

Interpreting

Interpretation: Part 6 “Interpreting”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – August 14, 2022

10th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Leviticus 19:17-18; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 22:34-40

Reflection: Psalm 51

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 51

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 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 51 and hear of God's love and forgiveness. That the Lord can give us a clean heart and a right spirit. That God delights in our salvation and not in sacrifice. That we may always turn to the Lord in love. Does seeking forgiveness from God lift your broken spirit? Do you find solace in the love that God has for you? Do you extend the faithfulness that God shows you in forgiveness by forgiving others? How can we all grow in God's love? How can we all celebrate the hope that offers to all people?

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 Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 through 9.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Leviticus chapter 19 verses 17 and 18.

"You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:17-18 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 13 verses 8 through 10.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:8-10 NRSVue)*

Our final reading for today comes from the gospel according to Matthew chapter 22 verses 34 through 40.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the

law is the greatest?" He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40 NRSVue)*

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

Today marks the end of our series on interpretation. We finish with an overall concept of interpreting the Bible. I wanted to include this as an insight into how I read and interpret Scripture. And I hope that it is as helpful to you as it is to me when I sit down with any section of the Bible. This is what I keep in mind when I'm answering any questions that I may be given, which is where the focus will be on the next sermon series we have. I will be answering your questions for the next few weeks, and if you have any that you'd like me to look at as part of that series, please get those to me so that I can hopefully include them.

So, all of our readings are intertwined very much today and it all centers around what Jesus has to say in our Gospel reading from Matthew. The Pharisees go to take their turn going after Jesus, seeing that the Sadducees have failed. They ask him the question of which commandment is the greatest, what part of the law is the most important? And Jesus answers with two. The first is that "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." That is the first and the greatest of the commandments. This comes from Deuteronomy. This is a rather central verse to all of Judaism. In Deuteronomy, we hear that we should love God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our might. That we keep those words close to our hearts, that we should tell them to our children and recite them when we are at home. Anywhere and everywhere we go, those words should be with us. Even to the point that you should bind them on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house. There is a tradition of doing just that if you've ever seen those little boxes worn on the arm or forehead. They have this verse within them. Jesus doesn't stop with simply the first and greatest commandment. He follows it up with a second commandment which is like the first. Love your neighbor as yourself. We see this as Leviticus 18, that you shouldn't hate any member of your kin. You shouldn't take vengeance or bear a grudge because you should love your neighbor as yourself. When Jesus finishes saying these two commandments, he says that this is the culmination of all things. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Everything hinges upon these two things, and everything can be seen through these two commandments to love. We hear that repeated in Romans, that all the commandments are summed up with the phrase you shall love your neighbor as yourself. According to Paul, Love does no wrong to a neighbor and love is fulfilling of the law.

I wanted to finish this series on interpretation with a theory of interpretation so that we could look at the way that we are still called to interpret today. We can often have questions about how to interpret different sections of the Bible and a lot of those discussions can become

very lengthy. And some of those discussions can cause great divides. I really wanted to share the concept that Christ puts forward here as it gives us a starting point and a baseline for reading the Bible. The key takeaway for me is that when I read the law, I ask how it helps me to love God and love my neighbor. When I read the words of the Bible, I ask how this can help me love and understand love. That is the question that I begin with every time I begin to interpret Scripture. If the fulfillment of the law is love and if love is the culmination of all commandments, then it informs us of what the outcome should be when we go about trying to understand the Bible. When we interpret the law, the end goal should be that we have found a way to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves as part of that. And sometimes we don't see that in the law because of how remote the situations can be.

We often are looking at these ancient situations through a modern lens. We can easily let today inform our interpretation of what the law was doing many, many years ago. We often interpret things based on what we know right now, and this can cause us to lose sight of why it mattered to the people at that time. When we sit down to read the Bible today, it can be difficult to imagine a society thousands of years ago. We can lose the full impact of what the law meant and why it was there. We can miss why it existed at all. We can also miss the way that society changed. The last few weeks, we have seen Christ interpreting the law in a way that increased love. And that is one of the things that we are still called to do today. It's easy to write off the laws we don't understand. It's also easy to either say that even if we don't understand them that we should hold to them, or if we don't understand them that we can forget about them. I think the problem there is that if we don't understand the reason for a law then we don't understand the love that would underly the law. If so, we can't live out that love and the law loses meaning because we no longer understand why it exists. And this can happen all over the place. Marriage today isn't the same as marriage in Biblical times. In many ways, marriage today isn't the same as it was 100 years ago, let alone 2000 years ago. Many of the concerns of a nomadic tribe don't translate well into a well-established society. We may have trouble understanding the traditions that were dominant in Biblical times and therefore we can have trouble understanding the Bible. And sometimes that happens because our society itself is so different than the society that was there 1000s of years ago. Even looking at our society 100 years ago, 200 years ago, 300 years ago, the changes are pretty dramatic. We have a difference today in what we need laws for compared to older times. One of the things that we can miss is how the law may have protected someone in ancient times because of our modern views. We might just read a law as not useful for today without understanding how the spirit of that message can still be applicable today. It can help us have an interpretation that does aid us in loving more completely today.

One example that I always like to give about this is that there are no Biblical laws about how you should behave on an airplane. There was nothing specifically written for that situation. But we can interpret the Bible with a spirit of love and understand how we should act on an airplane, or in a car, or on a train. We can think about it when we vote, even though you'll be

hard pressed to find anything resembling a modern election in the Bible. There will be plenty of situations in the Bible that no longer directly apply to us today just as we have many modern situations that you won't directly find in the Bible. But when we interpret through these two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves it gives us answers to those questions. When we understand the reasoning behind the things that are said in done in biblical times, it helps us to gain an understanding of how we can live life to its fullest in the spirit of God's love. Because we see the trajectory of all things in the law and the prophets and the letters and in the gospels. That trajectory is that we should rely on God's love more. Rely on retribution less and rely on love more. Rely on condemnation less and rely on love more. Rely on judgement less and rely on love more. Rely on legalism less and rely on love more. In this, the Bible becomes a progressive unveiling of God's love for us. And in that unveiling it shows us that we always have room to grow in love. When we see the law, not as something that was meant to keep people down, but something that would help them be able to understand how to love God more and something that would enable them to love their neighbor more, we understand the spirit of that law in the spirit of that love. And we are able to live it out better because we live in God's grace, because we share in God's mercy, because we live out that love as we see it, and we live out that love as we want to experience it. And when we interpret the Bible through a lens of loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, we dedicate ourselves to living up to the ideal the Christ holds out to us. That if everything hinges upon loving God and loving our neighbor, then we take up the mantle of love as our own. That when we do our best to live by those two great commandments, we live out the vision that Christ has for us. And in doing so, we are able to interpret in a spirit of love that always brings us closer together and closer to God in all that we are and all that we do. 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 Next Series – Pondering Questions

Our next series will have Pastor Cameron answering your questions! Get them to him however is most convenient for you and he will be using those as the basis for our weekly message!

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			

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