

## Where is God When...?

Questions of Faith: Part 3 “Where is God When...?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – February 13, 2022

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Epiphany

**Readings:** Daniel 12:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Mark 13:32-37

**Reflection:** Psalm 13

**Greeting:** The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps broke open. And the clouds drop down the dew. Praise the Lord! (*Proverbs 3*)

**Prayer:** Lord, we turn to you this day that we may seek your wisdom. We know that all knowledge begins with you. Help us to walk in your ways and to follow the example set for us in Jesus Christ our redeemer. Bring us into your light so that we may live in your great love. Renew our spirit so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Strengthen our faith and our hope in your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 13

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me. (Psalm 13 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 13 and hear of longing for God’s presence. In it, there is a fear of being hidden from the Lord. Yet we still hear of trusting in God’s steadfast love. Do you ever worry that God is being hidden from your eyes? In times of trouble, do you feel that Christ is somehow far away from you? Do our doubts cause you to stumble? Is it easy to forget God’s love in times of trouble? What does it mean to you to seek God’s salvation?

**Prayer:** O Heavenly Father, you have watched over us all the days of our lives. Be with us now as we come to you with our worries and questions. Help us to find wisdom through your steadfast love. Help us to remember you are always with us in all things. We thank you that your ear is always turned towards us so that we may come to you with the joys and troubles in our hearts. We raise our prayers to you because of your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek your grace and love through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Job chapter 40 verses 1 through 14.

*And the LORD said to Job: "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond." Then Job answered the LORD: "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further." Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? "Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then I will also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can give you victory. (Job 40:1-14 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from James chapter 1 verses 12 through 16.

*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved. (James 1:12-16 NRSV\*)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 13 verses 1 through 5.

*At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." (Luke 13:1-5 NRSV\*)*

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

I wanted to talk about the question of "where is God when...?" and we can sort of fill in the blank from there. Because this is a question that comes up, and especially when we are in hard times, when bad things happen. And I'm wanting to touch on the question of where is God when these things happen for today but for a further exploration of this entire subject, I'm going to actually be making this the focus of our series during Lent that addresses some questions of how we deal with difficulty. But today's question is more about if God is abandoning us during difficult times, and how we deal with that. I want to begin with the fallacy of the statement

“everything happens for a reason.” The reason that I do not sit well with this statement is because we like to ascribe that everything happens because God wanted it to happen. That God has a purpose in making everything in our lives happen the way it does. And for this, I would say no. Our gospel reading is an example of Jesus pointing out that we like to ascribe everything to some divine purpose. They're talking about some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, which the easiest way to interpret that is that Pilate had taken action that led to people bringing their sacrifices to the temple being killed. And Jesus asks a question that's rather pointed. “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?” The answer is no. He goes on to ask about a tower falling and killing some of the people who were there, and he wants to know if that shows that they were worse sinners than everyone else, that the reason that they died was because of their own sin. And again, the answer is no. Now there's a lot of ways to take the rest of that reading. But those were the things that I wanted to latch on to for today's message. Because Christ isn't saying God wasn't with those people. But he's also not saying God did it because of something they did. Because sometimes things happen. And we like to think that there's a purpose behind everything. And I think that that causes us to stumble when we are confronted with difficulty. Because sometimes we want ask “what did I do to deserve this? Where did I go wrong that God is punishing me in this way?” And it makes us question if God is even there in those difficult times. And I think the problem is that we get to latched on to thinking that God is moving everything around and poking his finger in every little thing that happens. And we forget that we live in a world of freewill. Both your will and the will of those around you. We also live in the naturally ordered world. If a tower falls, did it fall because God commanded it or because gravity exists? We can get very much caught up in trying to put more meaning in things than they need.

And we can hear that in James because James talks about temptation. And you might wonder how that relates. The reason that it does is because when James talks about temptation he points out something that we can forget. Because James says that no one when they're tempted should claim that they're being tempted by God. Because God can't be tempted by evil and God doesn't tempt people. It's not in his character. James notes, something about the human condition. That we're tempted by our own desires. Most of the temptation we have comes from our own thoughts and our own wants. And sometimes we twist ourselves into thinking that it's not our fault. And I'm not here to lay blame at anyone's feet because sometimes things happen even when there is no temptation. Sometimes bad things happen. Tragedy strikes. I think I can speak for most all of us here that when tragedy hits it can be hard on faith because we want to know “why?” and we want to know “what was God doing that he missed this thing happening?” “What was God up to that he didn't notice?” Or if God didn't notice, why didn't God do something about it?

And for that, I was reminded of Job. Now, we can get ourselves into a bit of a fix if we don't read Job properly, and I've touched on this before when we walked through Job. One of

the things that we can miss in all of it is that if we sort of glance over Job and give it a kid's Sunday school lesson treatment, we get Job being tempted and we want to say Job was good and God noticed he was good and stayed true and rewarded him. In that we miss the actual message in Job. I picked the reading from Job because of the fact that it teaches us a lesson about trying to fully understand things that we can't, and it comes with God's response to Job. You'll notice this isn't the "good and faithful Job, you've spoken wisely" that we sometimes trick ourselves into thinking is there. Instead, we have the Lord saying to Job "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond." And at this point, Job has made some accusations and is learning his lesson about keeping his mouth shut. But the problem is that because he's already made statements and has called God out, God is chiding him now for his silence. And he asks "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God and can you thunder with a voice like his?" God basically asks Job what can you do? Can you do everything I can? Can you be God? He tells Job that he'll acknowledge Job's power when he can show it. But until then, Job shouldn't speak of things he knows nothing about. Now that might sound a little dark and dreary. It might sound a little disheartening at first read. But there's a poetry to Job that we have to understand. Because the book of Job is about understanding God's sovereignty. God's not tempting Job and the test that Job goes through is allegorical, not historical. It's not an actual account of what happened to a man named Job and his friends who recite poetry as argument. Job is about understanding that God is always there. But we can't always understand why God may stay his hand or may do what he needs to do. And we can't always know if something happens because God willed it to happen or if it happened because this is the world we live in. We can go back to our Gospel reading and ask "was God absent when the tower fell? Did God make the tower fall? Or do things sometimes fall down?" And we find meaning so that we can pick up the pieces and move on.

For me, that's the bigger lesson in all of this. Where was God? Right there with you. No matter what it is that happened, God was there. But if God stepped in with a miracle for everything in life, what would life be? Certainly not the life that we currently live. What would happen to our free will if every time we made a choice God stepped in to forbid us from choosing? This, in some ways, can be unsatisfying. For me, it can be hard because I no longer ask the question "Where was God when...?" when something happens. I don't even ask myself why God made it happen because I accept that life happens. But I do look at what my choices are. How I can respond to the things happening. And knowing that God is there for me makes it easier. Because when we talk about dealing with hardships, and grief, and suffering, and loss it's easy to get lost in the unanswerable questions of "why?" and we get distracted from the real question of "what now?" And I don't say that lightly. But pain and hardship are part of life. It can make us stronger. It can make us wiser. It can humble us. It can test our faith because we're tempted to give up. But God isn't tempting us to give up. God is there for us, even if we're too blinded by grief and anger to see him. But I take comfort in knowing that God is there and that when I'm angry and when I'm hurt, I can complain to God. And I can ask forgiveness if

I lose my temper in that complaining. But I have found that if I vent to the Lord and I let out my frustrations and my futility, my feelings of impotence at not being able to change the things around me, I'm comforted by the love that I'm shown and the grace to help me to change myself to live in the world that surrounds me. And I pray that I grow a little wiser and a little stronger and a little humbler every time I walk out of a time of darkness. Because I know where God the Father was in all of those difficult times. I know where the Holy Spirit was residing. I know where Christ was standing and is standing: with me. So that whenever I turn to him, I may know he's there. Even if I can't understand the why or the how, if I can't piece it together and understand the past, the one thing that I have in Christ always is a future. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. Help us to live a life by your wisdom, that we may love and forgive through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 – Questions of Faith

In this series, Pastor Cameron will be answering questions that have been asked of him at various times. If you have a question you'd like him to address as part of this series, just let him know.

### 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	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

Rev Camron 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

\* 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.