*. This ministry has helped me cultivate the outward turn by encouraging me to take up a teaching role as a student minister, inviting me to participate in meal preparation for Connections for the Homeless, and reminding me to give of my own material resources. LCM has also been a place to engage critically with questions about what exactly the outward turn means in the context of our faith. Last quarter’s main discussion topic was baptismal vocation, or, put differently, the call to serve God and others in every realm of our lives. My senior thesis, in a nutshell, is about the problem of self-absorption, and the moral task of turning towards others. As some of you may remember, I had to repeatedly resist the urge, during our discussions, to bring up Kant and Murdoch, the two philosophers I centrally engage with in my thesis. I was ecstatic to find so much overlap between the questions I had grappled with in my project, and those of 21Theo. This intense intersection between my faith and academic work was extremely gratifying. I want all I do in life—whether it be academic work, community engagement, or quotidian conversation—to continue to reflect and integrate my faith.

Once I graduate, I also hope to find a church community similar to LCM. There is a sense in which I am finishing up the last weeks of my last quarter with a heavy heart; I look forward to the new paths ahead, but it pains me to leave a community that has helped to anchor and propel me over the past few years. But I also know that, in the same way that “God will write his law on our hearts,” as Luther claims, LCM and everything I’ve learned here will also be inscribed into my heart.