

## **God & Neighbor**

Faith & Wisdom: Part 4 “God & Neighbor”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – July 23, 2023

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** Proverbs 12:17-26; Galatians 5:13-18, 22-26; Luke 10:25-37

**Reflection:** Psalm 15

**Greeting:** Call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding. Seek it like silver, like finding a hidden treasure. Then you will discover the knowledge of God. The Lord gives wisdom and protects the paths of justice.

**Prayer:** We call upon you Lord, knowing that you are more ready to bestow your blessings upon us than we are to seek them, and give out of your love and righteousness that which we have not earned. We turn to you, knowing that all wisdom begins with you. May you guide us to your knowledge and strengthen us in your truth. May we receive your mercy, eager that we may share your mercy and love with the world. By your Spirit, guide us and lead us this day that we may share in your word and walk in your ways, and may we be enlightened in word and deed through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 15

*O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue and do no evil to their friends nor heap shame upon their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved. (Psalm 15 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 15 and we hear of walking in God’s ways. That how we treat others is a reflection of how we view God. That we are called to do what is right and to hold tight to the truth. That we should care for our neighbors and not do anything that would harm them. How have you reached out to help your neighbor? How do you demonstrate your love of God in how you live your daily life? What is something you could do today to show kindness to another? How can we share the wisdom and knowledge of faith that God has shared with you?

**Prayer:** Lord, it is your everlasting light that we seek in the darkness. May you bolster our faith so that we may seek your wisdom and truth. May your love strengthen us as we join together before you in prayer on this day. We thank you for your care, inviting us to seek your knowledge and to know your word. Together we bring our spoken and unspoken joys and concerns to lay before you, knowing that you are attentive to our every need. May you lift us up

that we may know your blessings in our laughter and our tears. May your steadfast love guide us through our joys and our sorrows. And by your Spirit may you guide 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 come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Proverbs chapter 12, verse 17 through 26.

*Those who state the truth speak justly, but a false witness deceives. Some chatter on like a stabbing sword, but a wise tongue heals. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who plan evil, but there is joy for those who advise peace. No harm happens to the righteous, but the wicked receive their fill of trouble. The Lord detests false lips; he favors those who do what is true. The shrewd conceal their knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims their stupidity. A hard worker is in charge, while a lazy one will be sentenced to hard labor. Anxiety leads to depression, but a good word encourages. The righteous offer guidance to their neighbors, but the path of the wicked makes them wander. (Proverbs 12:17-26 CEB+)*

Our next reading comes from Galatians chapter 5, verse 13 through 18 and verse 22 through 26.

*You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other! I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires. A person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit, and the Spirit is set against one's selfish desires. They are opposed to each other, so you shouldn't do whatever you want to do. But if you are being led by the Spirit, you aren't under the Law. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires. If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other. (Galatians 5:13-18,22-26 CEB+)*

Our last reading comes from Luke chapter 10, verse 25 through 37.

*A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live." But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured*

*man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.' What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?" Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37 CEB+)*

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

Today This week we come to something that we have heard throughout this series and we turn our focus to God and neighbor. And we begin once again in Proverbs. Because in Proverbs, we have a litany of things that are either wise or unwise. At first, they might seem to be a random list. But as I read this, I realized that almost all of these things have to do with how we treat one another. Because it has to do with things like speaking the truth, deceiving people, or about idly gossiping about people. We hear things about hard work and how it benefits us all. And our last statement in Proverbs is that the righteous offer guidance to their neighbors but the path of the wicked makes them wander. That wisdom will make you care for your neighbor and foolishness will drive a wedge between you. And Proverbs is telling us that we should care for and love our neighbor if we are to find wisdom in our faith in God. We can recognize this here because loving God and loving our neighbor is such a central theme that runs through the entire Bible. It is a central part of our faith. And yet we often do things that may go against this idea of loving God and neighbor. I think it happens because we aren't thinking about our actions in that way. This list gives us some things we can quickly understand. Lying to your neighbor isn't good. Lying about your neighbor isn't good either. Spreading gossip about your neighbor is not good. But sometimes we think not actively harming our neighbor is enough. And that's not quite the picture that we get from the Bible about what it means to love our neighbor and to love God.

We can see this in our reading from Galatians. Paul says we're called to freedom. Just don't let that freedom cause you to forget about responsibility. Because it's easy to become selfish. That when we think we are set free, it's easy for us to think that we have no responsibility to anyone. Paul reminds us that all the law is fulfilled in a single statement. Love your neighbor as yourself. And I think it's interesting because when we think about all of the law being summed up in that one statement it means that whatever it is that we do should be aligned with that one statement. Because Paul warns us if we're constantly going after each other, we'll do nothing but devour each other and lose sight of what truly matters. So, we should be guided by the Spirit. And what does it mean to be in the Spirit, rejecting our selfish desires? We can see it by the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And there's something here that I wanted to highlight because so often the things that we quote become lists of things we shouldn't do. And we don't

turn those lists on ourselves. We turn those lists on others saying, “You shouldn't do this. You shouldn't do that.” But Paul here gives us something else. A list of things that should come from our own actions. That if we are following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we should see that our selfish desires fall away. That we can show the love of our neighbor in everything that we do. The Spirit is against our selfish desires, because when we are selfish, we think about loving ourselves and we turn from loving our neighbor. But if we are following the spirit, we should ask ourselves a few questions. Have my actions shown love? Have my actions created joy? Have I shown patience in what I do? Have I demonstrated kindness to my neighbor? Have I tried to emulate the goodness of Christ? Have I done all things in faithfulness? Have I done to them in gentleness? Have I used self-control so that I can love my neighbor and not just think about myself? Those are the questions we should be asking. Because all of this comes down to whether or not we have loved our neighbor.

We see this again in our gospel reading. A legal expert asks the question “what should I do to gain eternal life?” So, Jesus asks him how he interprets the law. He responds that you must love God and love your neighbor. Jesus tells him that is the correct answer. So, the question comes, then what does it mean? Who is my neighbor? And the underlying question that we get here isn't “Who is my neighbor?” but the inverse “Who is not my neighbor? He wants to know who it is he doesn't have to love. It is a bit of a selfish question. So, Jesus explains with a parable. He talks about a man who's traveling when thieves beat him up and steal everything. While this man is lying beaten at the side of the road, people begin to pass by. A priest sees and goes to the other side of the road. A Levite does the same. But a Samaritan decides to stop, moved with compassion. He bandages the man's wounds and takes him to an inn to recover. He leaves money to take care of him and promises to come back and settle the bill. All of this from a Samaritan. From an outsider. The priest and the Levite didn't care enough to even look at the man. Help doesn't come from the Israelites but from the outsider. So, Jesus then asks a question. Which one of them was a neighbor to the guy who was beaten and robbed? The answer is clear, it was the one who showed mercy. Jesus tells him to go and do that as well. What you might not have caught is that Jesus changes the question. It is subtle, but Jesus doesn't actually answer the question the legal expert asked. He gets the expert to answer a more important question. He doesn't answer with who the man's neighbor is. He tells this legal expert how to be a good neighbor. To me, that says that the answer is that there's no one to leave out. Because if you are a good neighbor, you are a good neighbor to everyone. And if you are, then you can love your neighbor and you can love God.

Now, this is a lesson that I live by. This is the lens that I view Scripture through. I interpret the entirety of the Bible through this idea of God and neighbor. It is how I live my faith. I share that with you because I have found it to be an incredibly helpful way to explain what I believe and how I interpret the Bible. It is part of how I seek wisdom as part of my faith, and we will touch more on that next week when we wrap up this series. But it is important that we can explain how we live our faith. Not just that we hear the words, but we know what it means to act

on them. That we can explain what Jesus means when he says to love your neighbor. That we can read Paul and understand that if Paul says the law is fulfilled in loving our neighbor that we should be thinking about how our actions impact our neighbor. That we must think about that statement and ask if our actions are loving God and loving our neighbor. We can use some examples to help us think this through. If I murder my neighbor, that is not an act of love. It does not help our neighbor. If I pay off my neighbor's mortgage, that is an act of love. If I steal my neighbor's car, that is not an act of love. If I take my neighbor to the hospital in an emergency, that is an act of love. Pretty clear, right? But what if we look at some smaller interactions. My neighbor's name is Andrew, and every day I call him Andy even though he hates it. That doesn't sound like love. My neighbor's package is delivered to my door instead of theirs, but I don't feel like walking it over. That doesn't sound like love either. I notice that my neighbor hurt her foot, so I go and mow her lawn. That does start to sound like love. I notice my neighbor has been struggling so I invite them out to dinner. Love can be simple. And we quickly realize that there are many ways we can fail to love our neighbor as ourselves. Because we do need to treat others as we would want to be treated. And I often say that we should go beyond that and treat people better than we expect to be treated, overcoming our own expectations to love more. Because God has filled us with so much love, we can always give more.

But it also means that we have to decide if the way that we are interacting with our neighbors is showing love. It takes wisdom because we have to know when it is we are crossing to the other side of the road and turning away because we don't want our neighbor's problems to become our problems. We have to know when it is that our words are causing harm to our neighbor instead of showing them love. Because if we are hurting our neighbor, that's on us. If we do that, we aren't being a good neighbor. Because our actions should bring about fruits of the Spirit. And instead of always trying to think about the negative actions that we are trying to curb in others, maybe we should start thinking about the positive influence we can be for others. And maybe when others experience that positive influence, they will want to be a positive influence as well. Because if you can get people to really love their neighbor and love God, those lists we make of things people shouldn't do won't be needed. They will fix themselves. Because the fruit of the Spirit will bring patience and honesty. It will bring faithfulness and goodness. No amount of meanness will bring about gentleness. No amount of condemnation will bring about joy. But if we can love our neighbor and show them the love God has for them, that influence can change hearts and lives. Because then we are living the good news of Jesus Christ. So let us think about the positive influence we can be in a negative world. Let us use our wisdom so that we can treat others with respect, kindness, humility, and with love. And let us guide every action in our lives by how we love God and neighbor. 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 – The Spirit Moves**

Our current series looks at how we exercise our faith with wisdom. Each week we will look at Proverbs and explore an aspect of our faith.

July 2nd – Free to Care – Proverbs 3:21-35; Philippians 2:1-11; Luke 6:27-36

July 9th – To Believe – Proverbs 9:7-12; James 2:8-17; Matthew 9:18-31

July 16th – Being in Prayer – Proverbs 15:26-33; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 18:1-8

July 23rd – God & Neighbor – Proverbs 12:17-26; Galatians 5:13-18, 22-26; Luke 10:25-37

July 30th – Pursuit of Wisdom – Proverbs 4:1-9; James 3:13-18; Mark 12:28-34

### **Prayer List**

|   |                        |                  |                        |
|---|------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Rev Angie Lee                               | 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     | Tricia Adkins          |
| Don Stewart                                 | Ronnie Winstead        | Lauren Stewart   | Tom Finley             |
| Laura Carlen                                | Rosie Chancellor       | Chuck Hogan      | Brittany Gilbert       |
| Phil Hawickhorst                            | Ray Carr               | Alice Sherwood   | Richard Durham         |
| Kathy Hanks                                 | Steve Carlen           | Emily Blade      | Tim Schnauz            |
| Donna Carlen                                | Ernie Peters           | Jess Shoot       | Stanley Kiser          |
| Corine Howard                               | Don Gilmore            | Shirley Jester   | Connie Brown           |
| Marsha Overton                              | Linda Carlen           | Michael Nichols  | Paul Cox               |
| Taylor Waldorf                              | Harriet Tucker         | Becky McGuinness | Janet Yokum            |
| Donna Farley                                | Gary & Mary Winterrowd | Leo Smith        | Sue & Bob Smyser       |
| Larry Thompson                              | Evelyn Sue Icenogle    | Greg Williams    | Martha Roberts         |
| Charlie & Charlotte Baxter                  | Paul Schulte           | Lavon Figgins    | Kara Newton            |

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 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.