

Worship Together

Means of Grace: Part 6 “Worship Together”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 18th, 2020

20th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 7:1-7; Hebrews 10:18-25; Matthew 18:15-20

Reflection: Psalm 117

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 117

*Praise the Lord, all you nations!
Extol him, all you peoples!
For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 117 NRSV*)*

We read the words of Psalm 117 and we immediately notice the brevity. We might be caught off guard expecting more, but what more do we really need? We hear a call to praise the Lord, and that his steadfast love endures forever. What more could we really ask for, but that God loves us? What more do we need than to praise God for this wondrous love? How often do we get caught up in finding more words than needed to say something important?

Prayer: God of love and mercy. Give us a heart that we may love as you love. Grant us the vision that we may see your faithful love for us. Show us the way that we may join together as your people in your name. 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 Jeremiah chapter 7, verses 1 through 7.

Jeremiah received the Lord's word: Stand near the gate of the Lord's temple and proclaim there this message: Listen to the Lord's word, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel, says: Improve your conduct and your actions, and I will dwell with you in this place. Don't trust in lies: "This is the Lord's temple! The Lord's temple! The Lord's temple!" No, if you truly reform your ways and your actions; if you treat each other justly; if you stop taking advantage of the immigrant, orphan, or widow; if you don't shed the blood of the innocent in this place, or go after other gods to your own ruin, only then will I dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave long ago to your ancestors for all time. (Jeremiah 7:1-7 CEB+)

Our next reading is from Hebrews chapter 10, verses 18 through 25.

When there is forgiveness for these things, there is no longer an offering for sin. Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, and we have a great high priest over God's house. Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water. Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:18-25 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Matthew, chapter 18, verses 15 through 20.

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them." (Matthew 18:15-20 CEB+)

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

Our final message in our Means of Grace series is about worshiping together. And I think that I saved this for last because it ties everything together. Everything that we have been discussing over the last few weeks comes to a head with how we worship together. And this acts as a means of grace, because of the fact that humans are social creatures. And Christianity is a social religion. It is not something that you can truly do on your own. The easiest way to highlight this is to look at the last two weeks, when we talked about helping those in need and seeking justice. You can't do those things alone, because even if you are acting alone, you're acting for others. And there's multiple reasons that community is an important means of grace.

When we look at our readings for today, we see in Jeremiah that the message standing outside of the Lord's temple was that you do this together. And if you work towards God's goals, then God will be with you. That it's about how we treat each other. And how we keep each other in check. And only then is God truly with us. One of the interesting things is that Jeremiah says, "Don't trust in lies: 'This is the Lord's temple! The Lord's temple! The Lord's temple!'" And one might think, well, how is that a lie? Well, I think what Jeremiah is saying is that simply showing up, isn't it. That you have to act like you're in God's presence. That you have to treat each other well. That you have to live a good life, at least try. That you can't just show up and expect God to do all the heavy lifting. And we are reminded that accountability is a big part of it.

Our reading from Matthew talks about how if you have a problem, go and talk to whoever it is. If they won't listen to you bring others and make an effort to help each other. Because that's easier to do when you are regularly checking in and seeing each other. If that doesn't work, bring the concern to the church. Do everything you can to get right with each other. We get the famous line at the end of our reading that "where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them." That it is important to gather. It is important to be with each other in some way. That when we can come together, God listens. I don't think it is just about having help or needing confirmation either. We are gathered together because we need each other. Because it's really easy to get lost in our own thoughts and our own doubts and to talk ourselves into things.

I think that's where Hebrews comes in. That we're called to "draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water." We're called to not stop meeting together. So that we can encourage each other, we strengthen each other, we help each other, we correct each other, and we can only do this when we have that community together. Now I know there's going to be that thought of, well, what about those who can't be with us right now? There are those that may be reading these words on paper right now, those of you who are here with me on a Sunday morning, those who are at home, watching or listening. And the thing is that we can't always be in the same place. But we still have ways to stay connected. And the other means of grace that we have discussed, help us to build that connection.

Because even if we cannot be in the same location, we can still pray for each other. We can still lift each other up in prayer. We can still join each other and fasting. We can still share our studies together. We can still fight for justice. Together we can still help those in need. All of it done together. I think that right now, in this trying time, community is more important than ever. Notice that somebody isn't at church? Give them a call, send them a letter, find out how they're doing, check in and make sure they're okay. If you notice, let me know. And I'll check in too. Let others know and they'll check in. And we shared that responsibility so that we're all checking in on each other, finding out how the others are doing finding out if there's something wrong. If there's a concern, then we can share it with others. And we do all those things that we do, because we are looking in on each other.

That accountability is important. The accountability that we heard in our readings for today, that we are supposed to correct each other and help each other. Because it's easy for us to get caught up sometimes in our own ideas. Sometimes those ideas don't really fit in with reality. It's easy for us to see ourselves one way and find out that we're acting another. And often we don't find out until someone else tells us. And I think that matters. Because there's a lot that we can do that we may not understand that we're doing. Until we get that outside confirmation. It's also easy to let things slide when there's no one holding you accountable. That when you're not part of a group, whether it's a small group or a large group, whether it's a few of you that study together, sing together, do things together, in whatever way you do them. It could be the larger congregation, or the charge, or our district, or our conference, our neighbors, our community, in whatever way we are joining together in a worshipful experience, in whatever ways we join together to share the means of grace, the community becomes a means of grace on its own. Because by connecting in the community, we have people that hold us accountable, and we hold others accountable. And we begin to share a bond in Christ. That Christ wants us to be together. The Christ wants us to hold each other accountable, because we need that. We can get lost in our own ideas, our own views. And sometimes it takes somebody else saying, I think you're wrong. For us to actually stop and consider. And that's good.

It also helps to be strengthened. That sometimes we feel like we do the same things over and over and we start to wonder, is it worth it? But when we have a community around us that strengthens us, that says, yes, we're doing this together. And it's good. Then we're given that resolve to keep going. And we see it in prayer. And we see it in fasting. And we see it in study. We see it in the ways that we seek justice. And we see it in the ways that we help others. That when we have those community connections, sometimes we're reminded of somebody who was in need in the church came together and they helped. Everybody giving something of what they could. And together, it becomes something bigger. And it becomes an act of kindness from the community. And it makes the community one of invitation. That others are welcome to share in that kindness. And we see the community band together, to help others, to pray for others. That we have a shared list of prayer concerns that we lift up. That we have

all of those things that we bring together as a community of believers and all the things that we share in in worship. That we experience God through each other because we're there for the same reason.

And it helps. It helps us to grow. Maybe it's seeing a change in someone else and we say gosh I want to do that too. And we talk to them and we work with them. And others see the change and want to be part of it. And soon it becomes a whole flock, working together on being better people. Taking better care of ourselves, taking better care of our communities, taking better care of our neighbors and our loved ones. Living out God's purpose together. And of course, the best way to do that is to be able to be together. But we know that not everyone can. Circumstances sometimes prevent that. And that's where our outreach comes in. An act of worship doesn't have to be just Sunday morning. When we gather together to study in person, or however, maybe it's just everyone studying on their own and sharing thoughts on it later. Maybe it's Sunday school, maybe it's a midweek study. Maybe it's a prayer group, where you just get together every so often. And maybe it's just a call that you make all together and call each other and pray and join together knowing that you are sharing those things with each other, and with God. That you are sharing in knowledge together and sharing a knowledge of Christ. And in building community, we make ourselves better, and we reach for more, and we do more.

And so, we need to make sure that we open up ourselves to all those opportunities for worship. All those opportunities, we have to proclaim God's goodness, to proclaim God's love, to share in God's mercy and God's grace to remind others of God's steadfast love that endures throughout our many mistakes. That we comfort each other. That we support each other. That we correct each other. That we do these things in Christ's name. That we know Christ is with us, which emboldens us and strengthens us. It reminds us that we are of one body redeemed by one blood and that we are one people, God's people, doing God's will.

This last means of grace, this last way that we discuss about joining together that we remember all that it entails. Not just being together in worship one day a week, but living a life of worship, coming together in many ways. Joining each other in many means of grace. Strengthening each other that are we are stronger because when one of us is weak, the others can lift up the weak and when it's our turn to be weak, others will lift us up. And in that way we keep each other from stumbling and we keep each other from falling. We keep each other from drifting away, from drifting apart. Because we take an interest and we care, because we know that Christ cares about us. And Christ didn't call us together just because he wants to see numbers on attendance sheets. Because he wants good numbers reported back to a head office somewhere. But because we need each other in the same way that we need Christ. Because if we accept that God can work through us, if we accept that our Heavenly Father has a purpose in the things that we do, then we need to accept that God can have a purpose in others, especially in helping us grow. Because we should never stop growing. Because we are always striving for perfection in God. A perfected faith that allows us to love completely, to

serve God without question. To do God's will, happily, joyfully. To sing God's praises and glorify God's name. Because we know what God is to us. And we're strengthened in the way that God acts through others.

So let us always remember that we are a community when we worship together, we are brought together in God's love and care, that we were placed here together so that we could help each other grow, that we could help each other in difficult times, whether we are the one offering the help, or the one being helped. That we strengthen each other in all that we are and all that we do. Because God strengthens us in all that we are and all that we do. That we are there for each other through thick and thin because Christ is there for us through thick and thin. That when we're unsure, we know which way to go because we help each other the same way the Holy Spirit helps us. So be in worship together in whatever way that takes form. But never forget to help each other to grow in love and in grace. That we may gently correct each other. That we may lovingly support each other. That we may mercifully forgive each other. That we may all grow through the means of grace to a closer life with God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 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	Brenda Hurt	Anne Winkler Heinrichs
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
Leo Smith	Family of Dan Eubank	Family of Charlotte Carrell	Bonnie Hite
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes		

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.

10/18/2020 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.

We are currently collecting names to be read on November 1st for All Saints Sunday. If you have the name of someone who has passed in the last year, please let me know so that I can have their name read.

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