

The Poor and Hungry

Means of Grace: Part 5 “The Poor and Hungry”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 11th, 2020

19th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Isaiah 25:1-5; James 2:14-17; Matthew 25:31-46

Reflection: Psalm 12

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 12

To the leader: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David. Help, O Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind. They utter lies to each other; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, “With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own—who is our master?” “Because the poor are despoiled, because the needy groan, I will now rise up,” says the Lord; “I will place them in the safety for which they long.” The promises of the Lord are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. You, O Lord, will protect us; you will guard us from this generation forever. On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among humankind.

(Psalm 12 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 12 and we hear of God saving the poor and the needy. Of God’s faithful promises to help those in distress. How do we recognize our need to God’s salvation? How do we seek God in our lives? How do we live out God’s call to help others? How do we show God’s love and faithfulness in our lives? How do we demonstrate it to others as a testimony of all that God is?

Prayer: God, helper of the poor and needy. Give us the strength to act to help others. Grant us the faith we need to continue to live our lives in you. Show us the way that we may seek your help as we go to help others. 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 25, verses 1 through 5.

Lord, you are my God. I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, planned long ago, faithful and sure. You have turned the city into rubble, the fortified town into a ruin, the fortress of foreigners into a city no more, never to be rebuilt. Therefore, strong people will glorify you; the towns of tyrant nations will fear you. You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress, a hiding place from the storm, a shade from the heat. When the breath of tyrants is like a winter storm or like heat in the desert, you subdue the roar of foreigners. Like heat shaded by a cloud, the tyrants' song falls silent.

(Isaiah 25:1-5 CEB+)

Our next reading is from James chapter 2, verses 14 through 17.

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.

(James 2:14-17 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Matthew, chapter 25, verses 31 through 46.

"Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

"Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

“Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

“Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

(Matthew 25:31-46 CEB+)

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

This week, we follow on the heels of having a thirst for justice by talking about the poor and the hungry. One might ask how that works as a means of grace. When we do God's work, it means taking care of the people that need it. It means that we grow closer to God when we do just that. When we look at our readings from today, they all highlight different aspects of why it's important. The Gospel reading lays out one of the firmest explanations we have. In our reading today from Matthew, we have Jesus talking about what will happen when the Human One comes in majesty and the nations are judged. What's interesting is what isn't here. There are no creed's here, there are no affirmations. What there is, is a test of what we did. Those who have helped, those who have fed the hungry, those who gave drink to the thirsty, those who gave clothes to the naked, those who cared for the sick, and those that visited the prisoner will be seen as having done God's will. Having done it for Christ Himself. And the others are left baffled. Thinking that they never saw Christ so that they could feed him, so that they could clothe him, that if they never saw him how could they help him? The answer is simple. When we do it for others, we do it for Christ. The call is to put our faith into action.

That idea is strengthened by James, who asks what it is to have faith if we don't do anything to show it. And I think it raises an interesting point. Because it raises the question of what does our faith mean? Anyone can say that they believe in God the Father, they believe in Christ the Son, and they believe in the Holy Spirit. Those are words. What they aren't, is doing God's will. Are they important? Yes. But the question becomes, why are they important? And James reminds us that, how can we claim to have faith if we don't live it? If you simply tell somebody have a nice meal when they're hungry, you aren't doing anything to help them. When you tell those that can't afford to turn on the heat to stay warm, you aren't doing anything for them. The last line really lays it out. “Faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.” You can say what you believe but if you don't live it, do you truly believe it? And that's an important point. We aren't called to be passive observers of God's world. We aren't called to simply watch and wait. We're called to do.

We see this again in Isaiah. That God is a refuge for the poor, for the needy in distress, a hiding place from the storm shade from the heat. That God's going to look after those in need. One of the things that Christ is constantly saying is love your neighbor. One of the things that we see in the Old Testament is love your neighbor. What we get in everything that we have for today's readings, is an overarching picture of exactly what it means to show your neighbor the kind of love that God expects. That we do what we can, that we use what we have to do good in the world. And it means doing it by whatever means necessary. That it's not about simply saying the words and it's not about having good intentions.

I'm reminded of her recent criticism that I too feel deeply. It's one that we get, often when problems arise. That we see people send thoughts and prayers. And we have talked about this before, when we've talked about what prayer is and how prayer works. One of the most valid criticisms that I have seen is that when hardships happen, one of the biggest responses that we get is that we're sending thoughts and prayers. And reminded of James when people say that, because though those things are important, what they lead to is just as important. If your prayer is that people have food, pray about it, and then act on it. If your prayer is that poor people are taken care of and get the help that they need, then you act on it after you pray about it. Our prayers shouldn't just be God, I need you to take care of this while I'm going to sit by and just keep praying about it. It's one thing when we pray about things that are out of our control. When we know that everything that is happening in a situation is beyond what we can do and all we can do is pray. Then we pray. But we also have to think about the things that are in our control. If somebody says to you that they are struggling, then by all means pray with them and pray for them, but don't stop there. If the best we can do is hand things over to God and never pick up our own two hands, we're telling God that we don't feel his work is necessary. It can be hard. We are a people of limited resources with limited time and limited energy. And so, prayer is important because often we have to pray about things that we can't get to. But too often we let prayer be the only answer instead of the starting point.

When Christ calls us to help those in need, when Christ calls us to take care of those around us, when Christ calls us to make the world a better place, he doesn't expect us to do it by prayer alone. He expects us to do it by leading by example, by giving, and by caring. You'll see it if you look for it. I'm very proud of the way that the United Methodist Church works in situations that are troubling. I've seen it in the local church, I have seen it in the global church, that we have disaster relief organizations that do work all over the world that rely on organizations on the ground in various regions that rely on the local church. That we are a network of support helping all those in need. I've seen it time and again, that when a cause is brought up in the church, I have seen you take action. And it warms my heart to know that Christ is moving in you. My call now is that we never forget that that we never think that we have done all that we can. Because I don't want anybody to think that I'm saying that we aren't doing anything. Because I know that not to be true. I know that when I look out, I see the faces of people who care. That when I pick up the phone, I talk to people who are generous. But I

also want to make sure that we're people who are always pushing ourselves to find new ways to reach out, and new ways to help so that we don't let our faith grow stale. That we do not let our beliefs become just words, that we always follow them up with faithful actions.

And that is how helping the poor and the hungry, and all those in need is a means of grace. Because we make it how we live. That we make it part of how our lives are. That one of the ways that we interact with others is by treating them as we would treat Christ in front of us. That we see the image of God in every person. Because we are all made in God's image. That when Christ gives us an example of who a good neighbor is, it is the one who helped, even when they had no relation to the person and when they had not even a connection through faith. When we see the Good Samaritan, we see somebody helping someone because they were in need. We are not asked to pick and choose only those who believe what we believe. We are called to help those in need. And that is the mission that we have. It's one that we can do by ourselves. And it's one that we do even better when we do it together. And it's one of the ways that we know that no problem is too big. Because if one of us feels that we cannot handle it on our own, then we talk to others and we pool our resources to do things we could never do alone. And we make a real difference in the world. And we make a real difference in people's hearts. I know people whose first experience with God's love has been through somebody loving them. We live our faith because we live in Christ. If we are to claim that we are born anew in Christ, that we are given a life in him, then it's our responsibility to share that, to welcome others to it, to grow, to be generous, to be kind, compassionate, and caring.

And that we do it by whatever means we have. That it doesn't matter if it's in the local church or the local government. We make decisions that will benefit those in need. We do what we can to help those that we may not be able to help on our own. But we build a society that views every person that is hungry as deserving to be fed. Every person who is naked as deserving to be clothed. Every person who is sick as a person that deserves to be taken care of. That every person in need knows that the people of God are fighting for them always.

So when we talk about means of grace, and we finish out next week with talking about our togetherness, I want you to reflect on all the things that we have talked about, because they all interlaced together into a life lived in Christ. A life in which we commune with the Holy Spirit through prayer, through fasting, that we constantly are a people who are seeking justice, who are helping the needy, that we are a people who study so that we better understand God and how to make a difference in this world. That God's will may be done. And that all of those things link together because, in the end, they are all how we live our faith. So, I encourage each of you to think about the things that you currently do and evaluate, are there things you could do differently? Are there things you could do better? Are there things that you want to make sure you keep doing? Let us constantly be reflecting upon our lives, so that we may reflect God's love in them. That through the means of grace we grow closer to God the Father, to Christ our Savior, and that we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That we live a faithful life true to the God that loves us by living his will faithfully. 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	John Millsap		
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	Kim Hennes	

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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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.

10/11/2020 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.

PPRC will meet Sunday, October 25th at 12:30pm at Greenup UMC.

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.

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

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL 61920