

## **Methodist Roots: The Individual in the Community**

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – August 18 2024

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

**Readings:** Acts 2:42-47; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Matthew 18:10-20

**Reflection:** Psalm 122

**Greeting:** I offer my praise in the great congregation because of what the Lord has done. I will fulfill my promises in the presence of those who honor God. Let all those who are suffering eat and be full! Let all who seek the Lord praise him! I pray your hearts live forever! (Psalm 22)

**Prayer:** Lord, we ask that you remind us of your love that is there for all people. Help us to get along with each other because of your love. Remind us of how to act because we have been given the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We thank you that you are with us in all things, and that you have brought us together in this place so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Heavenly Father, watch over us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us. And may we celebrate the love and mercy found in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. It is with hope and faith we pray this day. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 122

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls and security within your towers." For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (Psalm 122 NRSVue\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 122, and we hear of joining together in worship. That when we pray to the Lord we pray together as a community. That we seek peace together as we seek the peace of Christ for all people. That we are called to serve God together. How do you respond to God's invitation to unity in Christ? Who can you pray with this week so that you may strengthen each other in faith? What are the things that you do to share the love of Christ with others? How do you celebrate God's love and grace as part of your life? How can we live out our journey in Christ together?

**Prayer:** God, you are there for us before we know that we need you. Help us to remember your love as we work together in the unity of Christ to help one another. May you help us this day that we may remember your steadfast love and faithfulness. We come before you now with

the joys and concerns that we share on this day. We turn to you now with the celebrations that we have spoken together. We turn to you with the worries that we have lifted up with each other. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that you will lift us up in love that we may know your strength. Help us in our laughter and our tears and guide us in sorrow and rejoicing. And may we join together joyfully by faith to celebrate your presence with us in love, forever and always. 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 Acts chapter 2, verse 42 through 47.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NRSVue\*)*

Our next reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12 through 26.

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26 NRSVue\*)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 18, verse 10 through 20.

*[Jesus said] "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:10-20 NRSVue\*)*

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

This week marks the end of our Methodist Roots series, and we have covered a lot in this series. This last message gets to one of the foundational aspects of Methodism. It is part of what drove the movement to become the denomination we know today, and that is the individual in the community. What I mean by this is that we have to think about how we live out our faith as an individual that is part of a community of faith. The individual matters as well as the type of communities we are a part of. Recognizing this helps us to understand our role in a community. Small groups were integral to the rise of Methodism. They were at the heart of what John Wesley taught. He believed they were foundational in building a strong community of faith. The Methodist movement considered them to be integral enough that early on they were more interested in obtaining meeting houses over any other property. They wanted places where small groups would meet and be accountable to each other. They were places to explore a life in Christ together and places for study and devotion. That was a huge part of the way that Methodism grew. It grew out of these small groups and these people working together to live out a life in Christ.

I wanted to highlight some of the ways that we see this in the Bible and explore the way that we interact with each other as individuals in a community of faith. When we look at our readings, we see different examples of how we live out our lives together as a community. The first example that we have is from the Acts of the Apostles, and it is of the early church. The first Christian churches that we see would be these groups coming together in Acts, and they do it by devoting themselves to the Apostles' teachings. They spend time together. They spend time in fellowship singing songs, praying together, breaking bread together, and they come together, and they share all things in common. They give up any sort of selfish desire to own things that nobody else can have and they share things as a community. And because they become a community of faith, they continue to grow. They grow in number because they exemplify what Christ teaches. They share with those who are in need. They break bread

together and eat gladly, sharing with each other. They pray for each other. They have the goodwill of the people because they are seen as a positive influence on the community at large. That this smaller community within the larger community is a benefit to the people around them, and that each individual comes together selflessly to share as part of this community. But because of that, they are all made whole in Christ.

We hear about the inner workings of that group when we hear from Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Because Paul recognizes each individual and the role that they play in a community of faith, and he recognizes how we interact with each other. He uses the idea that we are of one body, the body of Christ, and that we are baptized in one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. That as one body, there are no divisions between us. Like we talked about last week in overcoming divisions, we overcome them because it helps us to recognize that we are of one body, the body of Christ, and that the body is made up of many members. And Paul points out that each part of the body is a part that matters and should be recognized as a part of the body. Which might seem obvious, but Paul is noting that sometimes a part is overlooked or thought to not belong. A foot saying they don't belong because they aren't a hand is just as silly as an individual saying that they don't belong as part of the church because of a difference they have. Indeed, we all have a role to play because we all have different gifts. And Paul walks us through this. An ear is still part of the body even if it's not an eye. If the whole body were an eye, how would it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how does it smell? But God grows the church that each of us is an integral part of the community. Each of us has a role to play, and each of us is important. Every point of view that is brought before us is important so that we can understand other people's relationships with the divine, and we can understand how God has operated in the lives of others so that we may better see God in our own lives. Because there are many members of one body. Even the ones that seem weaker are indispensable. I may not think too much of my inner ear until there's a problem, and then I realize just what a giant role it plays in making sure that I can stand up and not fall over. Too often we only think about those very visible parts of the body, but Paul points out that each of us has a role to play, whether it's flashy and before everyone or whether it is quiet and behind the scenes. Each one of us matters to Christ, so we matter to each other. Because the body is not the same without you.

And that point is made clear when we hear from Christ. When we read from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus talks about the importance of the individual as part of the community. That if a shepherd had a hundred sheep and one goes astray, he will leave the ninety-nine to find the one who is lost, and he comes to rejoice, just as our Heavenly Father rejoices when one lost person is saved. And if God can rejoice, we should be able to rejoice also. Jesus also talks about the way we are reconciled to each other. That we are not reconciled to each other by keeping silent, but in helping each other. We correct with gentleness. Because Jesus notes that if someone sins against you, point out the problem between you and the other. And if that doesn't work, bring it to others. Those others will be witnesses that somebody has wronged

you, and that you want to make things right. I highlight that Jesus is specifically talking about someone sinning against you. I note this as a reference to last week's message. This isn't just about calling someone out for something you personally dislike, but it is when someone has done something to you. Because that action is between you, it needs to be cleared up.

Jesus also says that where two or three are gathered, he is there among them. I highlight this because it's that reminder that we are of the body of Christ. That Jesus is always with us when we gather together, when we pray together, when we sing together, and when we share together. When we give of our time, our efforts, and our energies as an individual, we also do so as part of the body of Christ. That all that we do individually is amplified because it is done as part of a greater whole. This is one of the things that I really wanted to look at, and it's because of the sense of community that we should have. That we need to be able to work with and grow in our communities. Because we are always communities within communities within communities. And before I confuse you too much, I'll give an example. The church is a community. Our local church here is one community. Inside that community, there are small discipleship groups, and those small communities help to make the larger community stronger. I encourage everyone to be part of at least one small group ministry. If you aren't but want to start one, come talk to me. Because each of us should be a part of a group. Even if it is simply coming to the church and having coffee to discuss the week together. It could be coming to the church to play a board game together. Or coming to the church to discuss a book you are reading. Having those smaller communities as part of the larger community helps to strengthen the individual and make the larger community stronger. Because when we build that trust with each other, it is building trust with Christ. Because it strengthens the body of Christ and encourages us to do more together. Because the church itself is part of many larger communities. The local church is part of our district, and our district is part of our conference. And our conference has had many missional goals that we have supported, and we are a part of that connection. We are also part of the greater United Methodist Church, with groups like UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, operating around the world, bringing relief to disaster situations. But that larger community is possible because of all the small communities that make it up. And those are possible because of the individual in the community. Every local church is also a part of their local surrounding community. Because they need each other.

To truly worship God and to truly follow Christ, we need each other. Because you cannot love your neighbor as yourself if you are by yourself. But it also doesn't help if you cannot love yourself as well. Both the individual and the community are important in God's eyes. And our faith life depends on both. That includes what we do on our own, the way that we pray, the way that we give, the way that we study, all the things that we do on our own help to strengthen us. But we also do those things as a group. The studies we do on our own help us to reflect on the things that we share when we come together as the body of Christ. The reflections that we have had on Scripture help us when we come and worship together. And

then what other people have learned in their individual studies and devotion may inspire you to do more yourself. We support each other as a community. We feed each other and nurture each other spiritually. That as an individual as part of the community, we understand that we matter as one and we matter as the whole because we matter in Christ. And that we come together to serve one another in love, in fellowship, and in friendship. That we share together so we can grow together, so that we may celebrate Christ together as an individual, as a community, and as the body of Christ we rejoice in all that we have and all that we are, forevermore. 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 – Means of Grace

This series is all about how we experience and share God’s grace. “Means of Grace” is a four-week series that forks through the way that we understand how God works in our lives as United Methodists. We will look at both individual and communal ways that we live out the love of Christ in our daily lives through works of piety and works of mercy.

8/25: Devotion

9/1: Worship

9/8: Compassion

9/15: Justice

### Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut

PO Box 610

Neoga, IL 62447

(217)895-2809

Worship 10:30am

### Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

Toledo, IL 62468

Worship 8:15am

### Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

Mattoon, IL 61938

Worship 9:30am

Rev Camron D St.Michael

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[cdstmichael@outlook.com](mailto:cdstmichael@outlook.com)

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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