

## **I Will Raise It Up**

Depths of Love: Part 3 “I Will Raise It Up”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 3, 2024

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings:** Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

**Reflection:** Psalm 19

**Greeting:** All we like sheep have gone astray, we have all turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He bore our sins and made intercession for us all.

**Prayer:** O Heavenly Father, be with us in these forty days. Help us to remember how your blessed Son was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. May we recall how he was tempted to be an example as we face temptation ourselves. May we learn and grow as we follow Christ in this journey to the cross. Be gracious to all who have gone astray and bring them with penitent hearts and steadfast faith back into your fold. May we hold fast to your great love, as demonstrated through devotion and sacrifice by Jesus Christ your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 19

*The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them, and nothing is hid from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 19, and we hear of seeking God's ways. That we should listen to the wisdom of the Lord and let it guide us in our lives. That God is there to help us to stay on track and to do the right thing. That God is there to correct us when we stumble. How do you listen to God when you are lost? How do you encourage others in God's love? Who do you know that could use your prayers this week? What are you learning as we journey with Christ to the cross? How can we explore the depths of love we find in Christ as part of Lent?

**Prayer:** Almighty God, you are with us in the deepest depths of our hearts and the smallest thoughts in our minds. Your steadfast love and faithfulness have been shown to us in the example set by Jesus Christ our Lord. We turn to you in this time of reflection with the celebrations that we have spoken aloud. We come before you with the worries we have voiced out loud. But we also come before you with the silent pleading from within. The joys and the worries we hold are all before you. Help us to know your mercy and grace so that we may know you are with us in our triumph and our defeat. May we always find our way back to you through our laughter and our tears. May our love for you grow day by day, and may we love each other as a sign of the love we find 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 New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Exodus chapter 20, verse 1 through 17.

*Then God spoke all these words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:1-17 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 18 through 25.

*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25 NRSV\*)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 2, verses 13 through 22.

*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22 NRSV\*)*

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

This third Sunday of Lent leads us into Christ teaching about the resurrection. And part of that is understanding the why of what he does in the temple. And I'll be honest, I am using the lectionary readings for this series and part of that is that the lectionary puts readings together so that they all relate to each other. And it really helps me to stay on track when going over such a big chunk of texts for something like Lent. But it took me a little bit to think about the why that we have with our reading from Exodus. The reading from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth had an immediate connection to our reading from John's gospel. But I had to think a little bit longer on the Ten Commandments. And so, I'm going to circle back to those after we take a look at John. Because in John we see Jesus going to Jerusalem. This happens early in John to help set the tone for Christ's ministry. Jesus goes to the temple and there are people selling and changing money. This holy place has become an open market. Christ's response he makes a whip, and he drives the animals out. He tips over the tables. He pours out the money from the money changers. He tells them to take the doves out of the marketplace and to stop turning his father's house into a marketplace. He drives them out. And I think the first question is why? And it's a good question to have. Because we need to understand the why if we are to understand the focus that this has for Christ's ministry. There could be many different reasons and I think a big part of this is simply the injustice of the system itself.

Because it means that people traveling a great distance have to buy the animals there at the temple. But before they can purchase anything, they have to convert their money so that it is in currency that can be used there at the temple. Which means there is going to be an exchange rate and a fee that comes with that exchange. We see a first layer of people making money off of the exchange, followed by people making money off of selling animals. Because only certain animals can be offered. The doves are there specifically for those who cannot afford the bigger animals, so this seems even worse for the fact that it is specifically targeting the poor. One of the ways that I read this is that beyond just the corruption of profiting from people who are trying to come and get right with God the marketplace begins to feel like they are selling salvation. They are selling the ability to be forgiven of your sins. They are selling access to God. And that's always what stuck out to me is that this feels so much like they are selling access to God. That this marketplace becomes an affront because of what it stands for. Because it's not just that nothing should be bought or sold. It's what they're buying and selling. God cannot be bought and sold and God's house should not be a marketplace. Now, I have to say something here because I know that some of my church ladies are thinking that we are going to have to talk after this service. Let me put you at ease right now, the church bazaar is OK. I see nothing wrong with trying to raise money for the mission of the church in an open and honest way. It is a commendable thing. What we see in our reading is an attempt to sell God's grace. That is the problem that Christ finds in the temple. When he begins flipping over these tables, it's because these people are trying to sell God, and God cannot be bought and sold.

So, the people there want to know what authority do you have to do this? What's the sign you can give to show that this prophetic message is true? And this brings us back to our reading from Paul's letter to Corinth. 1 Corinthians gives us this idea that Paul has that trusting in our own ideas of wisdom can cause us to lose sight of the divine. And one of the things he notes is exactly what's happening in our gospel reading. And that is that the Jewish believers there are seeking a sign, some portent from heaven that will say this is how it's supposed to be. That they need some grand act to show how they should behave. He says the Greeks desire wisdom, but we can fall short with wisdom if we trust that we are wise in our own eyes. Paul says that he preaches the foolishness of Christ crucified. And I think there's many ways to understand this is foolishness. Because I think there's a connection here to once again this idea of giving up self and it's something we have explored as we've gotten deeper into this journey to the cross in Lent. And a big part of all of this is giving up selfishness. And some of that is when we think ourselves to be wise, we think there's nothing left to learn. And we think that anything that would tell us not to be selfish is foolish. Because we have to look out for number one. The wisdom that the world so often wants to give us is that we always have to look out for ourselves over everything else. And in that sense, the cross is foolishness because it's placing self behind others. Paul calls it a stumbling block and I think he's correct. Because I think the idea of giving up self can seem foolish to many. So, Jesus tells them that if they want a sign they can "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They think he's talking about the temple itself, the building under construction for a long time. They could never rebuild it in

three days. John clarifies that Jesus is talking about this temple, the body and he's talking about the resurrection. Kill it and he will raise it up. The sign is that this message cannot be defeated. This message cannot be stopped because God's love cannot be stopped.

Now I told you I'd circle back around to the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are seen as this foundational set of rules. What are things that we can do and not do to be able to better serve God? And so we get this list. Don't kill, don't steal, don't cheat, honor your mother and father, remember God. In all of this I really started thinking about what these rules mean and how much those sellers in the temple had lost sight of them. Because we're told not to take the Lord's name in vain, but I feel that trivializing sacrifice to God and selling it in the temple does trivialize God. And if you're profiting off of people seeking salvation that also feels like a way of stealing from God's children. That it is not honoring God. I started thinking about that as these foundational rules are meant to draw us closer to God and to help us to love one another. And when I thought about this idea of tearing down the temple, and Jesus rebuilding it in three days that the layers of meaning here are deep. Because I feel like there's also this idea of tearing down these false constructs that blind us from living out God's true purpose for us. Because one can recite the Ten Commandments, but those commandments are summed up in the commandments to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Because if you love your neighbor as yourself, you do not try to cheat them. You do not try to lie to them. You do not try to steal from them. You do not try to kill them. If you love God, you do not abuse God's people for wealth. If you honor God, you do not try to profit off of the suffering of others.

And I thought about the way that Christ kicks over the tables that we have in our lives, when we set up all of the excuses as to why we do not live out Christ's love in our own lives. He drives out the money changers of our hearts, where we would exchange faith for safety. He drives out those who would have us believe that we don't have enough time to do God's will. He drives out the cattle that we call inaction that keeps us from being kind on Christ's account. He drives out the doves of blindness that allow us to look away from the suffering of others so that we can do nothing. He flips over the tables of false wisdom, the wisdom that makes us think that being selfish is simply how life is. And with it all, he replaces it, and he builds it back up with God's love. With mercy. With grace. With kindness. With compassion. Because Christ looks at each and every one of us and says "I can tear down the temple of your heart and rebuild it. And I can rebuild it in a way that brings you closer to God." That's part of our journey in Lent. Letting that temple of self be torn down and rebuilt in Christ's image. Part of our journey to the cross is giving up of those selfish desires so that we can take up our cross and follow. And so, I invite each and every one of us on this day to think about what it is we may need driven out of our own hearts. What it is that we may need Christ to help us rebuild. And to think about the ways that we can be better as a community in Christ. That we think about the ways that we can let Christ rebuild our hearts so that we may be more loving to understand the depths of God's love for us. So let us join together and as we take one step closer to the cross

let us never forget that Christ is with us every step of the way to strengthen us. That even in our failings, Christ can rebuild us. That he says that he will raise it up. To heal us. To help us. To make us whole. 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 – Depths of Love**

Our Lenten series explores the depths of love as we journey to the cross. Each week we take we reflect on the love that Christ has shown to each of us. And each week we take another step closer to standing at the foot of the cross.

February 18th – Has Come Near    February 25th – For the Sake of the Gospel  
 March 3rd – I Will Raise It Up      March 10th – Loving the Light  
 March 17th – Whoever Serves      March 24th – Blessed is the One  
 March 29th – Hail, King of the Jews

### **Prayer List**

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	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
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Jeff & Laurie Davidson
Family of Brad Anderson	Marie R.	Connie Brown	Thelma Ball
Stephanie Strewsbury	Family of Ed Davis	Amanda Stults Charter	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle
Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells		

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

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