

Day by Day: Truth

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 17, 2020

6th Sunday of Easter

Readings: John 14:1-21

Reflection: Psalm 66

Music: Standing on the Promises; God of Grace and God of Glory

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: Standing on the Promises

1. Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.*

2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of
doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.*

3. Standing on the promises I now can see
Perfect, present cleansing in the blood for me;
Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free,
Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.*

4. Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,
Standing on the promises of God.

*Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.*

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 66

To the leader. A Song. A Psalm.

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you. All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place. I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows, those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me. (Psalm 66 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 66 and hear praise for the power of prayer. Do you feel like God is listening to your prayers? Do you feel you come before God with an honest heart? How do you pay your vows to God? In what ways do you praise God in your daily life? How do you come before God in prayer? What do you pray for? What should you pray for?

Prayer: O God, our sovereign, our banquet, our crown. In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your palace. Train us to be heirs to your throne, that we may shield the needy. Help us in our patience. Strengthen us in our faith. Help us to always reach out to your with penitent hearts. May we always bring our prayers to you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from the Gospel according to John, chapter 14, verses 1-21.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” (John 14:1-21 NRSV)*

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

Today’s reading set me down many paths, and it was hard to narrow down just one. Do I look at those opening words and hold to not letting our hearts be troubled? Do I focus on where Jesus was going? Do I dwell on the place he would prepare? Should I focus on being called to do the works because even if one doesn’t believe in the words they can believe in the works? Should I focus on keeping the commandments? But one term floating around in today’s reading kept drawing me back. Truth. And it seemed that this idea was one that was important at the moment. Christ says that he is the way, the truth, and the life. That the Spirit of truth would be with us. So I figured I might begin with some uncomfortable truth that I felt must be said, even if just to make sure that I have said it at some point.

Now, I am going to open up with something here. I don't mean for this to be a "scare tactic" and I'm not looking for "shock value" with anything I'm about to say. I'm simply going to speak some truth. When I was updating these figures on Thursday evening, the United States was projected to have over 90,000 deaths by Sunday, May 17th. There had already been 86,000 confirmed deaths by the end of the day on Thursday. I was struggling to figure out a way to make those numbers relatable, because in my head I couldn't quite process it. Then I decided to compare a few figures that I thought might help us to understand. I found where I could relate to 86,000. I looked at the population of Cumberland County, Coles County, Jasper County, and Clark County. Just over 86,000 people live in those 4 counties. The gravity of the concept sunk deep in the pit of my stomach. The truth of that number pierced me right through. In the US, we have lost the equivalent to losing every single person in those 4 counties. In just under 4 months. This heart wrenching truth was something that I couldn't let go of as I thought about all the words that I have heard about this situation. Claims that it was blown out of proportion. That it isn't a big deal. That it is a conspiracy. That we just need to open up businesses and that we will have to just deal with the number of dead. And all I could think about was wiping those 4 counties off the map and saying that *they didn't matter*. My heart is heavy just thinking about it. I looked over to the projections. I had to stop. Because it added another 30,000 lives lost by mid-June. I know that we like to think about it happening somewhere else, but I know that in Coles County 17 new cases were announced this week. It is here.

So, what is it I wanted to convey with this information? What does it have to do with today's scripture reading? Well, first off is the simple truth of the matter. This is a serious problem that requires us to do something. Right now, that something is staying at home. That something is wearing a mask in public. That something is social distancing. That something is knowing that our actions save lives. That is the truth of the matter. I mention it because we may not be able to meet together in person again until late this summer, if not later. I feel that I need to make that clear. Do I want us to come back together, in the church building, singing and embracing? Yes. Desperately, I do. When it is safe. Because I cannot justify putting you at risk, because I love you all too much for that. And I started to think about Christ's words from John. Just before his betrayal. Just before he is to be handed over to be beaten and killed. He spoke of the future. About leaving those around him with the truth. He spoke about love. He spoke about togetherness, even though he knew he would be apart. He spoke of comfort, knowing the distress that was about to come. I have spent Easter talking about how we cope with this pandemic, day by day, because it is our reality right now. It is the truth that is around us. It is the trouble that knocks at our door. And it is the opportunity for us to face the truth and to do the work that God has called us to do.

Christ said that he is the truth, the way, and the life. Jesus says that the believer will do his works, and in fact will do greater works. Jesus said that if his followers loved him, they would keep his commandments. That the Spirit of truth would come. That we wouldn't be left

alone, because if Christ lives, we live also. I started to mull these things over in my head. Jesus said what the most important commandments were. Love God with everything you have and everything you are. Love your neighbor as yourself. I couldn't help but think about what it would mean to love my neighbor in this difficult time. Don't put them in harm's way. Don't do anything that would jeopardize the health of others. Don't push to have everything go back to normal just for the sake of being normal. For the sake of money. For the sake of jobs. Jobs can be replaced. When we draw together to weather the storm, we can make it through. Jobs can be replaced, lives cannot. Have faith that God will help us through, but don't put God to the test by demanding a miracle. Have faith that God will help us through this difficult time by strengthening us and guiding us and leading us down this strange new path we are on.

Philip voiced the worry of the group. Wanting some sort of sign, something big to show it would be fine. "Show us the Father" he says, saying that will satisfy them. But they didn't understand that Jesus had already shown them. Know the Son and you know the Father. Know the truth and you know the way. Know the way and you'll know the life. Know the Spirit and know the truth. Do the work and glorify the Father. Glorifying the Father glorifies the Son. Ever really think about that? "On that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me." There is this great idea of oneness that comes through in this, this great truth that Christ is trying to tell. The Father is in the Son. The Son is in the Father. The Spirit is of the Father. The Son is in you and you in him. The Father is in you and you in him. The Spirit is in you and you in the Spirit. Bound together in love. If I were to paraphrase it "we are all in this together, and love will see us through."

Sometimes I think we get caught up in concepts to the point that we miss those basic ideas. We get caught up that Christ being the truth and the way is about belief and what we declare in creeds and faith statements. The truth I have come to understand is that if your hands show the love of God, then your hands have said 1000 creeds over. If your words of kindness and mercy reach the heart of another, your faith statement is in that love. Christ tells us that the one who believes in him will do his works. That the one who loves him will keep his commandments. And what was it that Christ commanded us to do? To feed the hungry. To clothe the naked. To visit the prisoner. To give hope to the hopeless. To give freedom to those who were oppressed. To speak truth to power and give light to darkness. To fight back against greed that keep us from loving each other the way we should. To keep us from believing convenient lies when they help us to rest easy. That we are called to remember that where we go, Christ goes with us. Where we speak love, God's love is there. Where we act for justice, God's justice will come. When we act to save the lives of others, even when – *especially when* it means that we sacrifice something of our own for the good of others, that Christ is there to remind us that we are following in his way. What little cost it might be for a time that we stay apart, but what great good it does when we can save lives. Because though we often talk of saving souls, we save the souls of the living by loving the living. By showing the love of Christ in

all that we do. Not just on Sunday. Not just at church. Because you are the church. Wherever you go, you carry the way, the truth, and the life within you. That's the truth of the matter. If Christ is in you and you in Christ, if you share in the crucifixion and you share in the resurrection, if you share in the Father, and you share in the Spirit, then those things are in what you say and do.

Which brings me back around to some of the truth I was speaking earlier. Those terrible numbers I mentioned. They could be much higher. I shudder and say a prayer whenever I think about them. But I do not do it in fear. My heart is troubled by the sorrow I have when I think about those numbers. I worry about what I can do to help keep others safe. Contrary to many of the silly little things going around right now, I am not taking the pandemic seriously because I fear it. I take it seriously because of great love. Because I cannot imagine hearing all those things and thinking that those lives don't matter. I take it seriously because Christ told us to love others as ourselves, and I know I would want others looking out for me. So I look out for others, not in fear, but in dedication. The truth is that I am not driven by fear by I am driven by hope. Hope that, with God's help, we will get through this dark time. Which means we keep moving forward. It might be a few more months before we are fully gathered together again in the church buildings. So be it. If that is one of the sacrifices we make in order to make sure the we live Christ's commandments to us, then let us bear that gladly in our hearts. Let us use it to proclaim God's glory and God's love. Let us embrace that we do it so that we continue to know the way, the truth, and the life. Let that truth set us free, free to know that we are still worshipping. That we are still praying. That we are still following the Savior that suffered and died that we would know we are loved and rose that we would know life. Let us not simply have our belief be something that we speak of, but let it be something that we live. Each and every day. Not in fear, but in hope. Hope that if Christ is in us, and we in him, that nothing will ever really separate us and nothing can ever truly stand in our way. No matter where we worship, we worship together. No matter where we pray, God hears it. No matter where we love, we love with the heart's filled by Christ's love for us. And we find the way forward, in truth, day by day. 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: God of Grace and God of Glory

1. God of grace and God of glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power.
Crown Thine ancient church's story,
Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the facing of this hour.

2. Lo! the hosts of evil 'round us,
Scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways.
From the fears that long have bound us,
Free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the living of these days.

3. Cure Thy children's warring madness,
Bend our pride to Thy control.
Shame our wanton selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
Lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal.

4. Save us from weak resignation,
To the evils we deplore.
Let the search for Thy salvation,
Be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
Serving Thee Whom we adore.

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

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5/17/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

So, to give an honest opinion, I doubt that we will resume full in-person worship until late July at the earliest, though much will depend upon what is happening at the time. The biggest hurdle is that if we move into what is known as “Phase 3” of the plan for Illinois to get back to “normal” that we still won’t have groups larger than 10. It is also under the bishop’s guidance that we will not have singing in worship, as I understand it, until “Phase 5”. I will be in touch to begin discussing being able to meet in small groups, but the issue with worship, even if we plan it in 10 person groups, is that anyone who is over 65, has respiratory issues, or has compromised immunity should still not join in gathering. If we all stop to think about it, that greatly limits us. I may look at doing small meetings at various times once we enter the appropriate phase, which will include registering for the time we gather. This will not be for Sunday worship, but we can look at Sunday School, Bible Study, small groups, and possibly having small groups meet for communion and prayer. However, this will not be until June. I also must have everyone realize that I will count on most days as *3 people* because of my kids. So, we will need to keep that in mind. I know this is a difficult time and that it feels like this has been going on a very long time. But I also know that as I’m writing this that my county has seen over a dozen new cases of COVID-19 just this week. I have been praying for all of you. Please contact me with any questions. I have my phone with me almost all the time.

There are copies of the Upper Room available in Greenup in the box. You can also find the current issue online.

Annual Conference has been rescheduled Friday August 14th and Saturday August 15th. General Conference is going to be next year, and I will have more information about that later.

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. If you would like to use the church to record music for service, please contact me so that I can give the best guidance I can for both social distancing and recording format. I take your safety very seriously!

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.

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

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920