

Bad Things & Good People

Pondering Questions: Part 5 “Bad Things & Good People”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 18, 2022

15th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Luke 18:15-19; Ecclesiastes 7:13-18; John 9:1-7

Reflection: Psalm 23 (KJV)

Greeting: The Lord gives wisdom, from him comes understanding. The Lord stores up sound wisdom for the upright. He guards the path of justice and preserves the faithful. Let your wisdom enter our hearts and minds, O Lord! (*Proverbs 2*)

Prayer: O God, keeper of wisdom and understanding, you have brought us together into your presence this day. Grant us grace to worship you as we seek your blessing and your knowledge. Help us to grow in heart and mind with you, Lord. Build us up in your spirit so that we may know your love and be strengthened by your righteousness. Help us to be bold in our faith so that we may do your will joyfully and eagerly. May we worship you in a spirit of truth, that we may follow you all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 23 (KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Psalm 23 KJV)

We read the words of Psalm 23 and hear of God’s care. That the Lord is with us in our darkest hour. That we find comfort in God’s love. Do you believe goodness and mercy are with you? Are you intentional with sharing God’s mercy and love with others? What image comes to mind when you hear the 23rd Psalm? What comfort do you find and what do you share with others?

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 the Gospel of Luke chapter 18 verses 15 through 19.

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them, and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. (Luke 18:15-19 NRSVue)*

Our next reading for today comes from Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verses 13 through 18.

Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful, and in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that comes after them. In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evildoing. Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of the one without letting go of the other, for the one who fears God shall succeed with both. (Ecclesiastes 7:13-18 NRSVue)*

Our final reading for today comes from the Gospel according to John chapter 9 verses 1 through 7.

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. (John 9:1-7 NRSVue)*

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

So, this is a question that I think everyone gets at some point. And it is one of the more difficult questions to answer. It's often phrased as "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Now this is another one of those questions that doesn't have a simple answer. Our approach to the question itself reveals something about us that we might not think about. I wanted to highlight that in our readings today because even just the way we word that question raises issues. You might be wondering what that is. The first issue to tackle is that we ask about things that happen to "good people." This itself implies that good things are supposed to happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. But we run into a bit of a

quandary here because of the fact that it's very difficult to say that people are inherently good or inherently bad. That often when we talk about good people and bad people, it's the people we view as good and the people we view as bad. And we might set up some conditions for that. But we always have a certain amount of leeway that we give because we know that the people that we think of as good aren't perfectly good. They're good enough. And the people who are bad are just bad enough. The reason I say this is that we often draw lines based on this without fully thinking through what it truly means.

The readings I picked highlight some of the conundrum that we run into. We begin to see this with our reading from Luke. In Luke, Jesus is asked a question, but the question is not our focus today, which is why I left off the full reply. It's the initial reply that is relevant today, because he's addressed as "good teacher." And Jesus says to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Now, we can take this the wrong way. Sometimes we can take that as we aren't good at all. And that's not what he's saying. It's that to call someone good would mean that there's no bad. I've found that is the easiest way to phrase that. It hinges upon the fact that people have flaws. Those imperfections cause us to miss the mark, or the word that the Bible uses for missing the mark: sin. Part of what Jesus is laying down here is this idea that when we start thinking of people as good, in many ways we're ignoring the bad. Now, the reason I address this as part of this particular question is that we often get it into our heads that good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people. But one of the things that we see in Ecclesiastes is that righteous people perish in their righteousness and wicked people live long in their wickedness. This speaks to the issue at hand that when we start classifying people as good and bad. It is a reflection of our own judgment based on what exceptions we are willing to make. We do this all the time. "Oh, he tries to cheat at gold, but otherwise he's a good guy." Or maybe "She's always gossiping about people, but she's a good person." We make exceptions. And that's not wrong. But we have to recognize that that's what we're doing. Because it means that there's other people that, because of some of their behaviors, we view them differently. And suddenly it makes us think that maybe they are worthy of having bad things happen to them. Which isn't a very Christian thought.

One of the things that we get with this is the concept of whether or not we expect that good things happen to good people and that bad things happen to bad people. Because we expect those things in life to happen as retribution. But then we're reminded of the disciples asking Jesus about who sinned to make a man blind. Jesus' response is that it was nobody's sin that made him blind. Which rebukes the entire concept of his blindness being a result of someone's failings. Jesus notes that he was born blind so that God's work could be revealed through him. And it isn't even a statement that declares that his blindness was a purposeful thing, but that it now serves a purpose through Christ. Jesus restores the man's sight, not because the man was good enough but because Christ was revealing God's love.

We hear more like this from Ecclesiastes, this time in thinking about our own lives. Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books in the Bible because of how uncomfortable it makes us. This time, it is the wisdom being handed down that can give us pause. Be joyful in days of prosperity and in adversity, stop and reflect. Think about the fact that if God could make one, he could make the other. Because as mortals we cannot fathom everything that happens in this life. It is beyond our understanding to grasp exactly how and why everything happens on a scale larger than our own lifetime. So, what's the advice of Ecclesiastes to deal with this fact that good and bad things happen in life? The answer is to live life. Don't be too righteous and don't be too wise. Don't be too wicked and don't be a fool. Balance your life so that you can live the best life you can. Now, some people would read this as there being a certain amount of wickedness, but the author is being poetic with this as well. One way to view this is that we should be too righteous because you'll set yourself up to fall. Don't be too wise because you're going to overthink things. Don't fall back on wickedness just because it's easy. Don't be foolish just because you're trying to not be too wise. Sometimes we can plan things out to the point that we have planned ourselves right out of doing anything. Sometimes we can overthink things to the point that we are stuck. Honestly, this question can cause that kind of overthinking and obsession.

So, how about we take this question apart. The first thing to do is to break it down and ask if we have phrased the question right in the first place. If the question is "why do bad things happen to good people?" one might retort "show me these good people." One might also retort "why do you want good things only to happen to good people?" If something good happened to someone who is "bad" what if that made them change their ways and want to be a better person? What if that good thing is the thing that makes them change their heart and life and turn to Christ? We might also reply "do we want bad things to happen to bad people?" Is that out of our love and our forgiveness? So, maybe we need to drop that part of the question. And the question then becomes "why do bad things happen?" And an answer to that might be that good things and bad things both happen and oftentimes we can't tell them apart. What might be good for one person is bad for another. And what we might think of as bad at the time might look like something good down the road. We're trapped in our perspective. So, we're not very good judges of what's good and what's bad. And yes, I know there are events that it would be hard to argue one way or another on that. And I wouldn't. But I do want us to contemplate the fact that often we can think about something that was very difficult at one point and we can look back and think about how maybe it was the best thing that could have happened. And I only say this because I think we are poor judges of what it is we need, because so often we think of what we need in a moment and don't understand how it'll play out in a lifetime. Difficulties may mold us and build us up to be better people. And so, the question becomes "why do things happen?" And for that my answer would be things happen because that's life. And if nothing happened, there would be no life. Things happen because things were created, and we are still in God's creation playing itself out today for us here and now. Things happen and it is our task to live with them. I may not understand why they happen. I may not

even understand whether they're good or bad. But I do know this: in Christ I may do all the good that I can and repent for the wrongs that I will do. And I can strive to be a better person every day. And that through any hardship Christ will strengthen me. And I can thank God for every joy. And that even in adversity, I triumph in Christ. And so, as things happen, we take them one by one, day by day in the love that God gives us. Because in all things we are sustained by hope and in all things, we are loved. And in all things we are never alone, because Christ is with us. 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 – Pondering Questions

Our 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	Family of 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

* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of 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.