

## **God is Not Google**

Theology Thoughts: Part 1 “God is Not Google”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 24, 2023

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

**Readings:** Lamentations 3:17-33; Romans 8:18-25

**Reflection:** Psalm 43

**Greeting:** Make your ways known to me, Lord; Teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth. Because you are the God who saves me. I put my hope in you all day long! Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** God, bless us this day with patience. We know that we struggle in this on demand world with being able to wait. Help us to listen to your word and guide us in your ways. May you help us to slow down so that we may love our neighbor and may show our love for you. Grant us wisdom that we may learn the lesson you have for us today. Let us walk in your truth that we may share that truth with the world. We thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness. By your Spirit help us to help one another. We pray that you will continue to help us grow in mercy and grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 43

*Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust, deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.  
(Psalm 43 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 43, and we hear of seeking refuge with God in times of trouble. That even when things are difficult, we have hope with the Lord. That we must stop to praise God. Do you ever feel like things are so busy that you lose track of God? What can you do this week to slow down and be thankful that God is with you? What are some ways that you can help others to know the peace of Christ in their lives? How can you share God’s love with the world? How may we join together to share the comfort and care of Christ?

**Prayer:** Lord, we turn to you because of your steadfast love. We know that even when we struggle you are with us. May your Holy Spirit guide us in truth and light. Help us to share the peace and love of Christ each and every day. As we come before you this day, we bring to you the joys and concerns of our lives that we have shared aloud together. We also turn to you in

prayer with the unspoken worries and celebrations of our lives. Help us that we walk in your ways and seek the path of righteousness. May you be with us to strengthen us in our gladness and our sorrow. We pray that you will help us to grow in love through our laughter and our tears. As we learn more about you, Lord, may we grow closer to you. May your steadfast love and faithfulness guide us all the days of our lives, 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 reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Lamentations chapter 3, verses 17-33.

*My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "Gone is my glory and all that I had hoped for from the Lord." The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), to give one's cheek to the smiter and be filled with insults. For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. (Lamentations 3:17-33 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from Romans chapter 8, verses 18-25.

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:18-25 NRSV\*)*

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

Today we begin a new series in which we will be going through some theology thoughts that I've had. We will be looking at faith, works, prayer, forgiveness, scripture, and more as we move through these different thoughts about how we live out our faith. The first is something that I noticed some years ago and decided to take another look at. I chose our readings for today because I've been thinking about the on-demand world that we live in. And we often think that this is a new problem brought about by modern technology. But I think it is actually

an evolving problem and not just things that have happened recently. It is just much easier to see it today. To explain, look at the spread of information. The printing press changed how we get information and how quickly new information can spread. This leads to pamphlets and newspapers. Transportation has changed how on demand we are. We made trains and cars to get where we were going faster. We got telegraphs and radio, and information could spread even faster. At one point it might have taken weeks for a letter to arrive. Now, if it isn't there within a few days we begin to wonder what happened to it. Phones changed how on demand we are. When everyone started to have a telephone in their home, you could pick up the phone and call somebody and talk to people instantly anywhere. Now we carry them around in our pockets. We text, we call, and if we don't have an answer in five minutes, we start to think we are being ignored or that there is something wrong. We can map out where we are going to go and know exactly how long it should take us to get there. And we had better get there by the time the GPS told us. And we don't have to plan ahead either. Forgot to get gas? Somebody will be open and close to where you are. Run out of milk? You can go to the store. Is it 3am? That is fine, you can still run out and get it.

I started to wonder how much this has soaked into the rest of our lives. How quickly do we expect others to respond to our own needs? If we think about going out, it is often a decision we have to make right away. No time to think, no time to plan, we need to know now. Which got me wondering if we treat God in that same rushed manner. When we pray, do we pray with patience? Or do we treat every prayer like an emergency? That we need an answer right away and if we don't get an answer right away, we think God is ignoring us. Maybe I am praying because my jacket doesn't fit the way it used to. It doesn't want to button up how it used to, so I need God to do something about it. I need God to fix it right now, and if there isn't an answer then God must not be listening. If he was listening, he would have fixed my jacket. But what if the problem is that I'm not listening? Maybe God has already given me an answer and I just don't like that answer. Maybe the problem is that I've outgrown the jacket because I'm a little bigger than I was before. Maybe I just need to pay attention and be patient. Because it could be that God is pointing out that someone I know just started an exercise group. It would fit in perfectly with my schedule. It will take time. It will take effort. It isn't the instant fix I may have wanted but it is the fix I needed. And this can trip us up in the on-demand world we live in. But I have some news for you. God is not Google. We can't turn to God and demand answers to our questions right away. God isn't a search engine that just brings back only the answers we want when we want them. We have to have faith and we have to have patience.

Maybe I'm praying that there won't be any traffic on my next trip, because I want everything to be as fast as possible. And maybe God decides there is going to be a train in my way. Maybe being stuck in traffic causes me to slow down and think about how busy my life is. Maybe I take that time to appreciate what I have in life. Maybe I decide to make more time for the people I love and the things that make me happy. And all of it happens because of time. Because time is a tool that God uses to change out lives. Time to heal. Time to think. Time to

understand. Time to calm down. Time to breathe. We see it used over and over again. We see it in creation. Creation takes six days, but God sets aside a day to rest, setting aside time. When Moses leaves Egypt, God could have come to him that same day. Instead, Moses is given time. And when the time is right, God appears to him. We see it with David. David could have become king at any time, but God prepares him for the right time. We even see it when Christ spends forty days in the wilderness as time to prepare. Time is again used with Paul. Paul is struck blind on the road and has to wait to be healed. He could have been healed right away, but time is used to help Paul take in what is happening. We forget about all the ways that God comes through in unexpected ways when we get so hyper focused on what it is we expect God to do. Time teaches us how to be better people. Time teaches us to love one another because we have to take time to understand each other. Time teaches us to appreciate what we have.

I thought about this with the lament that we get in our reading today. "My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is." Where the memory of the difficulty and struggle is so great. But we all have those memories. Who doesn't have times where they wonder about what good could ever come from those events? Who doesn't have those things that we recollect that bring us sadness? But something happens when we add time to the equation. When we reflect on those things, we start to learn lessons. And those lessons will be different for each person. Maybe we think back to being hurt and realize that we acted foolishly, and we got hurt because we were doing something we shouldn't have been doing. Maybe the lesson is that sometimes there isn't anything we can do but be patient and wait. Maybe we learn that it is OK to take a risk because even if we get hurt, we get back up again. We might look back and have sadness, but we can also have hope because we have learned something. That God has used time so that we could gain even from our unpleasant memories. But when we aren't patient, we can lose focus. Sometimes we get so eager to learn a lesson that we start looking for reasons for everything. Or we are so desperate for an answer that we start creating answers where there are none. A great example of this is when Christ will return. Christ says he will return, but he also says that we won't know. Not everyone can accept that. So, what do people do? They begin searching everywhere for answers. They will look for signs anywhere and everywhere until they invent a date out of thin air. This happened just recently that people thought the rapture was just a few days ago. History is littered with people inventing dates that turned out to be false. Some will make an excuse, juggle some numbers, and fix a new date. Why? Because they want to know right now. They need to know so they can be in control. Because they want to type in "when is Jesus coming back?" and have God return a quick and easy answer. But God is not Google.

But we can't stand still with all of this. Because we sometimes confuse waiting with inaction. That we tell ourselves we are waiting for an answer, so we don't do anything. That we are waiting for a sign. And we forget that our prayers are always a call to action. Even if it is that we keep living and keep listening. We keep going because maybe the answer we get is just the

next step. And we don't know the plan, but we put one foot before the other and we keep moving forward. And that can be hard. It can be hard when we face tragedy and heartache. We see suffering in the world, and we ask "why?" And I'll be honest, I could preach for the rest of my life, and I still won't have all the answers. But maybe a question that I ask today will lead to an answer for somebody else down the road. Maybe standing up today, even if I don't know the end result, will turn into something good for someone else. Because I know that even when bad things happen, we don't give up. We keep trying. We stay prayerful and turn to God to find out what we need in the moment. Because I have faith that God will use time wisely. I have faith that God intends good for you and for me. I have faith that God will keep moving us forward, with or without the answers that we think we need. I have faith that sometimes we are supposed to live with and struggle with questions. Because those questions help us to grow in faith and in love. And that I don't need all the answers today. Because I know that I'm part of something bigger than just what I think I need to know right now. I'm part of God's creation. That we are here together as God's children. And I know that God has more in store for us than just what we think we need when we need it. So, maybe God is not Google. And I'm OK with that. Because I know that God is mercy. God is kindness. And God is love. And I know it is always available to you, and to me. Even when we are patiently waiting for God's word for us today. 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 – Theology Thoughts**

Our current series is going to be a collection of theology thoughts from Pastor Cameron. Each week we will explore different aspects of how we live our faith. We will be looking at faith, prayer, works, forgiveness, scripture, and more. The more we learn about God, the more we grow in faith and love.

Next Week: Faith & Works – We will be taking a look at the connection between faith and works by looking to Paul and James.

### **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

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