

## **Looking to Lent: Facing Presumptions**

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 23 2025

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

**Readings:** Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9 NRSVUE

**Reflection:** Psalm 19

**Call to Worship:** God! My God! It's you—I search for you! My whole being thirsts for you! My lips praise you because your faithful love is better than life itself! My mouth speaks praise with joy on my lips because you've been a help to me and I shout for joy in the protection of your wings. My whole being clings to you and your strong hand upholds me. (Psalm 63)

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, we thank you for the tender mercy you show to all people. We are thankful that you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be of our flesh, and to suffer death on a cross, that all could see and follow the example of his great humility. Help us to overcome the many difficulties that we face in this life. May you always strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may face any presumptions because you are with us. Mercifully grant that we can follow the example of patience and love shown to us in Jesus. May we embrace his resurrection that we may know life and have it abundantly. Heavenly Father, watch over us in worship this day. Guide us in singing and prayer by your Spirit. And help us to gather in the peace and the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 19

*<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. <sup>12</sup> But who can detect one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:7-14 NRSVUE\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 19, and we hear of calling upon God to clear our hidden faults. That we cannot presume that we are without transgression. But we do know that God will redeem us and will help us in all that we undertake. That the Holy Spirit will guide us to follow God's ways. That Christ is with us in our journey. How can we rely upon God to help us to overcome our own presumptions? Do we sometimes make assumptions about others? Do they keep us from loving our neighbor? How will you continue to face your problems this Lent? How can we work together to face them in Christ?

**Prayer:** Merciful God, we seek your presence with us in this place. We know you are with us in the good and the bad and the unknown. Help us through the easy and the difficult, for we know that your Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher in all circumstances. Today we ask you to help us

to face presumptions, knowing our thoughts can cut us off from love. May these forty days be a time of reflection so that we may mend our ways and turn our faces to you, O God. We lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you are always more ready to listen than we are to speak. We lift up the prayers that we voice together and the prayers we keep deep within our hearts. May you guide us, lead us, and strengthen us so that we can face whatever tomorrow may bring. May we remember you in our mourning and our dancing. May we find you in our weeping and our laughter. And may we always remember that whatever we face, we always face it together with your steadfast love and faithfulness. Bless us and keep us that we may walk in the ways 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 Updated Edition Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 55, verse 1 through 9.

*55 Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. <sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup>Now you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. <sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:1-9 NRSVUE\*)*

Our next reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 1 through 13.

*10 I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." <sup>8</sup>We must not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is*

*faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*  
(1 Corinthians 10:1-13 NRSVUE\*)

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 13, verse 1 through 9.

*<sup>13</sup> At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did." <sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man working the vineyard, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup> He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.' "* (Luke 13:1-9 NRSVUE\*)

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

This week we look at presumptions. One might wonder why we have to overcome presumptions as part of our Lenten reflection. One might think that presumptions are just how we imagine things. I included it because our preconceived notions can sometimes cause us to see things differently than they are, and they can cause us to treat people differently. They can even cause us to think about things in a way that doesn't match what is really happening. Our readings today all involve different ways that we have to face our own presumptions. Isaiah helps us to focus on the presumptions we make about each other and about God. Paul helps us to reflect on the presumptions we can have about our own actions and our own need for forgiveness. Our gospel reading from Luke can help us to look at the presumptions we may have when we pass judgment on others and when we think we know why things happen the way they do. All of our presumptions can lead us away from being able to love our neighbor, and they can lead us away from staying in love with God. Our presumptions can cause us to lose sight of what really matters.

Our reading from Isaiah is all about God's generosity. Isaiah is speaking of God's ways. We hear how God invites all to come to experience his generosity, that all are welcome at God's table. That all are invited to come follow the Lord. That we can turn from our own ways, and we can turn to follow God. But we are also given a statement that talks about our presumptions about God. Too often we think that God is going to do things our way. That God is going to dislike the people we dislike. That God is going to reject the people that we reject. That God is going to think like one of us. But Isaiah tells us that God's ways are not our ways, that God's thoughts are far above our thoughts. And that's a good thing, because it means God isn't going to have some of the flawed, petty human thinking that we can have. That his thoughts won't be centered around some of our own selfish desires. That God won't fall prey to the same temptations that we do. That God won't have our failure to love as part of his ways. Because God is a God of mercy. His forgiveness is far greater than our own. Because we like to presume that God is going to think like we do. That God is going to see things how we see

them. That God is going to judge the way that we judge. The problem is that God's love is greater than our love. God's mercy is greater than our mercy. God's support is greater than our support. Because God's thoughts and God's ways are not our ways. But too often we presume to know what God is thinking. I can tell you right now, I have no clue what God is thinking. Not in the slightest. I cannot tell you what God is going to do, because I am not God. That's an obstacle we have to overcome. We presume that God is just like us, and in doing so we try to assume that God is going to think and act like we do. Instead, we have a God that goes above and beyond. A God whose love is deeper than our love. A God whose mercy is greater than our mercy. And I, for one, am grateful for that.

We continue to have our presumptions challenged as we read Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul is urging the Corinthians that they remain vigilant. That they should not assume they are fine. That we cannot presume that we have done nothing wrong at all. This isn't so much an accusation, but a call for awareness. Paul mentions that going through the motions is not enough. That we shouldn't just presume that we are in the clear because we think we have done all the right things to be right with God. And I think part of what he is saying here is that we cannot just say that we haven't wronged anyone, because we may have wrongs that we have done that we are unaware of. But if we have done them, they're still wrongs we've committed. We may not have realized the hurt we have caused, but if we have caused hurt, that is on us. Because I don't know that any of us can say that we have done everything perfectly. I believe what Paul is warning us here is the fact that we may not realize how we have messed up. That we may not have realized what we have failed to do. And this is one of the reasons that I love our prayer of confession and pardon. Because it is a communal reminder of our shortcomings, for both what we have done and what we have left undone. That our love is not perfect and complete. That even when our intentions are good, we can still mess up, and that it is up to us to seek forgiveness. And if we are seeking forgiveness, then we need to be able to forgive others. Because we cannot just presume that we are the only ones that need to be forgiven. We cannot presume that we are the only ones that have asked to be forgiven. Paul's reminder is that we shouldn't get too comfortable in thinking that we're okay and not be vigilant about what it is we do and say and how we treat others. That we have to be aware of what it is we are doing.

Our gospel reading takes us in a different direction on presumptions. They're talking about some bad things happening, and I couldn't help but draw a few parallels here, one of which would be to our own community. Because when Jesus begins this lesson, he asks if these Galileans who were killed were worse sinners than everyone else because they were killed. Had they done something to deserve it? Or what about 18 people that were killed when the tower fell on them? Had they done something so terrible they deserved death more than everyone else? And the answer in both cases is no. And I think what Jesus is getting at here is that blaming people for the things that happen to them is both reckless and irresponsible. That it is not something that God says we should do. He is saying that we cannot simply think that because something bad happened to somebody that they deserved it. And I was thinking about this because I too often hear that everything is part of God's plan. That everything happens for a reason. I don't hold with that, and I think that's what Jesus is telling us not to believe with this. He doesn't say that the tower fell on them for any reason other than the tower fell. And I was thinking about this because our community was hit with some very vicious storms. And I can't tell you that God did it because, and then fill in the blank. Because one, I have no idea what

God is doing because I'm not God, like I told you before. I don't know. But I also don't believe that God thought the school needed to be destroyed for some reason. I don't believe it was someone's sin that caused it. Because one of the things that we have to deal with is that life happens. Stuff happens. Storms sometimes hit schools and towers can fall down.

What we are in charge of, though, is how we respond to those events. And that's what Jesus is talking about in the second part of this reading. Looking for fruits of the Spirit. And you know, I feel like I can tell you what those look like because I've seen them at work in these last few days. This week has been a bit hectic and a bit crazy for all of us. This building has been louder than normal this week with many, many kids here. And I saw so many fruits of the Spirit. The generosity from this community, the love and outpouring from all of our volunteers that helped to make sure that there were people here to help these kids while the schools were closed. I never once thought that God hit the schools with a storm just so that we could reach out to these kids. Instead of presuming that it happened for a reason, I accepted life happened. Because storms happen. Wind happens. Problems arise. There was a need, so people responded. I saw this in the many, many people that organized and volunteered and got everything those kids needed for this week. And we're going to keep going until we're no longer needed. And I am so grateful because it has been such an experience seeing all of those good works, seeing the fruits of the Spirit right there. Acts of kindness, of generosity, of caring, of compassion, of empathy, of love. The leadership that was needed to make sure that everything happened the way it needed to. The people that stepped up to watch over these kids, to serve breakfast, to serve lunch, to help them in all that they needed. We could have presumed that somebody else would take care of the problem, but we didn't. We could have made the assumption that somebody will step up. Instead, we thought somebody should step up and remembered we were somebody. We could have made the presumption that people will find a way. Instead, when God laid it at our doorstep, we saw the opportunity to live out our mission and Christ and we picked it up.

I was thinking about this because we could have made so many assumptions and we didn't. Instead, we recognized a need and we responded in love. We didn't let our presumptions keep us from doing what was right and what was good. And I think that's part of what I wanted to really leave us with today is that there's always the presumption that somebody else will manage. That somebody else will do the thing that we're not able to do. That somebody else will take care of things. And that presumption means that we assume we aren't the one that God is calling. I believe in erring on the side of grace and I believe in being willing to fail trying instead of failing to try. Maybe it will be somebody else that succeeds, but maybe I can help. Because I still think we should take every opportunity to do good. We should never assume that someone else is going to pick up the slack. Because maybe I'll try and I'll fail. But maybe someone else will see me try, and they will be inspired to try. And maybe they go all the way. But maybe, just maybe they needed to be inspired to do it. Maybe it is someone seeing you trying to walk that inspires them to run. Because that is what the strength of Christ does for us. It allows us to be willing to try. So, I pray that we may all overcome our presumptions so that we can try to do all the good that we can. Because when we remember that Christ is with us, we can overcome any obstacle, see past any presumption, and we can strive to be the best we can as we journey with God. 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 – Looking to Lent

This series is a 5-week series plus Ash Wednesday and in it we will be discussing the various issues we face in life. Lent is a time of reflection and letting go, and as such we will be reflecting on the mindsets we can leave behind this year. We will discuss what we give up and what we take up when we face doubts, temptation, adversity, presumptions, indignation, and expectations during Lent. As we look to lent, we are reminded that we face everything with Christ.

3/5: Facing Doubt

3/9: Facing Temptation

3/16: Facing Adversity

3/23: Facing Presumptions

3/30: Facing Indignation

4/6: Facing Expectations

#### Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut  
PO Box 610  
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(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  
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