

Means of Grace: Worship

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 1 2024

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Proverbs 2:1-11; James 5:13-20; Luke 22:14-20

Reflection: Psalm 95

Greeting: Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor. The Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace! (Psalm 29)

Prayer: Lord, we seek your grace as we join together in worship. Grant us wisdom that we may better follow your ways and help each other to do your will. Grant us understanding so that we may better love you and better love our neighbor as ourselves. May you help us to better worship together with a spirit truth in all that we are and all that we do. By your Holy Spirit, guide us that we may continually serve each other in your name. Heavenly father, grant us peace of mind and assurance in our hearts. And let us celebrate the life, death, and resurrection found in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Help us to see all that is good when we put our trust in your steadfast love and faithfulness. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 95

Come, let's sing out loud to the Lord! Let's raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation! Let's come before him with thanks! Let's shout songs of joy to him! The Lord is a great God, the great king over all other gods. The earth's depths are in his hands; the mountain heights belong to him; the sea, which he made, is his along with the dry ground, which his own hands formed. Come, let's worship and bow down! Let's kneel before the Lord, our maker! (Psalm 95:1-6 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 95, and we hear of coming together to worship God. That we should celebrate that God is our salvation. That we are in the care of our Heavenly Father. Do you celebrate that God is with you always in your life? Do you turn to God for everything that you need? To help you to help others? Who can you lift up in prayer this week? Who can you join in prayer to strengthen in God's grace? How will you seek God's peace and love in your life this week? How will you share that love and peace with those around you? How does God's grace change the way that you live your life in Christ?

Prayer: God, we thank you for always listening when we pray. We thank you for your steadfast love and faithfulness that are ever before us. Help us to remember you in our worship, our singing, and in all that we do to be closer to you, Lord. We come to you now with the causes

that we have to rejoice. We lift up our prayers of thanksgiving together as a congregation. We also lift up the worries that weigh on our hearts. We turn to you with the joys and concerns that we have lifted up with one voice. We also turn to you with the silent struggles and celebrations that we hold in our hearts. Though they go unspoken, we know that you hear our prayers, Lord. We ask now that you be with us in our laughter and our tears, in our dancing and our mourning. Be with us so that we may know your presence and your peace. Help us to celebrate that by faith you are with us always, in this life to the next, and forevermore. 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 is from Proverbs chapter 2, verse 1 through 11.

My son, accept my words and store up my commands. Turn your ear toward wisdom, and stretch your mind toward understanding. Call out for insight, and cry aloud for understanding. Seek it like silver; search for it like hidden treasure. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God. The Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He reserves ability for those with integrity. He is a shield for those who live a blameless life. He protects the paths of justice and guards the way of those who are loyal to him. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, as well as integrity, every good course. Wisdom will enter your mind, and knowledge will fill you with delight. Discretion will guard you; understanding will protect you. (Proverbs 2:1-11 CEB+)

Our next reading is from James chapter 5, verse 13 through 20.

If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve. Elijah was a person just like us. When he earnestly prayed that it wouldn't rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. He prayed again, God sent rain, and the earth produced its fruit. My brothers and sisters, if any of you wander from the truth and someone turns back the wanderer, recognize that whoever brings a sinner back from the wrong path will save them from death and will bring about the forgiveness of many sins. (James 5:13-20 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 22, verse 14 through 20.

When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I tell you, I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom." After taking a cup and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. I tell you that from now on I won't drink from the fruit of the vine until God's

kingdom has come.” After taking the bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and said, “This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you. (Luke 22:14-20 CEB+)

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

This week we continue our look at the means of grace, and we continue with works of piety. This time we are taking a look at the communal acts of piety, which brings us to this idea of worship. There are three different acts that John Wesley included in the general rules fit into this category. The three things listed are public worship, what we do when we join together to pray and sing praises to God. There is also “ministry of the Word, either read or expounded” which you can think of as what I am doing now with preaching. Lastly, we have the Lord’s Supper, when we partake in Holy Communion together as a congregation. These are all communal acts that help us to accept God’s grace and work together to further our spiritual growth as a community. You may have noticed that all of these are acts that require more than one person. Community is an essential part of Christianity. How we interact with each other is a reflection of God’s grace in our lives.

I wanted to pick readings that would highlight each of these different acts that make up our worship as part of the means of grace. Each reading today relates to how we celebrate God’s presence in our lives. They highlight different aspects of how we worship together and why we worship together. Now, in Proverbs, we hear about this command that we should look for insight, that we should gain wisdom, that we should seek understanding, and that we can do that by hearing Scripture together. This is something that we do here every week when we share out readings from the Bible and hear them expanded upon in a sermon and explore some of what they mean. I say some because I can promise you that there’s always more that we can learn from Scripture. We could spend weeks on just one reading. So, I treat each sermon an introduction to ideas that can be explored more in study. But we come together each week to seek the knowledge that we gain when we come together to seek God’s wisdom. We study together and grow together. When we come to worship, we hear these things, and we go out and we live them out together. By living them out together, it helps us to keep each other accountable. And that’s part of what we do as a community of faith. And it prepares us for what we will cover in the next two weeks, our works of mercy. Because the things we do as our works of piety help to strengthen us and guide us in what we do as our works of mercy. When we hear scripture explained and how to live it, we worship together celebrating God’s instruction. We celebrate the Holy Spirit showing us the paths of justice and righteousness.

We hear more about that from James. James talks about the ways that we come together in worship. That if anyone’s suffering, they should pray. If you’re happy, you should sing. And these are things that we do together in worship because they draw us closer to God. I always think singing does draw us closer to Go. I think this because singing helps us to tune

into emotions that might otherwise be hard to express. And it helps us to share those feelings. And when we come together as a community to share those feelings, we lift them up to celebrate that God is part of our communal life together. That we are of one body. That we come together, and we pray together. If anyone sins, we aren't called to drag them out and mock them. We are called to restore each other, to forgive each other, to build each other up. That we share together our failings so that we can correct them. Because we can grow together in grace. When we pray together, we share our hopes in Christ together. That we help each other because it's the right thing to do. And we correct each other in truth because we try to keep each other from falling from the path that God has set before us. And that's all part of how we worship together. Because we come together, and we are accountable to one another. This helps us to cover our blind spots. Because sometimes we cannot see what we are doing and need someone else to help us to understand. Because sometimes it takes another point of view to help us to see clearly. It's all too easy for us to overlook things.

But we join together because that unity gives us strength and gives us hope. And it's the kind of unity that we find when we share in the Lord's Supper together. That when we come together and share in Holy Communion, we do so that we can be of one body. That we are the body of Christ. That we join together in worship to celebrate that each of us is part of the body and a part that matters. That each of us is here because we have found purpose living a life in Christ. That we are of one body, redeemed by one blood, serving one God. That we are drawn together. That this supper, this breaking of bread and drinking from one cup, is a reminder to us so that we are reminded of the unity that we have when we join together to follow Christ. Because we are stronger together than we ever could be apart. When we worship together, we strengthen each other and lift each other up in the name of the Lord. When we come together in worship, we share our gladness, and it increases that much more. When we spread our sorrows out, it makes them easier to overcome. We find that things that are difficult for one person to handle are made lighter when that burden is shared by many shoulders. This supper is a reminder of that. Because Jesus gave us this simple reminder that when we break bread together, we do so because we are one people. That we share it with each other as we should share in Christ. That we drink from one cup, symbolizing the sacrifice made so that we could love one another freely. That we would know what true love looks like. That we would be free from sin and death, free from the cycle of fear that so often binds us to hatred. Free to love and free to care because of the gift that was given. That we could be of one body redeemed by one blood. That when we join together in worship, we do so to lift up God in praise. That we praise him in song, and we praise him in prayer, and we praise him in all that we do because we are thankful.

And it helps us to remember why we do what we do. It is that reminder that we do not do this for personal glory. We do not do this for any monetary reward. That we don't do this out of fear. But all that we do for Christ, we do for love. Because of love we have hope in our Heavenly Father. Because of love we can follow the Holy Spirit. We have been called to

worship together, and any act that glorifies God is worship. Whether it is coming together to share in the breaking of bread, the reading of scripture, the singing of songs, lifting up prayers together, sharing our joys and our concerns, pooling our resources that we may use them for God's purpose. That we do these things as acts of worship, where we devote ourselves as a community to following the path that Christ has shown us. That we are called to do what Christ has taught us, to love each other and to love God. And worship is how we demonstrate that love is an important part of our lives. Worship is how we seek to gain knowledge so that we may continue to grow in God's grace. That we come together that we may be healed by Christ's love. We come together that we may hold each other accountable and that we can be forgiven. That we come together to gain wisdom and understanding because God wants us to have that insight. To seek wisdom. To hold fast to the truth. Because the truth is that we are all important in the eyes of Christ. That we all matter. That we are all loved. Worship is one way that we respond to that love. It is a way we respond to the invitation through grace that we have. That grace has opened the door and asked us to step through and by God's grace we continue moving on to perfection, one step at a time. So let us follow Christ with all that we are, with all that we do, and with all that we share together as one people. Let us remember that we are of the body of Christ and that it is Christ's blood that redeems us as one people. And that when we come together in worship, we continue to move by God's grace following the path that Christ has put before us, helping one another in God's love and mercy. That we may all rejoice that we are one in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 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

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Neoga, IL 62447

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Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

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Worship 9:30am

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