

On the Turning Away

The Word in Song IV: Part 2 “On the Turning Away”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – July 18, 2021

8th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Ezekiel 18:21-32

Reflection: Psalm 40

Greeting: O sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name. Tell of his salvation from day to day! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 96*)

Prayer: God our protector, you are with us wherever we go. You know our hearts and our innermost thoughts. Help us to see your presence everywhere we go. Give to us a right heart so that we may love as you love and give as you give. Help us to share your peace with the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord. Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever. (Psalm 40:1-11 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 40 and we hear of trusting God and not turning away. That we find a place where we belong in the Lord. Do you show God’s love and faithfulness to others? How do you experience God’s mercy in your life? How do you show that mercy to others? What is your song of praise that gives hope? Who does it give hope to? What is your hope?

Prayer: O God, help us to seek you in unexpected places. May you help us to not turn away from those in need. Instead, let us show your love and faithfulness. May we be blessed to see you wherever we are. Strengthen us in our faith and put hope in our hearts. Hear our prayers and have mercy on us Lord. Let your spirit guide us in your righteous peace. 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 for today comes from Ezekiel chapter 18 verses 21 through 32.

But if the wicked turn away from all the sins that they have committed, keep all my regulations, and act justly and responsibly, they will surely live and not die. None of the sins that they committed will be held against them, but they will live because they do the right things. Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the LORD God. Certainly not! If they change their ways, they will live. If those who do the right thing turn from righteousness and engage in the same detestable practices that the wicked committed, can they do these things and live? None of their righteous deeds will be remembered. They will die because of their treacheries and sins. But you say, "My Lord's way doesn't measure up." Listen, house of Israel, is it my ways that don't measure up? Isn't it your ways that don't measure up? When those who do the right thing turn from their responsible ways and act maliciously, they will die because of it. For their malicious acts they will die. And when the wicked turn from their wicked deeds and act justly and responsibly, they will preserve their lives. When they become alarmed and turn away from all their sins, they will surely live; they won't die. Yet the house of Israel says, "My Lord's way doesn't measure up." Is it my ways that don't measure up? Isn't it your ways that don't measure up, house of Israel? Therefore, I will judge each of you according to your ways, house of Israel. This is what the LORD God says. Turn, turn away from all your sins. Don't let them be sinful obstacles for you. Abandon all of your repeated sins. Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel? I most certainly don't want anyone to die! This is what the LORD God says. Change your ways, and live! (Ezekiel 18:21-32 CEB+)

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

We continue this week with "The Word in Song" and this week's music comes from Pink Floyd. The song is "On the Turning Away" and it is a song that I've thought about using before but was never quite sure how to frame it. The song itself speaks to me on many different levels in relating to scripture. The music for today is itself a song with a very biblical message at its heart, especially when we get the opening lines. "On the turning away from the pale and downtrodden, and the words they say, which we won't understand. Don't accept that what's happening is just a case of others suffering, or you'll find that you're joining in the turning away." And it's this idea that we cannot turn from others. That we cannot turn from the suffering that we see in the world. We can't just look away. I was reminded of both Jeremiah

and Ezekiel, but I think Ezekiel's words are really the ones that came closest. "If the wicked turn away from all the sins that they have committed, keep all my regulations, and act justly and responsibly, they will surely live and not die." And we get sort of the mirror of that as Ezekiel goes on, that if people turn away from God, and turn away from doing the right thing, if they turn from righteousness, then things will not go well for them. That the wicked who turn from sin will be saved and those who turn from God cast their lives away.

God expects us to do well. God expects us to be able to walk away from our sins. God expects us to be able to care for each other. The last line from our reading today, "I most certainly don't want anyone to die! This is what the Lord God says. Change your ways, and live!" And that's important. It really is. Because that's the gospel message in a nutshell right there, change your ways and live. I mean, we could argue that it's more complicated than that but if we were to break it down to a simple phrase that one would be fitting. Because that's what Christ offers us, his salvation. A path so that we can change, and that we can live that we can live in Him eternally. That God calls us to step away from doing the wrong thing. God asks us to stop turning away from him. And that we come together that we may do God's will, that we may help one another. And that's a really big thing that we have to be able to look at and understand. Though internal holiness is important, and I wouldn't want to downplay that aspect, when we don't connect it with caring for the least and the last, from doing what is right for others, it's hard to say that we are following Christ. What do I mean? When we aren't doing the things that Christ said were the most important things we need to do, how are we actually following him? How is it we can claim to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves if we want to turn away from other people's suffering?

And that's one of the things that Ezekiel sees. People want to make all sorts of excuses. They'll want to say that God's asking too much. But the truth is that it's simply up to us to be able to turn away from doing wrong and to turn to doing good. And that God is there to help us. Christ is there to give us the support we need to be able to live that life. The Holy Spirit is there to guide us into that being. But it is tempting. It's very tempting to join in the turning away, because it's often easier to turn away from our problems than to turn to God so that he can help us with them. It's even harder when we want to turn away from what we consider to be other people's problems because once we look away, it's easy for things to be out of sight out of mind. But it's not out of sight for God. And neither are our actions to ignore the things around us.

This week I got a very interesting look at simply doing what is right because it is right. And I was guided there by the eyes of a child. As you might know, I took my kids up to Chicago for a little vacation this week. And we did a lot of walking as part of it. Something happened though that made me think about the message I had planned for this week. That would be Simon. Simon noticed anyone who was asking for help along the street. Simon instinctively wanted to help them. To paraphrase his explanation, he wanted to help them get money, so they'd be able to get a place to live. Now, somebody did try to warn us that some of the people

might be trying to scam us. My reply was that how I responded was on me. What they did with my kindness was on them. I couldn't think of a rational explanation that I could give to Simon about why we shouldn't help someone who was asking for help. Could they be lying? Sure. People lie about things all the time. I am not proud of it, but I know I've lied about things in my life, and I'm sure you have too. However, I stopped to think about this like Simon. If someone was asking for help, then help should be given. Which is the Christian response. It doesn't get much simpler. Simon didn't want to be the one who turned away from those in need, and I am blessed to have been reminded of that simple truth through him.

One of the things that we often fail to recognize about ourselves is that our inaction is sometimes just as important as our actions. And what I mean by this is that sometimes it's the things that we choose not to do that end up speaking louder than anything else that we've done. That when we choose not to give to those in need, we're turning away. When we choose not to share when things are going well for us, we are turning away. When we decide that what's ours is ours and we don't need to give, we join the turning away. We might worry about what people will do with our help. But how far do we take that? Will we want to not help someone get a home because they might someday do something wrong there? Do we not help someone because we think they won't use the money the way we would? And what are we saying to those around us when we refuse to help others? And that last part of Ezekiel reminded me of that last verse of "On the Turning Away" by Pink Floyd. "No more turning away from the weak and the weary. No more turning away from the coldness inside. Just a world that we all must share. It's not enough just to stand and stare. Is it only a dream that they'll be no more turning away?" "Abandon all of your repeated sins. Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel?"

Someone might ask how I make the connection between these songs and the Bible. Which is a good question. But my response is that it is just that my faith is everywhere. I see God in everything. When I hear music, I don't hear some music as a Christian and other music as just me, but I hear it all in faith. I connect everything around me to being a disciple of Jesus Christ, because it is a part of who I am. I don't have pockets of things that I do as a Christian and things I do outside of that. As a follower of Christ, everything I do and see is framed by that relationship. I may not do everything as well as I could, but I don't think that there's parts of my life that are disconnected from God. Wherever it's coming from, I am open to God's influence in my life. In what I see, in what I hear, in what I feel.

I heard the words of the music for today and I heard a reminder of what Christ has called us all to do and to be. Even if it is just the way that I hear the music selection for today, I'm OK with that because it connected me to Christ, and that is important no matter how it comes to us. It reminds me that God is actively helping us all the time, to keep us from turning away so that we always turn back to him. And so, I call on all of you to recognize that God is ever present everywhere in your life, always there to help you. Even when you want to simply look away. When you want to stop trying. God is there to help. And so let us turn from sin by

refusing to turn away from those in need. That we join together to do God's will so that all may share in the grace and the love and the abundance that we have in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. 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.

July 11th – *Doctor My Eyes* – Isaiah 38:1-20

July 18th – *On the Turning Away* – Ezekiel 18:21-32

July 25th – *Hold My Hand* – Matthew 14:22-36

August 1st – *Follow Me* – Luke 5:1-11,27-32

August 8th – *Turn, Turn, Turn* – Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

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	Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson
Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland
Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Shelley Murphy	Jeff Davidson
Ruth Ann Finley	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Kristen & Zack Morecraft	Anne Cutright
Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte		

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