

## **Day by Day: Devotion**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 3, 2020

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:19-25

**Reflection:** Psalm 13

**Music:** Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty; My Hope Is Built

**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:** Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!
2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.
3. Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,  
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;  
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.
4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

**Prayer:** Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and throughout eternity. Amen.

## Reflection: Psalm 13

*To the leader. A Psalm of David.*

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me! (Psalm 13 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 13 and we are reminded that it can be hard to have patience. Especially in the difficult times. How do you reach out to God when things get hard? Do you trust in the Lord to see you through? Does your heart rejoice? What ways can you show your joy? How can you share your trust and faith with others?

**Prayer:** O God, our shepherd, our gate, our lamb. In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your pasture. Guide us to your clear streams, and tame the wolf at our gate. Help us in our patience. Strengthen us in our faith. Help us to trust and be glad in all that you are to us. Help us to sing and rejoice. 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 the Acts, chapter 2, verses 42 through 47.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Luke 24:13-35 NRSV\*)*

Our second reading for today comes from First Peter, chapter 2, verses 19 through 25.

*For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his*

*wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (Luke 24:13-35 NRSV\*)*

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

Today's look at Acts is a look into the devotion of the early church and what it can teach us today. I think there is a lot in this short section that we read today. We have helping in times of struggle. We have vigilant prayer. We have community. We have thankfulness. We have invitation. The breaking of bread. Selflessness and charity are there as well. All in all, this is a pretty packed section. I think the thing that I found most interesting is that this is the description we get of the early church. And the temple is a side statement, almost an afterthought. Because the focus wasn't on the where. It was all about the devotion to God, no matter where it took place.

I'm going to recount a little of what is going on around me as I am writing this. I did not sit down and write all at once. I let this sink in. As I'm going over this again, I'm watching my youngest two bounce a ball out in the yard. I can see them through my upstairs window while sitting at my desk. I just finished giving the oldest a haircut. He's been working on a lot of work from school. I've been recollecting all the things I know about quadratic formulas and factoring and polynomials. I say recollecting because I used to know it all by heart but haven't really used it as much lately. I have been giving talks about the Civil War, teaching the alphabet, helping with creative writing, coloring, addition, subtraction, and every other topic in between. I've put together the work we will be doing most of this month. Why do I mention all of this? Because I'm doing all of the things I'm doing out of devotion to my family. I'm devoted to making sure that my kids are continuing to get everything they need, especially with everything being so off right now. My devotion pushes me to do the best that I can. And this is what I saw in today's scripture reading. A group of people devoted to God and community, doing everything they could to help each other.

In some ways, we might be a little jealous of this community picture, if only for the amount of time they spend together. But we also see that they devoted themselves to prayer. They devoted themselves to worship. They devoted themselves to charity. They broke bread together at home and gave thanks. These are all things we can see and want to emulate. Day by day, they did what they needed to do. Day by day, people saw what they were doing and wanted to be part of it. And so I started thinking about what that devotion would have looked like to those outsiders coming in. And it began to be a picture of what it is we need to offer compared to what it is we often think we are offering. Is our devotion to God or is our devotion to the ritual? There is a risk in getting so caught up in the ritual that the meaning is lost. This was seen in the Pharisees, who got so caught up in the law they forgot the reason for the law. I've seen reports of people fighting to get back into worshipping at the church building, forgetting why they are coming to the church in the first place. Yes, we are eager to get back, but why are you eager? Because of the place you want to be? Or is it because this is where

you come because you feel closer to God and one another while you are here? If it is that you come here because your devotion draws you, then good. But we stay away for a good cause. For safety. For health. For community, we temporarily spend time apart as a community. If we endure this, then we are better for it. As we hear from Peter today, if you endure when you suffer for doing what is right, you have God's approval. Well, we most certainly have God's approval. Some might scoff at thinking of social distancing as suffering, but not me. We are apart from friends and family. We can't even come together to mourn properly. We may feel isolated and alone. The mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual pains are real. But I can promise you that if we force ourselves to gather together at the church for the sake of being in a building, it will not be the good we want. We entrust ourselves to God and know that God will lead us back together when it is the right time. In the meantime, we can learn from the early church.

Turning our attention back to our brothers and sisters in Acts, they devote themselves fully to God. They share all that they have and distribute as each had need. They did not act selfishly, but as a community of faithful trusting that God would provide for all of them. Is that what people see in the church today? A faithful community that trusts in God's grace and shares in all of God's blessings? I hope so. It is the image I want people to see. The image of people always welcoming a stranger. The image of people eager to help and eager to give. People who devote themselves to the worship of God by doing God's work. By helping one another. By holding each other up in prayer and in service. Are we making the calls we can make? Are we checking in on the people we care about? We may be apart, but we can still hold each other in our hearts and make time to check on each other. Now, some will have more time for this than others. From that, we learn again from the early church. If we remember that they were sharing in things and distributing them as each had a need, we also must remember that we must share our duties in the same spirit of devotion. Some of us will have more time than others. This can happen for a variety of reasons. Work schedules that are heavy for some and light for others. Family responsibilities that are time consuming for one might not be as much of a problem for others. Some may have time to call, others time to write. Some will use the internet, others the phone. Some will send mail and others will send texts. One person may have time to reach out to twenty people, another only one. This doesn't mean that one is greater than the other. It means that one is helping the other by sharing in our community. Let the one who can speak to twenty be the one who talks to the person who speaks to one and lets them know how the other nineteen are doing. And if we all do what we can while helping those who cannot, we become stronger together.

There is another benefit of this. Doing all this isn't just to chit chat, but to devote ourselves to being in communion with one another in service to God. Because asking how someone is doing is ministry. And each of us is a minister. The body of Christ can be divided by distance, but it cannot be separated in spirit. We pray for each other. We help each other. We love the way Christ loves us, because he died on the cross to show us what loving really is.

He was willing to do *anything* so that we would understand what devotion is. And if I have one hope about all of the distance that we have had to endure, it is that I hope we learn to appreciate each other that much more. That we appreciate the time that we can gather together in person and be that much more devoted to being the church. But I also hope that we appreciate all the ways that we can still find devotion in this. That we can still study Scripture and meditate on the Word. We can still be in prayer. We can still sing God's praises. We can still give to those in need. We can still help. And when we do those things as part of personal devotion and part of ministry to others, people take notice. They notice, not because they see you going to church. They notice because they see you *being* the church. And it all comes back to devotion. What did those people on the outside see in the community of believers? They saw people devoting themselves to God, following what Christ taught, and living a life that was concerned about taking care of each other. They saw Christians being the church. Followers of Christ following Christ. Worshipers of God honoring God. They saw the things that they *wanted to be*. But they also saw an open invitation. Not a "members only" exclusive club, but honest people with genuine faith and loving kindness. So they joined them. They joined because they saw something they wanted in their lives. They didn't come to God because they were convinced by a solid scriptural argument. They saw a life that reflected Scripture. A life devoted to doing God's will, seeing how good it can be! They came to God because of God's people.

We may not see how to do this with where we are now. But we can. Food banks are still operating, and many are seeing more people than ever. People are weary. They are worn. They are tired. Kindness and prayers matter. Hope matters. We keep our hope by staying close to God in our hearts, by doing all the things that we know we need to do. We remain glad because we know that, even in the midst of trouble and worry, God is with us. Christ will lead us like a good shepherd and see us through the darkest of valleys. Our strength is that, just like the early church, we trust that God will help us to be what we need to be: the body of Christ redeemed by the blood. We act as devoted disciples living out our mission in Christ. It is who we are. And when we do it right, God shines through.

In a time when we are often focused on all the things that we cannot do, we should focus on what we can. We can reach out. We can give. We can be devoted to prayer and worship. We can study and meditate. We can share. We can have hope. We do it all, day by day, serving God. We trust in God. We hope in God. We anchor ourselves to the solid rock that doesn't change. Christ guides us, day by day, so that we can build a brighter tomorrow. So let us see the good that we can do and let us do it. All that we can as often as we can. 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: My Hope Is Built

1. My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.

2. When darkness seems to hide his face,  
I rest on his unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds within the veil.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.

3. His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
support me in the whelming flood.  
when all around my soul gives way,  
he then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.

4. When he shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh may I then in him be found.  
dressed in his righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.

**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
Family of Jerry Jackson			
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

\* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

## **5/3/2020 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.

We will not be meeting again for certain until June. Things are continuing about the same as usual. I don't have too many new updates this week, just a reminder to be safe. New guidelines recommend wearing a mask when going out to do activities like shopping and picking up food. Social distancing is still an important part of helping to keep virus impact to a minimum. It IS working. We just need to keep going. I would love to say that we will be back in June, but I know that the bishop and the cabinet are exploring what requirements must be met for in person worship. All I can tell you is that it may still be a while, and things may still be different. I am bound to follow the bishop's guidelines.

Annual Conference has been rescheduled Friday August 14<sup>th</sup> and Saturday August 15<sup>th</sup>. I will not be able to attend.

I am still looking for pictures and music to share in services. I'm happy to share prayer requests, video, or anything you would like to share. We will have at least until June before we meet again.

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. 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 am also looking at if anyone is interested in doing any live activities instead of prerecorded.



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. 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 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. If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them or direct you to a source that can.

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](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920