

Priority

Interpretation: Part 5 “Priority”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 7, 2022

9th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 17:19-22; Galatians 6:1-3; John 5:2-11

Reflection: Psalm 36

Greeting: The Lord has told us what is good and right. The Lord requires of us that we are to do justice. The Lord our God calls us to love kindness. We are to walk humbly with our God! Praise the Lord! (*Micah 6:8*)

Prayer: O God, our Guide and Guardian, you have led us away from the stress and the strain of the world to be in your peaceful presence. Grant us grace to worship you in Spirit and in truth. May we find comfort in your love and may you build us up by your faith. Enable us to do the work that you have called us to, without fear of failure or hesitation to do good. May we worship you, not just with our lips this hour, but in word and deed all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 36

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your salvation to the upright of heart! (Psalm 36:5-10 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 36 and hear of God’s love and faithfulness. That God watches over all with righteousness. That we may find shelter from the world with the Lord. That we know God’s love and light are there for our salvation. How have you experienced God’s love? How have you seen God’s love reflected in the actions of others? How do you share God’s love with others? What does God’s steadfast love say to you this day? How can we all grow closer through God’s love and faithfulness? How do we celebrate God together?

Prayer: O God, you are our hope and our praise. Help us to seek your wisdom in all that we are and do. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, 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 comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Jeremiah chapter 17 verses 19 through 22.

Thus said the Lord to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, and say to them: Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who enter by these gates. Thus says the Lord: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. (Jeremiah 17:19-22 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Galatians chapter 6 verses 1 through 3.

My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. (Galatians 6:1-3 NRSVue)*

Our final reading for today comes from the gospel according to John chapter 5 verses 2 through 11.

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The ill man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.' " (John 5:2-11 NRSVue)*

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

Today's reading brings us to another message about the Sabbath law. And this time we have one about healing on the Sabbath. We have a few things going on with our readings today, so I'm going to begin with our gospel reading. Now, in our gospel reading Jesus finds a man that had been there for many years waiting to be healed. And so, Jesus tells him to stand, take up his mat, and go. Once the man is healed, he takes up his mat, and he walks. This would be fine if it were just another healing. But this takes place on the Sabbath. And this leads to problems. The man comes along carrying his mat and he's asked why he's carrying his mat on the Sabbath. And he says it's because when he was healed, Jesus told him to take up his mat and go. This is not sufficient as they see this as a violation of Sabbath law. The law that they're referring to often comes back to a couple of different areas of scripture. One is that you're not supposed to do work on the Sabbath. There's a lot of different things defining what work on the Sabbath entails. One of those things is carrying a load and we see that in our reading from Jeremiah. Jeremiah goes out and tells the people that they shouldn't bear any burdens on the Sabbath day. Not to carry anything out of their house or do any work but that they should keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any of those things. This is the concept that the legal experts worry about. And this certainly creates a bit of an issue. Now, I also included a reading from Galatians which has that we should bear one another's burdens and that we should restore each other in the spirit of gentleness. This concept comes from Christ's interpretation of the law.

In all of this is a question about what is and is not allowed on the Sabbath. By extension, it also raises a question about the priorities that the legal experts have versus the priorities that Jesus shows. The legal experts are focused primarily on the law and that comes before everything else, including people. On the other hand, Christ is focused on helping people and that takes priority over the Sabbath rules. This is not an idea that the legal experts share, as they are focused simply on upholding the law as they see it. They don't share Jesus' interpretation of the law prioritizing people. They simply view it that nobody should be working on the Sabbath, and therefore, nobody should be healed. And if this man is healed, he should have to leave his mat because picking it up and carrying it is work. And I'm always struck by what they miss. And I say that because the only way to really be worried about the fact that this man is carrying a mat on the Sabbath is to completely ignore the miracle that's happened to him. That got me to thinking about how often we are willing to ignore something extraordinary because of a single-minded focus. This time the single-minded focus is on the Sabbath law. Those legal experts have complete focus on what the law says, and they interpret it without thought of anything but the law. What they don't see is how it affects people.

And that's a problem. It's a problem because if you aren't thinking about the way that rules impact people, then you aren't thinking about how those rules will be lived out. You aren't thinking about the way that the law will bring people closer to God if you are just thinking about the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. If the rule is to keep the Sabbath day holy, and yet it means telling people they can't be made well in the name of God, it would seem that the

whole meaning of the Sabbath has been lost. And much like when Jesus and his followers were criticized for eating on the Sabbath, this kind of view of the law completely ignores the situation that's causing the law to be violated in their eyes. When they were looking at plucking heads of grain, they didn't want to address the issue of why people were hungry on the Sabbath. With a healing on the Sabbath, they don't want to address the fact that nobody has been willing to help this man during all of the years he has suffered. The man himself tells Christ that he wants to be healed but that he has had nobody there to help him. None of the people complaining about the Sabbath law ever went down to help him. Nobody claiming the law has been violated was there to give him any assistance. What happens is that the man desperately wants help but has no one to help him, and when he finally does get help, his help is frowned upon because it didn't happen the way they think it should. And we see that their interpretation of the law is all about power and control, not about what is right. They want the Sabbath to exclude helping those in need. And if that's the case, the Sabbath is no longer honoring God. The law is no longer honoring God. And if the law isn't honoring God, then what's the use? Because the entire point was to help people live in a way that brings them closer to God. It should help people to do what is right and what is good. And if they're not the law has become a hindrance instead of a help. They aren't willing to take up each other's burdens at all. But they simply get angry because somebody was helped and just happened to be helped on the wrong day.

As I reflected on this, it raised a question in my mind. It made me wonder what kind of people we are. Are we the kind of people who would heal someone and tell them to take their mat and go? Or are we a people that wouldn't care what the problem is, if the law says no carrying then too bad. This is very much an issue of priority. The priority for the legal experts was upholding the letter of the law no matter what, whereas Jesus' priority is exalting God and loving people no matter what. Christ shows a priority of love over legalism. It's important because when Jesus sums up the law, it's love God and love your neighbor as yourself. It isn't summed up by saying that we should love the law. The problem is that if you uphold the letter of the law over people, then it is saying that loving people isn't nearly as important as loving the law, that the law trumps everything including loving God and loving your neighbor. And at that point the law begins to become a burden on others instead of a help. The spirit of the law has to be ignored in order to only see the letter of the law. If our priority becomes something other than loving God and loving our neighbor, then our priorities have become mixed up and we're going to lose sight of what's truly important in our lives. That when we say we are going to follow Christ it means that we are going to help others with their burdens. That we are going to help people because people matter. That we are going to love people because love matters. That we are going to serve God by helping one another because we want to do God's will. We want to be able to follow God wherever he needs us to be. That we will follow Christ wherever Christ takes us. And sometimes, yes, that may mean that we have to choose our priorities. We will at times have to decide whether the letter of the law is the right and proper course or whether it is the Spirit of God that may move us beyond a simple reading of the law. For me, I

pray that I always take the path of love. I will ask for forgiveness, and I will seek God's mercy if I have to violate the letter of the law in order to hold fast to the God's love. But if I'm forced to interpret the law in a way that keeps me from loving then it means that the law has become a hindrance. And that the law has become something that holds me back from doing God's will. And so, instead of having something that holds me back, I want something that's always pushing me forward. And for me that is the love of Christ. That love is always pushing me to rethink what I know, always pushing me to reconsider what I think is settled. Because I will always make loving God a priority in my life. I will always make loving others in the name of Christ a priority. If that means helping someone on the Sabbath, then it means following in the love of Jesus and helping others. I pray we may always think about how our actions impact others and how they fulfill God's love. And if we can do that, we let our love of God become our priority so that we are always close to Christ in all that we are and all that we do. In doing so, may we walk in the love and the peace of our savior, forever and always. 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. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. 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 – Interpretation

Our current series will be looking at the ways that we interpret Scripture. Each week will be a different lesson that will look at the Old and New Testament and what we learn about them both through Christ.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke
Family of Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Don Holsapple
Family of Loise Roberts	Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Family of Bunny Sparks	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

Rev Camron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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