

Take Responsibility

Take Care: Part 2 “Take Responsibility”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – June 6, 2021

Trinity Sunday

Readings: Acts 22:3-21

Reflection: Psalm 51

Greeting: Let your faithful love comfort me Lord. Let your compassion come to me so I can live again. Your word and your instructions are my joy! Your righteousness lasts forever! Praise the Lord!

Prayer: God our guardian, you know the worries in our hearts and the troubles that weigh on our minds. Refresh and renew us by your Holy Spirit, and give us a right heart, that we may be strengthened in faith so that we may more fully love and seek that paths you lay before us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 46

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:1-17 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 51 and we hear seeking God when we repent. That God will wash our sins away and give us a right spirit. How do you seek out God when you need to be

forgiven? What are the prayers that you give to repent? How can we be an example even in our brokenness? How do you share hope with others?

Prayer: O God, help us to seek you as we care for ourselves. Help us to take responsibility for our actions so we can live more fully in you. Help us to seek out your love that you may strengthen us in our faith and our hope. Hear our prayers and have mercy on us Lord. May you always guide us and lead us by your righteous hand. 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 reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading is from Acts chapter 22, verses 3 through 21.

Paul continued, "I'm a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia but raised in this city. Under Gamaliel's instruction, I was trained in the strict interpretation of our ancestral Law. I am passionately loyal to God, just like you who are gathered here today. I harassed those who followed this Way to their death, arresting and delivering both men and women into prison. The high priest and the whole Jerusalem Council can testify about me. I received letters from them, addressed to our associates in Damascus, then went there to bring those who were arrested to Jerusalem so they could be punished. "During that journey, about noon, as I approached Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven encircled me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice asking me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?' I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are harassing,' he replied. My traveling companions saw the light, but they didn't hear the voice of the one who spoke to me. I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' 'Get up,' the Lord replied, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told everything you have been appointed to do.' I couldn't see because of the brightness of that light, so my companions led me by the hand into Damascus. "There was a certain man named Ananias. According to the standards of the Law, he was a pious man who enjoyed the respect of all the Jews living there. He came and stood beside me. 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' he said. Instantly, I regained my sight and I could see him. He said, 'The God of our ancestors has selected you to know his will, to see the righteous one, and to hear his voice. You will be his witness to everyone concerning what you have seen and heard. What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash away your sins as you call on his name.' "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I had a visionary experience. I saw the Lord speaking to me. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Leave Jerusalem at once because they won't accept your testimony about me.' I responded, 'Lord, these people know I used to go from one synagogue to the next, beating those who believe in you and throwing them into prison. When Stephen your witness was being killed, I stood there giving my approval, even watching the clothes that belonged to those who were killing him.' Then the Lord said to me, 'Go! I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 22:3-21 CEB+)

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

Today, we look at Paul as we continue in our series about self-care with something that people may not think about as self-care. We see Paul taking responsibility for his actions and owning his past. And the reason I find this to be part of self-care is that when Paul's addressing people he's not trying to sugarcoat his past and he's not trying to gloss over it and pretend like it didn't happen. And the reason I think this is important is because I think it gives Paul a kind of confidence and assuredness in what he's able to do and speak. Because Paul isn't worrying in the back of his head that he's got to try to cover up something that he's got to try to pretend something didn't happen. Paul isn't interested in hiding who he was. But Paul's interested in moving forward while taking responsibility for his past actions. We hear this in various places in Paul's letters and in Acts. But here, when Paul is addressing the people, he gives his own concise history of what's happened. That he's always been loyal to God. Like those who are questioning him that have him on trial in this place, that he's a Jew. He was instructed in strict interpretation of the law. And like the people around him, he's harassed the followers of Christ. Now, Paul could have avoided this. Paul could just talk about everything he's done since then. And we might well ask why Paul would want to delve into his troubled past, because it's not pleasant. It is not something that he would easily shrug off. He once harassed the people of the Way. He used to go about arresting the same kind of people that he now considered to be his brothers and sisters.

But Paul talks about what changed. And Paul talks about his journey of change. About his visions, about being struck blind, about getting his sight back, and about going out. He explains that he talked to God about his worries. That he's not sure he can go and face people in Jerusalem, that he can go to the Jews to preach about Christ, because he was there watching over when Stephen was murdered. That he gave his approval. And he could leave all of this out. There's nothing saying he has to admit to his past mistakes. But I think Paul understands that trying to hide those things would be bad for him. Not just in his witness but if Paul tries to hide his guilt and hide his past and hide those things away so that it's like they'd never happened, then Paul has to deny part of himself. Then he has to deal with the inward guilt. And then there's the guilt he has of not being honest with others about his past. And those things, eat at us. We may not always be willing to recognize the way that they eat at us. But whenever we try to hide something and whenever we try to lie about it, we know that. And it hurts us internally. It hurts our hearts. And then if we're caught in a lie, then we're trying to undo the damage, we're trying to run interference, and we're trying to do all sorts of things that we never would have had to do if we just been honest. And I think Paul recognizes this idea that if he's going to live an honest life and he's going to be the best that he can be that he has to take responsibility and own his past. It may not always be pleasant for him. It may not always make friends the way he would like to. And we know that that even when he talks about needing to go out to bear witness, that the Lord knows he's got to leave Jerusalem. He's going to leave that part of his life behind, because he's lost the trust of the people in Jerusalem that he would want to bear witness to. And he's got to go out and rebuild that trust and he's going to do it by going out to the Gentiles.

And so, when he recounts his story and talks about his mission, owning that part of his history is an important part of Paul being honest to himself and honest with God. Because I don't think it would be possible for Paul to be an effective witness to Christ if he's hiding his past. If he's hiding his mistakes and pretending they never happened. Because all it takes is for one person to remember who he was. And then all the trust unravels. And then there's damage to Paul. That if in Paul's heart he knows what he needs to do, then he also needs to own what he's done. But it also means that Paul can move forward with a clear conscience, not claiming that what he did was right. Not claiming that things were different. But looking back and saying you know what I was wrong. I treated these people horribly. And now I want to be one of them. And so in this Paul is helping himself move forward by embracing his past and saying "that's who I was. But it's not who I am. I was a man who was so zealous in keeping my strict interpretation of the law that I chased down the followers of Christ and I wanted to throw them in prison, and I was happy to watch them stone a man to death. And now I know I'm wrong." But Paul's also saying, "if I can change so can you." But Paul couldn't do that if he didn't have that in his heart. If he didn't know that God was willing to forgive him. Because if Paul can't accept that forgiveness for himself and let go, that he knows he can't forgive others. Because if he's still punishing himself, how can he speak of God's grace?

So, Paul is giving us this message about, not only that he was wrong, but about this idea of change. It's about how we can overcome the past, not by hiding our mistakes, not by pretending that that's never who we were. Paul is saying I saw things very differently than I do now. But this is who I am today. And I think that's an important message for us to take to heart. Because in Paul's heart. He has accepted Christ's redemption. He has accepted Christ into his life and if he's going to walk with Christ, then he has to do it honestly. He knows there's going to be people that are going to be hard on him that aren't going to be as quick to forgive him until he's shown that he is a changed man. Paul can admit when he was wrong. That's an important thing for us to be able to do because if we can take responsibility for our own actions and say "Yes, I did that. Yes, that was me that was me, so headstrong that I thought I couldn't be wrong and now I know I was." In that, Paul has accepted Christ's forgiveness. And in showing that, he has worked to overcome his past that he's focused on the future. I think that's an important lesson for all of us to be able to take in. An important lesson for all of us to be able to move forward. Not burying the past and pretending it never happened. But saying this is the story of how I made it to who I am today, the good and the bad, but it doesn't weigh me down. Because the past doesn't define who I am today. The past shows that I can overcome. The past shows that I can learn from mistakes. The past shows that I can change.

Paul's actions also show that that's not who he is, that now he is a follower of Christ and that he offers forgiveness to the people who are still thinking the way that he did. He isn't looking down on them and saying, "look at you, you're all terrible for the things you're doing." He's saying, "Look, I was like you at one point. But Christ changed my heart and changed my life. And you can too. Invite Christ in, he can change your life as well." And it's that blunt

honesty about himself that makes his story that much more trustworthy. That makes his witness that much more reliable. Because he's honest to others about himself. He isn't trying to say he isn't flawed and that everyone else needs to change. He's saying he makes mistakes too, but it also gives him a freedom. And it's that freedom that's part of our self-care, because when we can embrace our past, it allows us to forgive ourselves and move forward. That we accept Christ's forgiveness and move forward. Because it means that we can forgive others. It means that our hearts are not weighed down with a guilt that we aren't willing to share. It means that in being open and honest with ourselves, we can be open and honest with others, that we can be open and honest with Christ, and that we can invite the Holy Spirit in knowing that we're not pretending that we can hide something from God. And in that Christ lifts a burden off our shoulders, reminding us that we are not defined by our mistakes. Christ sees who we can be.

So, take responsibility for your past. Set right the wrongs that you may have committed, but know that in doing so, it shows who you want to be today. And that who you were then isn't who you are now. And even if you haven't been willing to do it until now, take that freedom that Christ gives us to be forgiven and to forgive, that we may forgive ourselves so that we can move forward with our hearts lighter, knowing that Christ is with us every step of the way. That we may walk forward into the light, never having to hide who or what we are, but walking forward knowing that God loves us and that God forgives us so that we can share that hope with others, knowing the freedom that it gives us to have our hearts lightened by Christ's presence. So that we may all go forward in the peace in the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Have Mercy upon us, O God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out our transgressions. Wash us thoroughly from our iniquities, and cleanse us from our sins. For we acknowledge our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit. 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 below. 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: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Take Care

Our series is *Take Care* and each week we will look at different aspects of self-care and the ways God helps us to take care of ourselves.

May 30th – *Take a Step Back* - 1 Kings 19:1-16

June 6th – *Take Responsibility* – Acts 22:3-21

June 13th – *Take Alone Time* – Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 1:35-38; 6:30-32; Luke 5:15-16; 6:12-13

June 20th – *Take Advice* – Exodus 18:13-26

June 27th – *Take a Friend* – Genesis 2:4b-22; Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Ronnie Winstead
Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Trinity Powers	Lauren Stewart
Charlie Henderson	Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Shelley Murphy
Jeff Davidson	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes
Ruth Ann Finley			

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