

Day by Day: Peace and Justice

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 31, 2020

Day of Pentecost

Readings: Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23

Reflection: Psalm 104:24-35

Music: Holy Spirit, Truth Divine; We've a Story to Tell to the Nations

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. May we be filled with the Holy Spirit on this day. Praise the Lord!

Music: Holy Spirit, Truth Divine

1. Holy Spirit, Truth divine,
Dawn upon this soul of mine;
Word of God and inward light
Wake my spirit, clear my sight.

2. Holy Spirit, Love divine,
Glow within this heart of mine;
Kindle every high desire;
Perish self in Thy pure fire.

3. Holy Spirit, Power divine
Fill and nerve this will of mine;
By thee may I strongly live,
Bravely bear, and nobly strive.

4. Holy Spirit, Right divine,
King within my conscience reign;
Be my Lord, and I shall be
Firmly bound, forever free.

Prayer: God of wind, word, and fire, we bless your name this day for sending the light and strength of your Holy Spirit. We give you thanks for all the gifts, great and small, that you have poured out upon your children. Accept us with our gifts to be living praise and witness to your love throughout all the earth; through Jesus Christ, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 104:24-35

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 104:24-35 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 68 as it speaks of God's power and majesty. We hear of God's great mercy in providing for the needy. We hear the righteous should be joyful and sing. What causes you to sing of God's majesty? Of God's mercy? What are you thankful for when you lift up your prayers to the Lord? What could you do to show mercy today? What could you do to show grace? How can we honor God in how we treat others?

Prayer: O God, you sent the Holy Spirit to stir up the zeal of your faithful waiting in Jerusalem. Grant us that inspiration now. Let us rejoice in your glory and praise you. Enable us to share the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. Guide us, lead us, strengthen us, protect us, encourage us, and bless us as we share your peace and your love, and show your grace and mercy. In Jesus name we pray. 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 first reading for today comes from the book of Acts, chapter 2, verses 1-21.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all

these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:2-21 NRSV)*

Our second reading for today comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 19-23.

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.” (John 20:19-23 NRSV)*

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

I started this sermon many times and events of the week continued to make me reflect on if I was headed in the right direction. This has been an interesting time for many reasons. And so, I started reflect on what the Holy Spirit means to us. And it got me to think about what it means to have peace. I began my reflection in this week's Gospel reading from the Gospel according to John.

When Jesus came and stood among his followers, he told them “Peace be with you.” And I began to think about what it means to have peace. And on top of that what it means to have peace as we are sent by Christ. I thought on this because of how close it is that he says “peace be with you” to when he says “as the father who sent me, so I send you.” He then breathes on the disciples and says receive the Holy Spirit. And then come something that caused me to think an awful lot. We are told if we forgive the sins of any they are forgiven. However, if we retain the sins of any they are retained. I started to think about what that would actually look like. And as I contemplated it, I looked to the book of Acts. The familiar story of the

early followers being together and having flaming tongues rest upon their heads as they were blessed with the Holy Spirit. We are told that the gift will be for the least and the greatest, for the free and the slave. That people will dream dreams and that people will prophesy and see visions. Everyone could understand what they were saying, even if it wasn't in their native tongue. A message for all. And I started to think about what all of this meant together.

I began to focus in on the idea that if we forgive sins they are forgiven and if we retain sins there kept. And I began to think about the Lord's prayer in all of this. And how those concepts tied together. In the Lord's prayer we pray that we can be forgiven as we forgive others. And it made me think, what would it really mean to retain the sins of others? If we retain the sins of others does that mean others can retain our sins? If so, why would we ever want to retain them? When I began to think about forgiveness and mercy, I began to think about peace. It is hard to have peace when others are not merciful. And that concept was brought to the forefront by yet another injustice, with a man being killed in broad daylight, filmed for all to see. I was reminded that for many, peace is still a dream. That there are still many injustices in this world. And it made me think that somewhere in there, beyond retaining and forgiving sins, there was also the idea of ignoring sins. And then I started to wonder are we retaining sin by ignoring it? Are we ignoring the Holy Spirit when we turn a blind eye to the suffering of others? This weighed heavily on my heart, as I still fully don't know how to address what happened. To address what seems to happen again and again. I started thinking about all the different things that happened to people who aren't like me. And I began to wonder what it means to have a prophetic voice in the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to speak God's truth as we are sent by Christ to do? One thing became clear the more that I thought. It cannot mean being quiet in the face of injustice. I can go jogging and not worry if my life is in danger. There are people in this country who cannot. I've never really worried that my home would be broken into and I would be killed because of someone else's carelessness. That is not a peace that all brothers and sisters share. There are so many things that I can go about doing in my day-to-day life that bring me no concern, and yet I know there are those who cannot do the same things without fear. And that fear often includes fearing the people that are sworn to serve and protect.

Now I will not sit here in generalize all situations and all people. However, recent events have caused me to realize that I must say something. I cannot stand by with such a great injustice facing so many and be silent. And I was reminded of something that I have seen time and again: no justice, no peace. How can one have peace without justice? I don't know that one can. We shouldn't simply settle for our own peace if it means others go without. If we are sent by Christ to be his messengers, if the Holy Spirit is given to us so that we may tell God's truth to others, part of that message must be justice for everyone. And thinking about some injustice made me begin to think about the many injustices that people face. Looking at racial injustice reminded me of how far we have yet to go in this world. That one needs to look no further than the current pandemic to see the way that our systems still cause a great racial divide. Communities of color have been hit hard, often due to a lack of resources. Looking around the

world we can see that there are still many, many barriers to breakdown. Barriers along the lines of race, along the lines of sex, along the lines of nationality, and that's just beginning to touch on the problems that we all must face.

It was at this point I was drawn back to Acts. I started to think about what that message meant if they were proclaiming to everyone and everyone could understand regardless of their nationality. Regardless of their faith. Regardless of creed or color. That message was meant for all. That hope was meant for all. That hope is still meant for all. No matter how much I want to joyfully proclaim that the Holy Spirit is ours I cannot help but think about those who cannot hear "peace be with you" and truly feel it. The Holy Spirit tears down barriers. The barriers that we try to build up as humans, God will destroy. And we have a choice to make. We can either tear the barrier's down or let them stand. There is no other option. We cannot pretend that it's not our problem because it is a problem facing God's people and if it faces God's people it is our problem. If it is a problem facing some, it is a problem facing all. We may wonder if there is anything at all that we can do. We may think that they're not problems in our neighborhood and therefore there's nothing that we can do about them. We may look around our own communities and say that those problems aren't happening here. Sadly, I know this is not true. I grew up knowing this. Knowing that even in these communities, small as they are, I can walk down the street and not worry about being bothered. Others cannot. I know this for a fact, as I have a friend that has been questioned on numerous occasions about where he is going when he's been out walking. Not because of anything he's done, not because of where he's going, not because of what he's doing. He's questioned because the color of his skin. He's a black man walking through a neighborhood where he isn't expected to be. And that's enough to disturb his peace. I was reminded of his experience as I read the news of a man who was trying to simply watch birds in the park. He saw a dog that was not on a leash when it was supposed to be and politely informed the owner. To which she threatened to call the police. Threatened to call them and say that a black man was threatening her life. I was reminded of my friend and the entire experience caused a wrenching deep in the pit of my stomach. I was confronted with video of a man out for a jog, something that I am sure many of you do without even thinking about it. His choice to go jogging ended with his death. Because someone thought that he didn't belong there. And I was reminded as I watched in horror as a man cried out that he couldn't breathe yet could find no compassion. A black man murdered in broad daylight. I begin to wonder how I could talk about peace and hope without talking about these great injustices. You may ask "what can we do? That didn't happen *here*." And the answer is that we use the power that the spirit has given us combined with the privilege that we may hold to speak truth to justice. If the Holy Spirit is meant to break down barriers, then we must break down barriers. Each one of us has a voice that we may use. We use it when we make known our concerns. Concerns in our communities. Concerns in our state. Concerns in our country. Concerns for the world. We do this by making sure that our leaders know that we think there's a problem. Because even in communities where we think it's not happening here, we elect officials that can make a difference.

Now I am not about to stand here and tell you who to vote for. What I am telling you to do is to speak to those who have power, and demand change. We cannot sit idly by while others are put in such distress. We cannot sit idly by while people are killed because of an imaginary barrier that humans create. Our voices can make that change. Be it speaking out just to those that we know, calling our elected representatives, or voting for those that recognize that change is needed, we have a say. I can't imagine that Christ would want us to sit by thinking that it is not our problem. With our peace comes responsibility. With our peace comes privilege. And this is true of all matters of injustice. If we can solve one injustice, we can solve all injustice. God's people are called to speak up for those that have no voice.

I was then reminded that the people that Christ spoke to were in fear. In our short Gospel reading for today, we are reminded that Christ's followers were afraid. We often talk about being able to relate to those disciples. That we can relate to Peter and Thomas for our failings and our doubts. That we can relate to Peter facing naysayers who didn't think that anything more was happening than a drunken rambling. But we know Peter was speaking truth. Christ's message often shown light into darkness. He often spoke about the problems that people wanted to brush aside. Issues of poverty. Issues of division. That message was so often aimed not at the high and mighty, but those who are being oppressed. That in God they had an ally. Christ spoke of a God of mercy and strength. Strength to endure and strength to speak the truth. Last week we talked about being witnesses to the ends of the earth. If we are to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, we must be a witness to those who still face oppression. We must be able to speak for those who feel they are not heard.

It is not enough in these times to simply think that one is not racist, but one must be actively against racism. It is not enough to think that one is not sexist, but one must be actively against sexism. It's not enough to have sympathy for immigrants and refugees, we must boldly speak up for immigrants and refugees. It is not enough to feel for the poor and the downcast, but we must actively work to make their situation better. And here's the good news. If Christ is with us, we can succeed. If God is on our side, nothing can stand in our way. We must fill ourselves with the resolve that the Holy Spirit gives us. We must stand with those who face uncertainty, who face hardship, who face difficulty, who face death itself. And we do so strengthened by Christ. Because we are strengthened in love. If we love God, then we love each other. If we love our neighbor as we love our self, that we cannot stand for anything happening to our neighbor that we would not stand to have happen to us. If the words do not come to us, the Holy Spirit will guide us. We so often proclaim that in God all things are possible. Let us prove it. Let us show that we are not a people afraid to speak up for the least and the last. Let us show that we are not afraid to tear down barriers. There is no language, no ethnicity, no color, no status, no gender, no border that can separate us. We must stand united, ready to do God's work wherever it needs to be done. Ready to make the voice of God's people heard. Ready to be peace in the middle of the storm.

Pentecost marks the end of the Easter season, but it does not change that we are Easter people. It means we are people who believe in a new beginning. People who believe in hope beyond hope. People who believe that we can rise up. People who know the great love of our God. People who know of the awesome deeds of our loving Savior. People who know the love of a Redeemer who would die so that we could live. Let us be a witness always to the miracle of Easter, to the miracle of Pentecost, be a witness to Christ's good news. Let us be a people who offer peace and then do the work to make it permanent. Let us be a people who offer hope and do the work to see it through. Let us be a people that proclaim God's love and then show it. Let us be a people who serve the Father, united in the Son, and blessed by the Holy Spirit. Let us be a people who believe that in God all things are possible, who then make what some think is impossible become reality. That we may dedicate our lives to the mission that Christ has given us. That we may be a people of love, hope, mercy, and peace. Let us tear down barriers and proclaim the good news that God is here for us all. That Christ died for all. That the Holy Spirit is for everyone. Day by day, let us do the work that Christ has sent us to do. Always and everywhere, for all people, for all time. 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: We've a Story to Tell to the Nations

1. We've a story to tell to the nations,
That shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy,
A story of peace and light,
A story of peace and light.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

2. We've a song to be sung to the nations,
That shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
A song that shall conquer evil
And shatter the spear and sword,
And shatter the spear and sword.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

3. We've a message to give to the nations,
That the Lord who reigns up above
Has sent us His Son to save us,
And show us that God is love,
And show us that God is love.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

4. We've a Savior to show to the nations,
Who the path of sorrow has trod,
That all of the world's great peoples
Might come to the truth of God,
Might come to the truth of God.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now that we may be ministers of the good news wherever we go. 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
Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt
Sharon Button	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Family of Jerry Jackson	Family of Tom Jester
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn			
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.

5/31/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We have moved into Phase 3 in the Restore Illinois plan. There may have been some confusion as to what will be allowed with some of the other news that has come up, so I will try to convey what I know. The Bishop has put forward a plan that we will be following. At this time, we can have up to 10 people gathering for any meeting here at the church building. We cannot have more than 10 people, and we must still wear masks and practice social distancing. We also need to keep track of who is at each gathering so that we have a record in case of contact tracing. We are now allowed to hold outdoor services. With that, we still need to have six-foot social distancing. This would be between households, meaning that each household would need to be six feet apart without contact. I am meeting with the Bishop soon and need to get some clarification about part of the guidance. As I am currently understanding it, part of the guidance is that anyone over 65 should still abstain from *any* in person gatherings. I will have an update later in the week, after I have the chance to ask the Bishop about this. Because of this, I cannot update when we will have in person gatherings again. Though there is hope for the tail end of June, the guideline for those over 65 is also part of the Phase 4 guidance, and hence why I am needing to ask the Bishop for clarification. Because of this guideline, I am waiting to schedule any in person gatherings of any kind until after I can receive clarification. After I get clarification, we may discuss the option for an outside service if there is interest. However, I will still be doing online video and printouts for anyone who will not be able to attend. So I am asking for grace in how much I can put into my schedule right now. I will be working with the Church Council Chairs this week to put together a meeting, hopefully via computer or phone, to discuss these options with the Church Council. If we do meet in person in a group of ten, I will be able to have my children be in a different part of the church while we conduct business. However, some of that still depends on guidance from the Bishop. I know that we are all eager to see each other again, but I must once again emphasize that we need to do it safely with a great amount of care. I also must remind everyone that I *must* follow whatever guidance the Bishop gives me. I serve at the pleasure of the Bishop. Please keep that in mind as we discuss what I can and cannot allow in the coming weeks.

In preparation for returning to worship, we do need to begin getting the church ready. In the close future, this would mean cleaning the church building. When we get closer to returning to in person worship inside the church, we will also need to work on how to handle seating arrangements, recording who has come to church, having hand sanitizer available, and other plans. I will be working with each church to be ready for that great day! If you are wanting to help clean and get things ready, please contact me so that we can go over any details that I may need to go over with you beforehand. Depending on the guidelines, we may be able to begin worship within the building at the end of the month.

In other news, Annual Conference has been rescheduled again! This time, the move has been made to make Annual Conference an online only event on Saturday August 15th. This is because we may not be fully in Phase 5 before that date, and to be fully prepared the Conference meeting will now be virtual. In good news, this means that I will be able to attend. Please contact me for more information. General Conference is going to be next year, and I will have more information about that later.

There are copies of the Upper Room available in Greenup in the box. You can also find the current issue online. The new Sunday school quarterly is also in the box for whoever is interested.

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 have enjoyed some of the recent music we have had for the Greenup Facebook page!

As we move into a new phase of recovery in Illinois, please become familiar with the new guidelines. Not all restrictions have been lifted, and if there is a surge, we can go back from Phase 3 into Phase 2 again. This includes social distancing and wearing a mask. We must be aware that we could move into Phase 4 as early as the end of the month, but it could take much longer depending on the number of new cases and the amount of testing done.

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 pages. 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! If anyone you know is not getting a copy and would like one mailed, please let me know. I am trying to get them mailed out weekly.

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. Until I receive further guidance, I cannot allow any Sunday School classes to use the

church building at this time. When I know a little bit more, I will offer guidance for anyone who would like to meet in the building.

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