

Times Change

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – June 28, 2020

4th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Numbers 21:4-9; 2 Kings 18:1-6; Matthew 18:6-9

Reflection: Psalm 126

Music: Nearer My God to Thee; God Be with You till We Meet Again

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. Let us celebrate the example God has set for us. Praise the Lord!

Music: Nearer My God to Thee

1. Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
Still all my song would be,
nearer, my God, to Thee.
*Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!*

2. Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone.
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God to Thee.
*Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!*

3. There let the way appear, steps unto Heav'n;
All that Thou sendest me, in mercy given;
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to Thee.
*Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!*

4. Then, with my waking thoughts
bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;
So by my woes to be nearer, my God, to Thee.
*Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!*

5. Or, if on joyful wing cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I'll fly,
Still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to Thee.
*Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer to Thee!*

Prayer: O Lord our God, help us this day. Help us live a life more and more like the example set for us in Christ Jesus. Help us to change our ways to follow you in our hearts and in our lives. Help us to be examples of your great love. Help us to change to mercy and grace in all that we do. Lead us in all our days, from this life to the next. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.
(Psalm 126 NRSV*)

We read the words of Psalm 126 and we hear joy over changing fortunes. We hear all the proclamations of what God has done for the people and a plea to continue to help. How do you see God's restoration in your life? How do we turn to God to help us change? What is it we ask God for in our lives? What do we ask for others?

Prayer: God, our guardian and guide. Help us to turn to you and your gracious love. Fill us with laughter and joy in all our days. Instill a spirit in us to inspire hope and faith in others. May we comfort those who are full of sorrow and always find comfort in your mercy. Let us celebrate the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 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 comes from the Common English Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Numbers, chapter 21, verses 4 through 9.

They marched from Mount Hor on the Reed Sea road around the land of Edom. The people became impatient on the road. The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to kill us in the desert, where there is no food or water. And we detest this miserable bread!" So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people and they bit the people. Many of the Israelites died. The people went to Moses and said, "We've sinned, for we spoke against the Lord and you. Pray to the Lord so that he will send the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous snake and place it on a pole. Whoever is bitten can look at it and live." Moses made a bronze snake and placed it on a pole. If a snake bit someone, that person could look at the bronze snake and live.
(Numbers 21:4-9 CEB+)

Our next reading for today comes from 2 Kings, chapter 18, verses 1 through 6.

Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, became king of Judah in the third year of Israel's King Hoshea, Elah's son. He was 25 years old when he became king, and he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi; she was Zechariah's daughter. Hezekiah did what was right in the Lord's eyes, just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the shrines. He smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the sacred pole. He crushed the bronze snake that Moses made, because up to that point the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (The snake was named Nehushtan.) Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, Israel's God. There was no one like him among all of Judah's kings—not before him and not after him. He clung to the Lord and never deviated from him. He kept the commandments that the Lord had commanded Moses.

(2 Kings 18:1-6 CEB+)

Our final reading for today comes from Matthew, chapter 18, verses 6 through 9.

“As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake. How terrible it is for the world because of the things that cause people to trip and fall into sin! Such things have to happen, but how terrible it is for the person who causes those things to happen! If your hand or your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It's better to enter into life crippled or lame than to be thrown into the eternal fire with two hands or two feet. If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It's better to enter into life with one eye than to be cast into a burning hell with two eyes.

(Matthew 18:6-9 CEB+)

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

Have you ever stumbled into a thought when you were looking at something completely different? That happened to me this week as I was preparing this sermon. Our readings today were chosen from a cascading thought train. I actually started with Hezekiah. Which then led to the origins of the serpent on a pole in Numbers, which then led to Matthew. Now, you can apply this to some national issues we have had, but my goal was a little more personal. So we begin with a review of our readings for today.

We begin in Numbers, and while the Israelites are in the wilderness they've once again begun to complain. Now there are snakes biting and killing people. They say they've sinned, and they turn to Moses for help. God instructs Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. If they look at it after they've been bitten, they'll be saved. We start here because it the origin of the bronze snake that we find in our reading from 2 Kings. The serpent was a good thing. Moses made it to save the Israelites. However, when we get to the reign of King Hezekiah, things have changed. Hezekiah sees all of these things that have gone wrong. He tries to do right by God. He removes the shrines, smashes sacred pillars, cuts down sacred poles, as part of a great cleansing of Israel of all the things they are worshipping instead of God. Then we get to one that seems a little shocking after reading Numbers. He crushes the bronze snake that Moses had made. Because the Israelites had begun to burn incense to the

bronze snake. What I find fascinating is that this bronze serpent, this snake on a stick, that was used by Moses to save the Israelites was now causing them to fall away from God. Which led me to Matthew, where we read about tripping and falling into sin. That it would be better to have a huge stone hung around your neck and be drowned than to cause one of the little ones to fall into sin. Just to make the point, Jesus gets into a bit of hyperbole. If your hand or foot causes you to sin, get rid of it! Eye causing you to sin? Get rid of it! You're better off maimed than to lose sight of God. You're better off without than causing others to lose faith and causing others to sin.

Now, there are big national issues that I could focus on, and you are free to apply them there, but they actually led me down a path that ended up on a more personal reflection. That something that was once good doesn't always stay good. Something that was once salvation might end up being a stumbling block. Something once seen as something to be admired can eventually become one's downfall. As I thought about this on a personal level, I started to think about all the ways that we encounter this in our own lives. We can be blinded by thinking that because something in our life was once right and good, we cannot think of it as somehow being wrong. And we get so hung up on these things that we think are truth that we don't allow new information in. We don't allow our minds to be changed. Even when that idea has become warped and distorted.

I started thinking about that bronze serpent. By the time Hezekiah becomes king, people have seemed to have transformed their view of that bronze snake. It was no longer a tool Moses used to turn people to God, it began to be worshiped as a God. That is when the problems began. That bronze serpent did not change. It never stopped being the pole Moses held up, but it started to *mean* something different. I started thinking about all the things we hold onto that eventually change shape and change form in our minds, but we hold so dearly to the original idea that we become blind to any changes that might have taken place around us. It happens with language. Words can take on new meaning. A phrase that might have been acceptable and we grew up using now brings others harm. Maybe the harm was always there, and we didn't know it. But society changes. Terms change and fall out of favor. New meanings come around and sometimes old meanings we didn't know are discovered. But it highlights a conflict we can have. When we are a people rooted in tradition that goes back a long way, with texts that go back even further, sometimes we can be blinded to the "now."

When we think about what Jesus said about the here and now to the disciples, it was that if something is adversely impacting someone, don't do it. Because it isn't about you at that point. It is about how you are treating others. We hear the same thing from Paul in Romans when he talks about not eating things that will cause others to lose faith, even if they mean nothing to you. Because even if your own internal dialogue finds nothing wrong, if it hurts others it hurts them. Our internal feelings only carry so far. The problem is that if our actions or our words or our things cause pain to others, we have to decide what is more important. Our personal feelings or the way we hurt others. I can think of plenty of examples. Smoking around

someone who has decided to quit smoking. Smoking used to be seen as cool, advertised with cartoons, and almost everywhere. We know better now, and we don't see those images. We don't offer a cigarette to someone that struggled with quitting just because it means nothing to us. We recognize their struggle. Would you sit around pouring a drink for someone who struggled to quit drinking? Just because it has never been your problem? No, because it would hurt. But it happens more often than we like to think because we often don't know the struggles of others. But if people do make it known, and we ignore it, that is now no longer on them but it is on us. Because we are now the stumbling block.

I thought about this because there are so many things that can impact us in that way. We might make an off handed comment and not think about the hurt or trauma that it might bring up in someone else. We don't often consider the pain we might cause. And I started to think about that bronze serpent, smashed by Hezekiah that had been held up as something glorious by Moses. We can't always depend on ourselves to know what is going to cause others pain. That is true of all of us. Each of our lives holds memories good and bad. Each of us knows that a certain phrase, date on a calendar, or an action can bring up those difficult memories. The care that we take is to not intentionally become that stumbling block to others. That if we find out we are causing someone else hurt, it is our job to change. Because our responsibility is to love. Our responsibility is to care for others. Luckily, discourse will always allow us to grow. It doesn't mean that we fear doing anything out of what it might do, but we recognize that sometimes there is a time and a place to speak up and a time and a place to listen. Too often we think it is our time to speak when it is actually our time to listen. And that applies how we treat God as well. Sometimes we are so busy talking to God we aren't listening. We aren't hearing how he may need us to change. That maybe we need to be the Hezekiah to help break someone else's cycle of hurt.

So my message today is this: somethings change and not everything that was once good is good now. Not everything that was once helpful is helpful now. But we learn from dialogue. We learn by seeking understanding and gaining wisdom. We search for God's help to help each other grow. We ask God to help us understand each other. That we can help each other grow in our love of God and in serving God. That we can grow in our care for each other by recognizing those changes. That we can learn to be a little more merciful and a little more graceful, taking other people's struggles into account. Because they are important. If we want to be like Christ, we need to love like Christ. We need to understand the difference between the things that don't bother us and understanding how actions can harm others. That if our words hurt, we learn to change our words. If our actions hurt someone, we learn how to change our actions. All so that we can be more loving and more caring. So that we can find ways to help each other grow, so that we are united in God's mission to love each other. That we are in this together and must love together. Let us not cling to the bronze serpents of the past but let us build a new tomorrow full of compassion and faith and hope. One full of God's mercy and God's love. That we do not cause each other to stumble but lift each other up. That

we be united in serving Christ. That we be united in living a life that reflects his love and his compassion. As we help each other to grow. That we listen and we speak and we care just as Christ cares for us today. 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 Be with You till We Meet Again

1. God be with you till we meet again;
By His counsels guide, uphold you,
With His sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

*Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet;
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.*

2. God be with you till we meet again;
Neath His wings protecting hide you;
Daily manna still provide you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Till we meet, till we meet,

*Till we meet at Jesus' feet;
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.*

3. God be with you till we meet again;
With the oil of joy anoint you;
Sacred ministries appoint you;
God be with you till we meet again.

*Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet;
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.*

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
Corine Howard's daughter	Marcia	Family of Mike Dooley	
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

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6/28/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We have entered Phase 4 of the IGRC plan. With that, we will begin in person worship on July 5th for all three churches. Before I get to what is required as we return to in person worship, I feel I need to lead with a word of caution. We will only remain in Phase 4 as long as the Illinois Department of Public Health keeps our region in that phase. However, there are signs already that areas in our region may be seeing an influx of cases. If that happens, we may have to return to Phase 3. If that happens, we will need to return to online worship. My best advice is to continue to practice social distancing and be safe out there.

So, onto the things we need to know about returning to worship. We will need to practice social distancing. People will need to be seated six feet apart and *everyone* in attendance must wear a mask at all times. There cannot be any exception for mask wearing while in the building, unless you are either alone or far enough up front. It may then be removed for extended speaking while far enough up front but must be replaced again. There will not be congregational singing yet, and the conference is recommending not having *any* live music at this time. We also cannot pass anything between people. No shaking hands, passing the plate, hugs, etc. I will need to inspect the churches to make sure that everything is ready, including having seating marked. This will look a little different, but I am confident we can do it. There is also a special note that for those who are older, have a respiratory illness or injury, or have a compromised immune system, you are strongly encouraged to check with a health professional on if you should be out. I will continue to provide printed materials for anyone who wants them and am at least planning on having the sermon audio continue to be posted. This week marks the last planned video sermon. If you have any questions at all, please contact me! I'll do what I can to help.

Annual Conference is an online only event on Saturday August 15th. 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 and at Cottonwood. You can also find the current issue online. The new Sunday school quarterly is also in the box for whoever is interested.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! A printed copy of the service including the weekly sermon will be available online and in print. The sermon audio will be uploaded weekly as well. If you'd like to be updated when it is available, it is on Spotify, Google Play, and iTunes. I will also post updates to the church Facebook pages every week. 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.

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

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