

Give Thanks: For Failure

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – November 17 2024

26th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: 2 Samuel 24:10-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Mark 14:66-72 NRSVue

Reflection: Lamentations 3:19-26

Greeting: Do not turn your servants away, Lord, for you have been my help. Do not push me to the side and do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If everyone leaves me, the Lord will still be with me! May you teach me your ways and lead me on a level path that keeps me from slipping and gives me strength in adversity. Be patient and wait for the Lord! Be strong and let your heart take courage. Again, I say, wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27)

Prayer: Almighty God, we give thanks for your presence with us as we join together by your grace and mercy. We are thankful this day for the failures in our lives that remind us just how great your love and mercy are. We give thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness that are with us all the days of our lives. We put our trust in your word and your ways, that you may lead us in the path of righteousness. May you watch over us, Heavenly Father, and protect us from harm. May your Holy Spirit guide us in gentleness. And may we always be reminded of the example set for us by your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May we always give thanks that you are our God and we are your people. Let us worship this day in a spirit of truth as we grow by your wisdom and your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Lamentations 3:19-26

¹⁹ The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! ²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. ²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." ²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:19-26 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Lamentations, and we hear of waiting on God. That even in our deepest distress, we have hope with the Lord. That even in the midst of failure, we have salvation. How are you giving thanks this week? Are you thankful for the lessons learned from the failures you have faced? Do you think about the ways that you have failed to act? What can you do differently this week? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you show others that you are thankful that they are in your life? What can we do to celebrate the love of Christ as we give thanks?

Prayer: O God, our guide and our guardian. We are thankful that you hear us as we lift up our prayers before you. We know that you are with us day in and day out, and that you never leave us. We give thanks to you especially for the failures that teach us of your abounding grace. Help us to always be a people with hearts full of gratitude for the many blessings that we have in this life. We come before you this day with the joys that we have lifted up together. We turn to you with the troubles that we name together. But we also have celebrations and worries that we hold silently within our hearts. But you know our hearts Lord, and you hear the prayers that we share together on this day. May your steadfast love and faithfulness strengthen us in our mourning and our gladness. May we know that your presence is felt in our laughter and our tears. And may we always remember that you are there for us in all things. It is with grateful hearts that we remember your mercy and grace, demonstrated through the loving sacrifice of 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 Updated Edition. Our first reading is from 2 Samuel chapter 24, verses 10 through 14.

¹⁰ But afterward, David was stricken to the heart because he had numbered the people. David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." ¹¹ When David rose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² "Go and say to David: Thus says the Lord: Three things I offer you; choose one of them, and I will do it to you." ¹³ So Gad came to David and told him; he asked him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you on your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me." ¹⁴ Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great, but let me not fall into human hands." (2 Samuel 24:10-14 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 12 through 17.

¹² I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful and appointed me to his service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 13:12-17 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 14, verse 66 through 72.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the female servants of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹ And the female servant, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean, and you talk like one." ⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." ⁷² At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept. (Mark 14:66-72 NRSVue)*

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

You are all failures. Amen. Can you imagine if that was it? If that was my entire message today? If our failures defined us? This was an interesting thing to think about because it's not often that you hear people talk about giving thanks for failure. But I wanted to talk about being thankful for failure because I think failure is one of the ways that we grow the most. As long as we are willing to learn from our mistakes. I say this because when we fail, we have to face our actions and what they may have done. And we have to figure out what went wrong. I used some different examples of failure in our scripture readings, though there were many more I could have used because the Bible is full of people failing. It's true. If you go and you look through scripture, you will find many, many examples of failure. The important part is what we learn through those failures.

We have some different failings in our scripture readings today. And we begin in 2 Samuel with David. And if you've studied David, you know David failed quite a few times. David was a man after God's own heart, not because he always succeeded, not because he always did the right thing, but because he always turned back to God and put his trust in him. Sometimes we get the idea that for David to have followed God, he must have gotten everything right. And that's not really how it works. Because the thing is that David was human, just like us. David didn't always get things right. And our example today is David realizing that he's been a fool. So, he prays. David is offered three things and these things that are offered are basically a way of finding out if David's heart is in the right place. David puts his trust in the Lord. David decides that if anything is going to happen, he puts his trust in God because he trusts in God's mercy. And I've always been fascinated by this because it's a sign that David always reveres God, even when he's messing up. That if given the option of falling into human hands or being required to trust that God will have mercy, he trusts God. What we see through David's failure is that even when he's getting things wrong, he still keeps his trust in the Lord for his wisdom, and especially for his mercy. That David is a man after God's own heart in spite of his flaws, because even when he fails, he turns to God.

Now, we hear about this type of trusting in God a little bit more in our reading from 1 Timothy. And here we have Paul, grateful for the fact that God is there for him. That Christ waits patiently for him. That he knows Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that he is the foremost of those sinners. Paul does not shy away from his past. In fact, he often

holds up his past failings as part of why he trusts in God so much. He feels that he is of the foremost of all people for sinners, yet he knows he has forgiveness in Christ. He holds himself up then as an example, an example of Christ's patience. Paul sees himself as the foremost of sinners, having done so many things against the faith. He persecuted the church. He hurt others. And yet Christ was patient and helped him. Then surely everyone can seek God's grace and mercy and find patience in Jesus Christ. For Paul, the important part is that his failures taught him how great God is. Because if he hadn't had all of those failings, he would not have understood the depths of mercy and love that were there for him. Had he not had all of those issues in his life, he would not have been nearly as convinced of how great God's compassion for his children is.

And then we have Peter. Our account with Peter is a little different because we end with remorse instead of forgiveness. This isn't because Peter is not forgiven. It is because we stop when Peter realizes his failure. It's because Peter is seen as a foundation in the church. Peter the rock, Peter who will help lead the early church, Peter who vowed to always be there for Christ. I included this because I wanted an example of the most highly revered people making mistakes. Peter is afraid. Because Peter is afraid, he does something that he's ashamed of. Peter three times claims he does not know Jesus because he's afraid. He's afraid of what will happen to him. It's not until he has denied him three times that Peter remembers Jesus' words. And when he remembers, he breaks down and weeps. After this, Peter is humbled. He learns from this just how easy it is to let someone down. Peter's experiences just how great his failures could be and it teaches him not to be so headstrong. It teaches him not to be so adamant that he will always be able to do the right thing no matter what. Peter learns from his mistakes and can be thankful for failure.

The thing is, is that we all make mistakes. We are all going to have times when we get things wrong. And we have different ways of dealing with it. For some, they will insist they were never wrong, and they will never admit they made a mistake. Some people do not handle failure very well. They think that if they have failed, it is a sign of their inability. And to that, I would say that we all have to learn from failure. Failure is a part of life. We will not get everything right. We will not do everything right first try. It is not a sign of how worthy or unworthy we are though. David? David failed repeatedly and spectacularly, and yet God still loved him and helped him. Paul? Paul failed miserably and persecuted the early church and yet he is given a mission to the Gentiles and becomes a voice that changes the course of history. Peter? Peter felt that he would follow Jesus anywhere and when the time came he denied him three times. Yet all three of these people are loved by God. All three of them are forgiven and all three of them still find purpose. Because our failures help to teach us that we can still move forward.

Our failures teach us that we need forgiveness. And because of that, it teaches us to forgive others. Our failures help us to understand our limitations and our understanding. It helps to guide us and lead us that we may understand that sometimes we have no control. Our failures help us to understand that sometimes things happen out of our control and that we then pray for guidance. Because the one thing that we can understand from all of our failures is

that no matter how we fail and no matter what we fail in, Christ is still with us. And our failures teach us of just how deep God's love is. Because God's love is there for us no matter how we fail. Our failures can teach us where we got things wrong. Our failures can teach us how to do things better the next time. Our failures can help us to teach others how to avoid them. Our failures strengthen us in Christ's love.

And so, I do give thanks for failure. Though it is not my favorite thing and it's not something that I enjoy doing, I know that when I fail there's something I can learn. Because I know that God can turn any situation into an opportunity for growth. Because our failures teach us how to live. Our failures help us to understand our need for forgiveness and teach us how to forgive others. Our failures teach us to have empathy and compassion. And our failures teach us to rely on God. Because God is with us no matter what. The Holy Spirit is there to guide us and lead us no matter what. And no matter how often we fail and no matter how far we fail, Christ is there as our friend to help us back up again. That we may heal, that we may be whole, and that we may keep going. So let us give thanks for failure. And let us give thanks to the Savior that strengthens us that we may always overcome that failure. 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 – Give Thanks

This last series before Advent looks at the many things we have to give thanks for. Each week will explore how we give thanks to God for all the many ways we have been blessed, both expected and unexpected. We will be looking at why we are thankful for those who have gone before us, for the music that we sing, for our failures, and for children. How do you give thanks to the Lord?

11/3: For the Saints

11/10: For Music

11/17: For Failure

11/24: For Children

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Neoga, IL 62447

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Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

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Worship 9:30am

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