

## **The Unknown**

Reflections: Part 1 “The Unknown”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 5, 2023

All Saints Sunday

**Readings:** 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17

**Reflection:** Psalm 23

**Greeting:** Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love endures forever. The people who do what is right are truly happy! Remember me, Lord, with your grace and favor!

**Prayer:** God, help us remember your steadfast love in all that we do. May your wisdom guide us and lead us all the days of our lives. Help us to continue to grow in your grace and your mercy. Bless us this day as we come before you in prayer. Help us to walk in your light and to trust in your ways. May we help each other in this journey called life so that we may remind each other of the promise we share in Christ our Lord. Let your truth strengthen us and may your love and faithfulness give us comfort in all distress. By your Spirit, let us be one with each other as we are one with you. We pray this day that we may walk the path of righteousness in this life into the next, and it is in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 23

*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 we hear of peace in God’s care. That we may rest secure in the arms of our Lord. Do you find comfort when you reflect on God’s love for you? Do you seek ways that you can share that comfort with others? As we gather together, we join so that we may share peace with one another. What are some ways that you can carry that peace with you throughout the week? Who is it that you will lift up in prayer this week? In what ways can you reach out to share the peace of Christ with that person? How may we bring hope to a troubled world? How may we share the light of Christ with all those who are in need?

**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 hearts. 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 readings for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 1 John chapter 3, verses 1 through 3.

*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from Revelation chapter 7, verses 9 through 17.

*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:9-17 NRSV\*)*

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

We begin a series today that will focus on reflections about our faith. To begin, we look at how hard it is to deal with the unknown. And the biggest unknown that we face is what

comes after this life. I think it's important for us to think about why the unknown bothers us so much. In looking at how we face the unknown, it helps us to look at how we face death. It also helps us to handle all of the unknowns that we face every day. And I think we have a better option than fearing the unknown. Because we can face the unknown with hope. We see that in today's readings. They highlight how little we know while giving us some food for thought and something we can reflect upon in being able to move forward. In 1 John, we understand we hear of the unknown in what is in store for us. We understand that what we will be isn't something that we know. And that's something that's hard for us to deal with. Mostly because we like being able to plan. We like knowing. This can become a problem for us though, because of the things that we don't know. But it is only a problem if we let it become one. Because though we may not fully understand what comes next for us after this life ends, we can understand that it is good. We may not fully know what exactly will happen, but we are told that we will be like Christ. My question is, do we really need to know more? Could we even begin to fully understand? Can we let that be enough? I think we can. Because we don't always have to know the details. We don't have to know every detail to trust that it will be good. It is important that we can let that be enough.

In Revelation we have more of the unknown, because even understanding the imagery that we get in Revelation is difficult. I don't know if we will ever be able to say that we fully understand in this life what all of it means. Because I think there's always going to be more that we discover. But something that we do get is that we will be cared for, will be looked after, that we will have something more. I think there's something important about letting that be enough. I could sit here and tell you about streets of gold and tell you exactly what the hereafter is like. And I would be guessing. I would be mashing together the best picture I could with what little I have to go on and my imagination. But I can't bring myself to do that, because I cannot do it honestly. Because if I try to paint a picture from my imagination, I feel I should tell you it is my imagination. That we do not get a clear enough picture from scripture for me to give you specific details about how things will look. But it also feels like I would be giving you details so that you could avoid dealing with the unknown. That it would just be a distraction. Instead, I think we should face the unknown. We should acknowledge what we do not know. Because I think we can learn, and we can grow, and we can understand that we don't have to know everything. That we can take comfort in the fact that no matter what happens in this life, or the next, that we trust that God will be with us. That Christ will be there to guide us. And to let that be enough. I say this because too often we spend all of our time searching for certainty in a world that is uncertain. We search for that certainty, and we try to create solid answers that we think will give us all that we need. We want certainty because we want to be able to predict what will happen and know everything that will happen. And for all the things that we can be certain of, what will happen tomorrow is not one of them.

That can be hard. We like to come up with answers because it makes us feel like we're in control. We don't like not knowing and not being in control. But over the years I've grown to

find that the one thing I'm in control of is how I respond to life. I can't predict everything that will happen. I can't predict just how things will change. I don't know what the future will hold. Not in this life and especially not in the life to come. The thing is that I do know that I can control how I will respond. That I don't have to know because I can trust that God will be there. And as long as Christ is there to guide me, I'm okay. Because that's enough for me. Because whatever comes I know Christ will be there to help me figure out how to deal with it, how to move on and to continue moving forward. And that in my heart I know that when I move from this life to the next, there as well I trust that Christ will be there to guide me. And because of that I don't need to know what's there, because that is enough. And so, I don't have to have the certainty. I don't need to have the assuredness that I know exactly what it will be like. I will know when I know, and I will see when I see. I can wait, and that is OK. I won't know what that experience will be like until I am in it, and that is OK.

I say this because we can get so caught up in figuring out the future that we miss the now. We can get so caught up in the search for certainty that we forget that we have a life to live right here, right now. Because the truth is that I don't know what's going to happen 10 minutes from now. I don't know what will happen an hour from now. I don't know what will happen a day from now, let alone a year or a lifetime. And I'm excited for that because I trust there will always be something more there. That God has wonderful things in store for us because God will always be with us. That I know there will be ups and downs and there will be things I don't understand. But through it all, I live it with Christ. I trust that as I live in Christ, I die in Christ, and I am raised in Christ. That if that is so then I will live this life and the next in Christ. And I can let that be enough. So, yes, there will be unknowns. There will be the unknown of today, tomorrow, and the hereafter. There will be the unknowns of never really knowing what other people are thinking. We will always have the unknown of what the weather is going to be like. The unknown of what is happening in places that I am not. The unknown of what comes next. But instead of letting it frighten me, I say we rejoice. Because no matter what comes next, we face it gladly with Christ. So let us not fear the unknown but let us move forward always embracing that as long as we have God with us, we may rejoice. And as God's people we may say, 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 – Reflections**

Our current series is called reflections. We will be reflecting upon various topics of faith and what we learn in life. We will be looking at the unknown, friendship, thankfulness, and trust through faith. We will spend these weeks reflecting upon our faith as we head into the Advent season.

Next Week: Friendship – Our next message is a reflection on friendship and what it means that we call Christ our friend.

### **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	

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