

Day by Day: Personal Experience

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – April 19, 2020

2nd Sunday of Easter

Readings: 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Reflection: Psalm 16

Music: Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us; O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Greeting: May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Music: Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care;
In thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
2. We are thine, thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
Keep thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
3. Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
Thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
4. Early let us seek thy favor, early let us do thy will;
Blessed Lord and only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Prayer: Almighty God, through Jesus Christ you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we, who celebrate the day of our Lord's resurrection, may, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; grant us wisdom as your word is read and fill us with a spirit of understanding; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 16

A Miktam of David. Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
(Psalm 16 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 16 and we hear a devotion to God. In times of trouble, how do you take refuge in God? Do you think of God as your chosen portion and cup? How do you listen to the Lord to receive instruction and council? Let us let our hearts meditate on the Lord that we may be filled with his joy and be led to the path of life.

Prayer: O God, our light, our beauty, our rest. In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your new creation. Form us into your people and order our lives in you. Be our refuge and our strength and guide us and lead in all our days. Help us in all that we are and all that we do. Let us devote ourselves to you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from First Peter, chapter 1, verses 3 through 9.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9 NRSV)*

Our Gospel reading for today comes from the Gospel according to John, chapter 20, verses 19 through 31.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:19-31 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, I began mapping out where I was going to go this Easter season and trying to plan felt like some large task that required a crystal ball. I don't know what is going to happen in the coming weeks. Will all of my messages in the Sundays after Easter be recorded like this? Is that going to change what I would say? Of course it would. It is hard to ignore the giant thing that is happening around us. Kids are doing schoolwork from home. Businesses are closed. I'm wearing a mask when I leave the house. I'm standing here in an empty church building. And then I was reading today's Gospel reading. About a group of people huddled behind locked doors for safety. Not sure of what happened next. They were taking things one day at a time. I realized that this is all we can do right now, and so our current series is Day by Day. And today we look at something that shapes every single view that we have, if we admit it or not. Personal experience.

Poor Thomas gets picked on a lot because of today's reading, but I don't think it's fair, and I can explain. I can relate to Thomas, because it can be really hard to believe something that you haven't experienced. For a good example, see everyone else who was hiding out. What do I mean? Let's step back just a little and look at what's actually going on in the reading for today. In John's Gospel, Simon Peter and the other disciple set out when Mary Magdalene tells them the tomb is empty. They go, they look, but they don't understand. Mary sees Jesus. Now, here's something interesting. Mary sees Jesus and believes just from him saying her name. She runs off and tells the others. Jesus has risen. That was in the morning. We pick up today in the evening. The doors are locked in fear. Jesus comes and stands among them, even though the doors are locked. He tells them "peace be with you" and you'd think that would begin the rejoicing. However, we aren't told of any rejoicing until he shows them his hands and his side. Not until then. Even though Mary had told them. Even though he appeared among them when he shouldn't have been able. No, they needed to experience the proof. And this brings us to Thomas. Thomas is the one who wasn't there. Thomas says he won't believe. Thomas gets accused of being a doubter. But this really is not fair. Because Thomas is basically in the same boat as the rest of them were up until Jesus showed up. He too wants to experience Christ risen. He wants to see the marks of the nails. He wants to touch his side. Because for him, it won't be real until he experiences it. He simply wants the same proof that was given to everyone else. So far, the only person who believed, with nothing but a word, was Mary! And here we come to an interesting thing that is still a problem today. It is hard to believe in other people's experiences in the same way we believe our own.

Experiences are a double-edged sword. In some cases, it gives us incredible faith, shown in our reading from Peter. That even in time of trouble, we have cause to rejoice in our Savior. That Christ is with us in our trials and to Peter they become a means to show the genuineness of faith. He encourages to love without seeing and to believe without seeing. However, we also know that experience can hamper us. It was Peter, after all, who also had the experience of denying Christ three times. His experiences caused him to say that he wasn't a follower of Jesus, because he was worried about the consequences. We run into the same kinds of problems the disciples ran into in that locked room. They weren't sure what to believe, so they stuck to what they knew. They didn't believe Mary and sit already rejoicing. They waited for proof. This is a common thing. I see it all over the place right now. It is easy to question and doubt if the current measures we are taking are necessary. Why? Because if we haven't experienced the cause of it all, we are ready to doubt the need. I see it in all sorts of other situations. Sometimes people doubt if racism is still a big problem because they have never been on the receiving end of racism. Sometimes it is people doubting the need for a strong social safety net to take care of those in need. That they have always had the ability to get work and cannot understand someone who struggles. I have personally seen it with mental illness. That people will doubt my experiences simply because they have not lived them, and therefore struggle to understand. This is not everyone, of course, but I've seen it enough to know that the way Thomas responds is not rare or especially doubtful. Thomas is the norm. I

mean, if we look at the way dialogue often appears today, Thomas is actually pretty levelheaded. To paraphrase a few of the discussions I have been part of, Thomas might have told the others that they were liars and that the resurrection was a hoax. That they were just trying to pull one over on him. They might have called Mary “hysterical” and just completely dismissed her witness as “fake news”. The more things change, the more they stay the same it seems. Just as Thomas couldn’t believe until he had a chance to experience Christ resurrected, many today cannot believe the experiences of others unless they live them. This hurts our ability to bear witness and it hurts our ability to help. There are many things that we personally may never experience, but we should be able to believe in the experience of others.

Personal experience is something, well, personal. By its very nature, it will be unique to every individual. I know this is true. If I asked each of you how you have experienced Christ, I would get a unique answer from each and every person I ask. And they would all be true for their experience. And we will all experience both the world and God differently. You might have been born and raised in the church. Maybe you had trauma shape your faith. However your faith was shaped, it is your own unique experience. And I don’t think that is being downplayed in today’s scripture. Sure, Thomas needed to experience it. He really isn’t chided for it, but each of the disciples is given a concept that they *must* understand if they are going to be able to bear witness to Christ. They need to be able to help others believe without seeing. And we hear that in the letter from Peter. He encourages them in their personal experience. That, though they haven’t seen, they believe.

This does bring us to an interesting question, and something that can help us in both the day to day adjustment to what is happening now, and how we approach our faith and the faith of others. Why did they believe? Why do you believe? Why should others believe? These are important questions, and they go to the heart of faith and trust. John’s Gospel today ends with the declaration that this was not everything that Jesus did, but that what was written was written so that you would know and would believe. That there were many other things, but that this should be enough for faith and trust. You’ll notice I’m yoking those two terms together. There is a reason. Trust and faith go hand in hand. The Gospel account includes all sort of things that are not flattering for the disciples. This episode with Thomas and the rest not seeming to believe until they had seen is just one example. No, one might think they would have left those things out. But there is something to be said for the trust you build when you tell a full story. Our own experience tells us that people mess up and make mistakes. When we give the whole story, we build trust through our honest expression. That trust helps to strengthen faith. We may not have seen, but we trust in the Gospel account and our faith is strengthened for it. When we give our own account, we speak not only of our successes, but our failures. We do so because we know that an honest picture builds trust and builds faith. Faith in each other, and in turn, faith in God. Why? Have you ever spoken with someone who makes it sound like everything is going just great, even if it isn’t? Someone who leaves out any negative details because it makes them sound a little less fantastic? It doesn’t instill faith. It

instills doubt. The question becomes “what aren’t they telling me?” and that becomes the focus. The same thing happens when we share our faith. When we encourage others to share our faith. If all we do is give easy platitudes and never talk about the struggle, we don’t sound real. We don’t sound authentic. We simply sound like we are selling something. Now, this is true in almost every aspect of life, but especially true in matters of faith in God. Because an inauthentic witness gives others the image of an inauthentic Christ.

So when we pull all these things together, we need to both respect the experiences of others while also authentically sharing our own. This creates dialogue, something Jesus was always seeking. Dialogue raises questions, questions cause us to seek the truth, and in that search, we look for authentic voices that we can trust. We put our faith in those voices. This is true of our spiritual journey and of how we process data in general. We are in an unprecedented moment in our modern history. Just as the disciples were experiencing an unprecedented moment in history. We need to make sure that the witness we share is authentic. That it is witness to our faith. That it instills trust. Because right now we need to be able to trust both each other and those trying to lead through these troubled times. One might think that the statement “listen to those doctors! Pay attention to these experts!” isn’t really a faith statement. But it is. I don’t understand everything that the experts understand. That isn’t my experience. But I put my trust in those who spend their lives figuring those things out. Because I trust that God will give us the authentic voices we need to get us through. I trust that God has blessed someone with knowledge that I don’t personally have. I trust that others can be a voice of reason when I’m not sure. I trust God to help me through, and in that I trust the experts. When I’m not sure, I pray for clarity and guidance. I pray that God will help me to look past the blustering voices of those who simply want to be heard. Those who are so determined to get back to “normal” that they’d ignore everything. Even Thomas, who was supposed to have doubted, simply wanted to know what the others knew.

We will weather this storm. Because we have faith. Because we have each other. Because we have God. Because we have a Savior who is with us, who understands us, who knows our pain, who knows our loneliness, who knows our worries, who listens to our fears, who comforts the afflicted, who cares. He cares. I don’t know that we will ever go back to “normal” again. We will get back to normal, everyday life, but I don’t know that normal will look the same. Just as normal never looked the same again for the disciples. This is most certainly not the same magnitude, but you know what I mean. Their lives were never the same again. Our lives may never be the same again. But we have a constant. We have Christ, the solid rock that we anchor ourselves to. We have the sure footing to weather any storm. Because we are anchored in faith. We are anchored in a belief beyond belief. A hope beyond hope. A life beyond death. A promise. That our Heavenly Father watches over us, that the Holy Spirit will guide us, that Christ is with us. Because Christ is risen, and Christ is with us today. And that gives me the strength to get by. Even if it is just for today. Then I will trust Christ day by day. Because my experience with God is that God isn’t giving up on us. My experience is that God

never gives up on us. Christ never gives up on us. The Spirit never gives up on us. So stand firm and stand strong. And day by day, we will get through. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Music: O God, Our Help In Ages Past

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| <p>1. O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.</p> | <p>4. A thousand ages, in thy sight, are like an evening gone; short as the watch that ends the night, before the rising sun.</p> |
| <p>2. Under the shadow of thy throne, thy saints have dwelt secure; sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.</p> | <p>5. Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away; they fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.</p> |
| <p>3. Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame, from everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.</p> | <p>6. O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, be thou our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home.</p> |

Dismissal with Blessing: We are sent forth in the power of Christ's resurrection. Alleluia! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
John & Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Dave Yaw	Aaron Carrell	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Joyce Sly	Nancy Hoke	John Millsap	Larry Sidwell
Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Jerry Jackson	Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe
Brenda Hurt	Sharron Button	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Family of Jerry Green
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley	Tammy Fischer and Children	

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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4/19/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are continuing in our efforts to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God. To do no harm, we must make sure that we do what we can for social distancing to help prevent the spread of the current Coronavirus. To do good, we must offer support and compassion to one another in this difficult time. And to stay in love with God, we remember to pray to God and to worship. Even if that means we worship from home. I thank all of you for your patience as we navigate this difficult time.

With schools not set to meet again physically this school year, and some summer events already being shifted, I cannot for certain say when we will be back together again physically. I would like to schedule meetings if anyone can do them virtually. Zoom is an option for those with internet access. I am open to any suggestions and will be working with committee chairs to discuss our situation going forward. I know that personally, my schedule has been rather busy. I thank you all for patience as move forward in this trying time.

Annual Conference has been rescheduled Friday August 14th and Saturday August 15th. I will not be able to attend because of school being in session at that time.

I am still looking for pictures and music to share in services. We will have at the least two more weeks of online services, so anything you'd like to share is always welcome.

Please let me know of any updates or anyone that is in need of special consideration. I have been having to adapt my schedule to make room for the extra effort involved in making the online worship experience possible and with adapting my schedule to include leading lessons for the kids.

As we continue in the current stay at home order, we are also facing economic problems. Legislation has been passed that will offer economic relief for some. However, we must be prepared as a church to support each other and support those in need. This may have a longer lasting impact than the virus and I urge everyone to be in prayer. Also, be in contact with each other. Please check in on people and let us remain a close-knit community, even when we are practicing safe social distancing. Also, please be aware of scams involving door to door solicitation and also over the phone calls about bank information. The IRS will not call you. Medical professionals will not come to your door. Please be safe.

We do have guidance for a live communion service, but it would need to be done in a live video feed. If anyone is interested in helping put this together, please let me know.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! It is on YouTube and a link can be found on my website as listed below. I am also posting the information on the church Facebook page. If there is anything you would like to contribute, let me know! There will also be printed materials available at the churches to pick up. Please feel free to contact me for

more information. If anyone is interested in doing music for any upcoming service, please let me know. There are many options for doing this. I can also share readings or any other video that you'd like to make part of the service. Participation is welcome!

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

If anyone is interested in online groups or interested in how to form one, I am available to help. There are free tools available to be able to still meet online for Sunday School or other meetings.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus. Make sure to wash your hands, as it is the best way to keep from spreading the virus. If you are not feeling well, running a temperature, or otherwise seem to be taking ill, stay at home and let someone know. That way someone can check in if you get worse and you won't risk spreading anything to others. If you are needing someone to pick up things at the store and don't feel you should be out, contact a friend or myself. I will be doing shopping for people as needed for those who do not want to be out. I personally am volunteering as a younger adult who is not at high risk in order to help anyone who needs it. Please feel free to call me and I can make arrangements to help with anything you might need delivered. If you do go out, please follow all distancing guidelines, and if you can, cover your face. Please let others know, and together we will all see this through safely. This is not a hoax. This is not being exaggerated. No hospital is "padding" their numbers. This is a very real and very serious pandemic. Please do not share false information about it. It only works to undermine the people doing the dangerous work of trying to keep us all safe.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920