

## **Our Thoughts**

The Dark Valley: Part 3 “Our Thoughts”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 20, 2022

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings:** Isaiah 55:1-9

**Reflection:** Psalm 63

**Greeting:** Tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord for he is merciful and compassionate. God is very patient and full of faithful love. The Lord our God is always ready to forgive. (*Joel 2*)

**Prayer:** Lord, your mercy is always upon us. Be gracious to all those who have strayed from your ways and welcome them once again into your love. Lift us up so that we may always turn to you with repentant hearts and may embrace you in faith. Help us to hold to the eternal truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reign as one God, forevermore. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 63

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped. (Psalm 63 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 63 and hear of holding fast to God. We hear of praising God for his steadfast love. Do you give thanks for the many ways that God has impacted your life? Do you share in that by showing mercy and grace to others? Do you think about all the small ways God has been a part of your life? All the ways that Christ is with you day in and day out? Do you try to share those joys with others? How do you share in the love and faithfulness that Christ has shown you?

**Prayer:** Lord, we turn to you now in prayer. We come before you with the celebrations of the joys in our lives. We come before you with the troubles of our hearts. We look to you in all things that your steadfast love may guide and lead us. Help us in our doubts and worries and strengthen us in faith, through Jesus Christ, our faithful redeemer. May we find peace and grace through that same 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 reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1 through 9.

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:1-9 NRSV\*)*

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

So, for today's message we turn to Isaiah. When reading Isaiah during this Lenten season, I reflected on the way that we often try to attribute our own way of thinking to the way that God acts and thinks. One of the things that we get from Isaiah is the way that God is so far beyond what we can imagine that God's way of thinking is not our way of thinking. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, God's ways are higher than our ways and God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And the reason that this matters is because sometimes we expect God to follow our train of thought and to do things the way that we would do them. That from our limited perspective, we expect God to act like us. The reason this can become such a pitfall for us is that it causes trouble when we enter the difficult times. When things get rough, we can get frustrated with not understanding what God's thoughts are. We begin to look for a purpose based on our thoughts and looking for reasons for what happened based on our reasoning. If we can't imagine why God wouldn't do what we want God to do, then it must be that God isn't doing anything. We fall into this trap of thinking that we can fully understand God. This becomes even more troubling because of the fact that it causes us to begin to overlook all

of the goodness that God brings as well. Isaiah opens with this idea that God is telling the people he will always be with them. God will lead people into things they never anticipated and couldn't imagine. That we may not understand but God will make things happen, and God will be with us, and God will help us. That we should seek God while God is near. That we should return to the Lord because the Lord's mercy is abundant. That God's pardon is there for us.

Part of that is giving up our own ways and our own thoughts. The ways that we trick ourselves into knowing that we are right. That idea of knowing that we are right is what can cause us to lose faith in difficult times. Because the truth of the matter is that we often don't know what the best thing to happen would be. We only see what the best thing we can see is. The difference here is that we may only be viewing one moment in time out of all eternity. Our understanding may only let us grasp such a small part of the picture. And, though we are reluctant to admit it, a lot of times our wants can be rather selfish. Because it's often not for our needs that we are desperately seeking something from God but out of our desires. Another problem that comes from this is that we then begin to place our wants higher than God's needs. How often when we are praying for something that we really want do our prayers simply become "God let this happen because I really want it." How often do we stop to consider if this is the best for everyone? Is this the best for God's plans? Is this the best thing that should happen? Is this even the best thing for me? And that can be really difficult to think about because we often get so caught up in ourselves that it's hard for us to see beyond the moment. And for me, this is one of the reasons that centering ourselves in prayer is important. It comes back to that idea that we've talked about previously that when we pray we have to remember that our prayers need to be that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Not that our wants triumph over everything else. Not that we trick ourselves into thinking that if we need something that God must abide by our own thinking.

But another pitfall that we come into this with is sometimes we convince ourselves so deeply that we are right that not even God can change our minds. And this type of thinking is what's caused people to interpret Scripture in very particular ways at different points in time. Because they want to frame God as always being on their side. And a great example of this comes from the great American debate on slavery. When debate came up about slavery, some would point out that the Bible says slavery is okay. Those who wanted to defend slavery interpreted the story of Noah and his sons to say that one of the lines of Noah was destined to be slaves and that's the people that are in slavery today. So, it's all okay because that's what God wanted. Now you might be sitting there thinking that this seems like a bit of a stretch of logic. And it was. Their thoughts guided what they wanted God to say. But the problem now is that that type of thinking often happens in other ways people interpret Scripture. Sometimes we read certain parts of the Bible and we read them a particular way because it lines up with what we already believe, even if it doesn't match up with the rest of the Bible. And the problem is that then we are assuming that God thinks like we do. We are assuming that we can interpret correctly once and never have to look at it again. Because surely God said it and that's the final

word. The problem though, is that it's not often that God's actually said exactly what we're wanting. It's that we interpret what God said to fit our situation. We expect God's thoughts to be our thoughts and his ways to be our ways. And sometimes this causes us to fall down into a hole where we're constantly trying to defend a certain line of thought because it helps us to keep doing what we're doing. Not because we see it to be holy or right or just, but because we found an excuse to not have to change.

Sometimes things fall in a completely different pattern when we try to line up our thoughts with God's thoughts. Sometimes, if we can't make sense of something, then we write it off completely and say nobody knows so it doesn't matter. And we don't revisit those thoughts, wondering if maybe God has shown us something new. That idea really struck me when thinking about God's ways and our ways being different. God reaches out to us in so many ways and calls to us in so many different ways. God speaks to us differently at different times in our lives. Because God can always find a way to reach into our lives to show his grace and his mercy. Christ will always be there to step into our lives to show his goodness. But it may not always look the same. Just as we are taught the Bible differently when we are little children compared to how we understand it when we are grown adults, compared to how we understand it after we have lived a life full of surprises, joys, and difficulties. Christ knows our lives and knows how to speak to us so that we can hear. But we have to be willing to hear what Christ says. I say this not because I want you to give up on having solid beliefs. Not that at all. I say it because I want you to be able to look at those beliefs and know that they are founded in the love of God. I want you to be able to look at those beliefs and know that they come from living a life in Christ. From knowing that the Holy Spirit inspires you to greater things because of faith through those beliefs. But if we become so set in our ways that we expect God to think like we do, we close ourselves off to those things. And the problem here is that when we enter difficult times, we become so set in what we "know" that we become unable to see the new opportunities and the new things God is trying to tell us. We become so hardened of heart, set in our ways, that we refuse to see God's mercy and love in action in our lives. Because it's not that God is changing. It's not that God is shifting. It's that we are always shifting, with every day bringing us new experience. Every day bringing us new knowledge. And God can use all of those things to reach us and to teach us deeper truths, to give us more abundant joy, and to help us to cope with deeper loss. But if we become so set in our ways that we don't allow God to show us something new, then we become stuck always looking behind to see where we expect God to be, never looking around to see where God is.

So, I guess my point for today is this: don't get caught up in thinking that you know best and that you know it all. That you can define all of who God is, because no matter how we define God, God will always be more. No matter what we expect of God, God will always be more. When we expect that God's love has reached its limit, we are just beginning to see the depths of God's love. When we are beginning to feel that Christ is not with us, we need to look around and see where Christ is because he's still there in our lives, just maybe not where we

expected. That instead of calling the Holy Spirit to meet us where we wanted him to be that we see where the Holy Spirit is calling us to go. So that we may always follow God and not try to lead God. So that we may find that abundance of mercy and that unending love so that we may live a life in Christ and live life abundantly. Knowing that where God is there is always something more. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. 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 – *The Dark Valley***

Our current series will look at the ways in which we deal with issues such as doubt and loss. How does our grief impact us? How does it impact our relationship with God? What happens in that dark valley?

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan	Rosie Chancelor
Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes	Ted Marrs	Family of James Myers
Family of Roger VanScyoc	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Darrell Quick	

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

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