

## **A Thirst for Justice**

Means of Grace: Part 4 “A Thirst for Justice”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 4th, 2020

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

**Readings:** Isaiah 1:10-20; Ephesians 4:17-24; Luke 18:1-8

**Reflection:** Psalm 26

**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 love of Christ that brings us together in God’s care. Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** God, we seek you on this day. Guide us as we gather together this day, as you do in all things. As we lift up our prayers to you this day, we ask that our faith be lifted, and our resolve be strengthened. Let us be drawn together that we may worship in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 26

*Of David. Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord, singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.*

*(Psalm 26 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 26 and we hear of following God with integrity. Of recognizing God’s steadfast love and being faithful. How we should be thankful and true to God. What does it mean to live a life of integrity? How do we walk in God’s justice? How do we give thanks for God’s wondrous deeds? How do we show others the goodness that is our God?

**Prayer:** God, full of love and goodness. Give us the strength to seek good in the face of evil. Grant us a surefootedness as we seek to walk in your holy ways. Show us the way that we may carry ourselves with integrity as we seek your justice in our lives. Help us that we may grow in your grace and mercy, and that we may find peace in your love. 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 Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 1, verses 10 through 20.

*My Hear the Lord's word, you leaders of Sodom. Listen to our God's teaching, people of Gomorrah! What should I think about all your sacrifices? says the Lord. I'm fed up with entirely burned offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I don't want the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from you, this trampling of my temple's courts? Stop bringing worthless offerings. Your incense repulses me. New moon, sabbath, and the calling of an assembly— I can't stand wickedness with celebration! I hate your new moons and your festivals. They've become a burden that I'm tired of bearing. When you extend your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you. Even when you pray for a long time, I won't listen. Your hands are stained with blood. Wash! Be clean! Remove your ugly deeds from my sight. Put an end to such evil; learn to do good. Seek justice: help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow. Come now, and let's settle this, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. If they are red as crimson, they will become like wool. If you agree and obey, you will eat the best food of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. The Lord has said this. (Isaiah 1:10-20 CEB+)*

Our next reading is from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17 through 24.

*So I'm telling you this, and I insist on it in the Lord: you shouldn't live your life like the Gentiles anymore. They base their lives on pointless thinking, and they are in the dark in their reasoning. They are disconnected from God's life because of their ignorance and their closed hearts. They are people who lack all sense of right and wrong, and who have turned themselves over to doing whatever feels good and to practicing every sort of corruption along with greed.*

*But you didn't learn that sort of thing from Christ. Since you really listened to him and you were taught how the truth is in Jesus, change the former way of life that was part of the person you once were, corrupted by deceitful desires. Instead, renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit and clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:17-24 CEB+)*

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 18, verses 1 through 8.

*Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected*

*people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, 'Give me justice in this case against my adversary.' For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don't fear God or respect people, but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me." The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. But when the Human One comes, will he find faithfulness on earth?"*

*(Luke 18:1-8 CEB+)*

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

We continue with our look at means of grace, and this week, we turn to one that's a little trickier. And I don't say that to say that the concept is difficult. I say it because it's not as forthcoming as our prior messages. We've talked about prayer and fasting and study as ways that we open ourselves up to God, getting to know God, and getting to know God's purpose. Today's is a little more about living that purpose. And it's helping to put those things in action that we've been discussing. And this is having a thirst for justice. We see it laid out in our readings for today. In Isaiah, we hear about not wanting offerings. Not wanting sacrifices. Not wanting hollow actions to show that we understand God's will. Not to simply show up say here God, here's your gift, I'm going to go back to doing whatever it was I was doing. But that we have to live our experience of God. That we have to live in a relationship with him by doing his will. And one of the biggest ways that we can do that is by seeking justice, putting an end to evil, and learning to do good. And how do we seek justice? We help the oppressed, defend the orphan, and we plead for the widow. Now, that might sound a little constraining. But those groups are bound together as the vulnerable. The weak. the powerless. We help those that are going to struggle to be able to ever find help themselves. the poor and the powerless have little ability to change their situation because of where they are. But if you are in a situation to help, then you must help. Because God strives for us to seek justice. To live in a just world. To build the kingdom of God here. That when we pray that we want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, that means that we want God's justice with us here and now. That we aren't just idly sitting by twiddling our thumbs, waiting for justice to come. That we seek to help those who are in need of help, those who are living in unjust situations, that we may show them that we care. Because God cares. We care because God calls us to care.

We see this in the call from Ephesians. Don't just sit around and think. Don't close your heart off to God but change your life. Don't desire things simply to better yourself but find a way to bring the Holy Spirit into your mind and into your life so that you may do good. clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image, in justice and true holiness. Be the person who seeks the light and wants to shine the light in the darkness so that others may see. There are many ways we can do this. Our Gospel reading helps us to deal with what may sometimes feel like the futility of seeking justice in an unjust world. Sometimes when we see an injustice, we say that's just the way it is. But our Gospel reading today reminds us that sometimes it just means trying over and over and over. We have the parable of the widow who keeps coming to the judge asking for justice. But she isn't seeking it from a man who is good. A

man who fears God and who respects people. She's going to get justice from someone who doesn't care. And that's the trick really. We can't always convince everyone that seeking justice is the right thing. But if we are relentless in our pursuit we can overcome and get people who would normally not want to help to do the right thing through persistence. He decides to give the woman justice because he's tired of being bothered. "Won't God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night?" Yes. That's the thing. We can't imagine that God is just hanging around going well, we'll just see what happens. God wants us to make those changes. He wants us to be that change. He wants us to seek justice. He wants us to be people thirsting for justice and righteousness, wanting the world to be a better place.

We see it in the way that people are described as following God. It's not the people who live a life that is blameless. We see David held up as an example. And David makes lots of mistakes. The thing is that David always keeps in his heart that he needs to seek God and seek God's ways. We see God use people that we might otherwise write off. Moses delivers the people out of Egypt, even though he had killed a man. Paul, who once persecuted Christians, becomes a voice for justice and Christ. Because he turns from the error of his ways to follow God and proclaim Christ as his Savior. God isn't seeking perfect people. God is seeking people who want to do better. God never says since you made a mistake in your life that now you're condemned to always be that mistake and now you can no longer help anyone. Quite the opposite. If you have done something wrong to others and understand that and turn to Christ for forgiveness, you now have an experience that helps you to understand how easy it is for injustice to take place. And you become a stronger voice for justice because of that knowledge. If you're someone who has made a mistake, you can speak to God's saving grace, because you know it and experienced it. You become a living example of God's mercy and God's love.

We put into action all of those things that we've been discussing. What is it that we pray for? when we talked about prayer, we talked about seeking God, and helping others. By having God step into our lives to guide us and lead us. That we would be in constant prayer so that we are in constant devotion, so that we are constantly choosing to follow God. that when we fast, we fast so that we may focus in and build a closer relationship to God so that we may better understand God's purpose in our lives, so that we may help others. That we study so that we may understand what God's will is and what Christ's role in our lives is so that we may better build our lives around that. And one of the biggest ways we can do that is to build a world in which all may find justice. that we free ourselves from discrimination. That we free ourselves from ignorance that we free ourselves from a world so ready to tell us lies that we want to hear. And we embrace the Christ, that sought to get justice for all. That we see Christ on the cross, forgiving others. Acknowledging the injustice but showing a path to righteousness. As someone always willing to speak up for those who are downtrodden. For those who have been cast aside. For those that have been ignored. Even for those who are outside the circle. Because Christ will always be pushing those boundaries. He pushes the boundaries in our minds and in our hearts and in our lives and in our world. That we may understand that God's people are everywhere. Because God invites all who love him to follow him. That God invites all to be redeemed. And that God invites us to break every yoke. To end every imprint oppression. To give voice to the voiceless. To be the help that others need. Because in doing so, we also

grow closer to God by conforming our lives to what it is God seeks. And that in doing so we grow closer and we are given clarity. We are given hope in Christ that we may give hope. We find purpose in the Holy Spirit so that others may find purpose as well. That together, we may strive to build a better world in God's image. A world of justice. Not just for some, but for all. That all may have the opportunity to serve God freely. That all may have the opportunity to worship God freely. That all may have the opportunity to live a life where they are given a choice to accept God the Father in their lives, to welcome the Holy Spirit, to accept Christ as their Savior. That all are given a chance to thrive, to live, to succeed. Because that's the opportunity that Christ has given to us.

So, I say to you. What is the path that you choose? How will you seek God in your life that you may bring justice to others? It needs to be in all that we are and all that we do. Our prayers need to be more than just telling God "I need this," but instead "God help me to make the world a better place." Our fast, shouldn't be something that we do just to better ourselves but so that we may better the world in God's image. Our study should be so that we have a greater understanding of God, so that we may live a life that we are the ones persistently seeking justice in the face of adversity. That we may seek change in a world that we think we may not be able to change, but through God all things are possible. There is no change too great to overcome. There is no adversity that is too big for God not to be able to triumph over it. The God that is revealed to us is the God that cares. God opens the door. Because we see it in the life of the Christ who loves us, who felt that the greatest love one could give was to lay down his life for his friends. The Christ who asks us to love our neighbor as ourselves. That if we accept injustice for our neighbor, we accept injustice for ourselves. That if we cannot love our neighbor to the point that we want them to have the same freedom, the same love, the same mercy, the same grace that we have, then we don't want it for ourselves. That we can't truly ask God to be that presence in our lives if we don't want him to be that presence in the lives of others.

So, have that thirst for justice. Have that sense that if all are not free then the work is not done. Know that you are an instrument of God's love and grace and mercy that you are a deliverer of hope, transformed in Christ's love and mercy, given his hope. Be the change that you want to see in the world. And God will help you to make that change. That we join together to do so, because many voices are louder than one. But even if you have to be the lone voice crying out in the wilderness, "make a path for the Lord," that it's what we do. Because we act as a call to others. So, seek justice in all that you are and all you do. So that you may embrace God. And that through the means of grace, you may grow in a closer relationship with the Father who loves you, with the Son who saves you, and the Holy Spirit that guides you. 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
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers	Cindy Cisney
Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins
Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt
Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Family of Ken Bushur	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Bill Gilbert
Ronnie Winstead			
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn	Leo Smith	Dan Eubank	Family of Charlotte Carrell
Bonnie Hite			
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Family of Lyle Whitley		

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.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.

**Our Current Series – Means of Grace**

This series looks at the things that we do to connect to God so that we grow in discipleship.

September 13th – *A Heart of Prayer* – Prayer connects us to God.

September 20th – *Fast with a Purpose* – How should we fast?

September 27th – *A Mind for Study* – Study helps our spiritual growth.

October 4th – *A Thirst for Justice* – Seeking justice is part of the mission.

October 11th – *The Poor and Hungry* – Caring for others is care for God.

October 18th – *Worship Together* – We come together to grow together.

## **10/4/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron**

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are continuing in both online and in person worship at this time. I am thankful for all of the work that everyone has done to make this possible. As we return to in person worship, please contact me for details or see prior weekly updates for all of the current safety precautions.

If you are wanting to know more about the precautions we are taking at this time, please contact me so that I can discuss them with you.

I apologize that my time has seemed to be disappearing as of late, as I am dealing with school in home, which tends to take up a lot more time than I'm used to in the day. Please contact me with anything you think I may need to know, as I am relying upon all of you to stay up to date with everything going on right now.

Charge conference is set to be a virtual meeting on October 8<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. I would like as much of the church council to meet as possible. I will have more details soon about that.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920