

## **Seasons of Change**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – July 5, 2020

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Jeremiah 29:1-14

**Reflection:** Psalm 74

**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!

**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 74

*O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago, which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell. Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary. Your foes have roared within your holy place; they set up their emblems there. At the upper entrance they hacked the wooden trellis with axes. And then, with hatchets and hammers, they smashed all its carved work. They set your sanctuary on fire; they desecrated the dwelling place of your name, bringing it to the ground. They said to themselves, "We will utterly subdue them"; they burned all the meeting places of God in the land. We do not see our emblems; there is no longer any prophet, and there is no one among us who knows how long. How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand; why do you keep your hand in your bosom? Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You cut openings for springs and torrents; you dried up ever-flowing streams. Yours is the day, yours also the night; you established the luminaries and the sun. You have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter. Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and*

*an impious people reviles your name. Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild animals; do not forget the life of your poor forever. Have regard for your covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence. Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise your name. Rise up, O God, plead your cause; remember how the impious scoff at you all day long. Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of your adversaries that goes up continually.*  
*(Psalm 74 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 74 and we hear the voice of a people crying out. There is a feeling of abandonment. A call for God to remember his people. But even in the midst of trouble, people find a feeling of hope. Remembering all that God has done, and that God is still in charge. There is a hope and a plea that is often familiar in difficult times. How do you raise your voice to God when troubled? How do you remember all that you praise God for? What are the prayers you lift up for yourself? For others?

**Prayer:** God, our King and Creator. Help us to never forget the wonderful things you have done. Help us to celebrate you even amid troubles in our lives. Let us always turn to you and your steadfast love that endures forever. Let us always call up the Father who guides us. Help us to always seek the Holy Spirit that leads us. And let us always celebrate the salvation of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. May praise always be on our tongues and love in our hearts. 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 Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, verses 1 through 8.

*There's a season for everything  
 and a time for every matter under the heavens:  
 a time for giving birth and a time for dying,  
 a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,  
 a time for killing and a time for healing,  
 a time for tearing down and a time for building up,  
 a time for crying and a time for laughing,  
 a time for mourning and a time for dancing,  
 a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,  
 a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,  
 a time for searching and a time for losing,*

*a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,  
 a time for tearing and a time for repairing,  
 a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,  
 a time for loving and a time for hating,  
 a time for war and a time for peace.*

*(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 CEB+)*

Our next reading for today comes from Jeremiah, chapter 29, verses 1 through 14.

*The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the few surviving elders among the exiles, to the priests and the prophets, and to all the people Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon from Jerusalem. The letter was sent after King Jeconiah, the queen mother, the court officials, the government leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and smiths had left Jerusalem. It was delivered to Babylon by Elasah, Shaphan's son, and Gemariah, Hilkiah's son—two men dispatched to Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar by King Zedekiah.*

*The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims to all the exiles I have carried off from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; cultivate gardens and eat what they produce. Get married and have children; then help your sons find wives and your daughters find husbands in order that they too may have children. Increase in number there so that you don't dwindle away. Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because your future depends on its welfare.*

*The Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, proclaims: Don't let the prophets and diviners in your midst mislead you. Don't pay attention to your dreams. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I didn't send them, declares the Lord.*

*The Lord proclaims: When Babylon's seventy years are up, I will come and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. When you call me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you search for me, yes, search for me with all your heart, you will find me. I will be present for you, declares the Lord, and I will end your captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have scattered you, and I will bring you home after your long exile, declares the Lord.*

*(Jeremiah 29:1-14 CEB+)*

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

I couldn't help but to keep coming back to the exile when thinking about what to talk about this Sunday. I think it is because even though we are *here* again, back inside the church, things are different. I don't know when they won't be different. It reminded me of the exile because just like the exile everyone was trying to figure out what to do with their lives with everything being so different. And I was reminded then of Jeremiah's letter. That Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon and basically says "look, build houses, settle down. You are going to be there for a while, make the best of what you can. And don't think it's never going to get better, there's plans for peace and a future of hope." God will still be there, and God will be there when things get better. With that, I was reminded of Ecclesiastes. There's

a time for everything, and if I had to add something to that list, it would be that there's a time for doing things how we've always done them, and there's a time for doing new things because it is what we need. Because we are in a season of change.

These were the things on my mind when I began to think about coming back. Because I also know that there will be people who are still hearing this message that are not in the building. People who will be reading this who aren't with us today. And that is OK. Because things are different. I could just say that we are back, hooray, and act like nothing has changed. But that would be ignoring the elephant in the room. But my point is that we can either look at it as a big pain and something we don't want to have to deal with, and can't wait until it is over, or we can make the best of it like we do with all things when it is time for a change. There will be things that are going to feel different. Even just trying to write the service for today, it was different. Even different from how things have been different up until now. I was reminded of the exile, not of a people sent away in punishment, but people trying to get used to doing things in a very different way. We've been trying to get used to doing things in a very different way. And we will have to keep trying to do things in a different way. Because the honest thing I can say right now is that I don't know when things will return to "normal." We may learn that there are things we are doing now that we want to keep doing. We might find new ways to do things that we think are worth doing even after things are "normal" again. Things that have helped in this difficult time that might help us to reach out better in future difficult times.

I would like to set a tone for this. I don't want to think that I'm "putting up with" worshipping God the way we are worshipping today. I hate to think of "putting up with worship" at all. No, this is a time for change, and I want to embrace it in all of its oddity and strangeness. I can still be glad. Like the letter from Jeremiah, be glad of what you do have. Make a home, settle down, eat the food, get married, keep living. Because life goes on. The church goes on. We continue because we adapt. We know what season we are in. I know that someday there will be a season of rejoicing when things go back to the way they were, at least as close as we will get. And it isn't bad to look forward to that time either. Those in exile didn't stop thinking about when they would return, but they also couldn't let that be the only thing they dreamed of. Because the seasons will always change. So, I say we embrace the season. We come up with new ways to make this just as good as we want it to be. That we experience God in new ways because God hasn't left us. God hasn't gone anywhere. God is still with you and with me and with everyone that reaches out.

Now, it may be strange. It was strange to think that for weeks on end I would record in an empty church. It was strange to think that lots of plans got upset. It is still strange to think I don't know when it will be done. But it is also interesting. It may make us reflect on the things that we do and it may make us cherish those things a little more. It might make us do things we want to do and think of new ways we want to do them. It might inspire a brand-new season to follow this. Not what we've been doing and not what we used to do, but something all together new. So, in this evolving time, this change of seasons, I encourage each of us to think about ways that we can contribute in this new form that we are in. Maybe it is writing something to have read during service. Maybe it is something to share with others. Maybe it is prerecording

something to be played during service. Maybe it is finding new ways to keep that feeling in our hearts. I encourage each of you, no matter how this message is coming to you, to think of new ways to worship God. Because, in reality, shouldn't we always be thinking of new ways to worship and to serve? New ways to show each other that we love each other? New ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ? And maybe this will be a time when we open our eyes and start thinking about things that we hadn't thought of before. Maybe we pray in ways we've never prayed before. Maybe we listen in ways we have never listened and speak in ways we have never spoken. Because our eyes are opened to something new. Maybe we can take this time of struggle and turn it into a brand-new season of celebration. Because it is what we make of it.

We might feel like a people in exile right now. I know I have felt very much an "exile" from all of the people I'm used to seeing and all the things I'm used to doing. All the ways that we used to gather have been "sent away" so to speak. Just like the people of Israel would have missed the celebrations in the temple, all the ways that they were used to doing everything. But Jeremiah's message is not to give up hope. Not in now and not in the future. So, I say to you, don't give up hope. Don't simply resign yourself to "get through this" but find ways to flourish in it. Find new ways to be the best you can be, to showcase Christ the best way you can in brand new ways. I hope that each of us can learn from this something that we didn't know before. And with that, we gain wisdom. We gain wisdom that we can share, and we grow in hope that we can share, and we grow in love that we can share. And we find new ways to share it. Because I know this is not the end.

I also know that at any time things could go back to how they were, with having to stay away from the building. If things get worse, we could be rolled back to how things were in prior weeks, and that is a very real possibility. We could be anxious. Or we could figure out how to be the calming presence for others the way that Christ is the calming presence in our lives. That we can say that God is with us and, if God is with us, that however we worship is worship. Be it with a mask and be it with no singing. Be it that we hear the prayer and speak it in our hearts or be it that we let words wash over us and reach us in brand new ways. Be it that we write letters or that we send words of encouragement. That we find new ways to stay connected to each other and to God. That we let them make us stronger than we ever were before. And that we find new ways to flourish in God. Because no matter what changes around us, God is still there, steadfast love everlasting. And Christ is with us, Christ the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Let us be changed, changed in that unending love. That we may grow together, that we may face any challenge because we are stronger when we face it together. When we do what we can to help one another. Doing what we can do to strengthen each other in God's mercy and grace. Let us always be examples of grace. Let us always be those who inspire hope. And always those who share the good news that Christ is with us, even in a season of change. 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**

**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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## **7/2/2020 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 today. 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. There will not be congregational singing yet, and the conference is recommending not having *any* live music at this time. There are also no responsive texts or communal prayers 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. I have decided to try to keep doing video for the time being. If you have any questions at all, please contact me! I'll do what I can to help.

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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