

## **Salvation Revealed: With Love**

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 4 2025

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 9:1-6; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19 CEB

**Reflection:** 1 John 3:18-24

**Call to Worship:** You who are faithful to the Lord, sing praises to him; give thanks to his holy name! Lord, listen and have mercy on me! Lord, be my helper! You changed my mourning into dancing. You took off my funeral clothes and dressed me up in joy. I will sing your praises and never stop! Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever! (Psalm 30)

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, through Jesus Christ you overcame death and opened to us the door of eternal life. You have felt our pain and our sorrow and seen fit to give us hope. Renew and refresh us in your Holy Spirit as we celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb. Help us to see salvation revealed in your steadfast love and faithfulness. Let the light of our Lord's resurrection lift our hearts with gladness. May you guide us and lead us in worship so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. That we may celebrate the empty tomb as a sign of your great love for us. Help us to recognize that we have been freed from slavery to sin and death so that we may arise into a life of righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** 1 John 3:18-24

*<sup>18</sup>Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. <sup>19</sup>This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. <sup>20</sup>Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. <sup>21</sup>Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God. <sup>22</sup>We receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup>This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as he commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Those who keep his commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that he dwells in us, because of the Spirit he has given us. (1 John 3:18-24 CEB+)*

We read the words of 1 John and we hear of how we are to love. That Christ is our example of how to not simply say the right words but to do the right thing. That we are called to follow Christ in all things so that we walk in the light of the truth. That even when we aren't sure of ourselves, we have the confidence of knowing God is with us. Do you ask for God's strength when you pray? Do you ask God to help others to know his steadfast love and faithfulness? How do you walk in the love of Christ? How do you share it with others?

**Prayer:** O God, our rainbow, our dove, our promised land: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your ark. Protect us from storms, and ferry us to your welcoming shore. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. We share with you the worries that we have spoken aloud. We lift up the celebrations that we have voiced together. Help us to also share the silent pleadings from within. Help us to experience your grace in our laughter

and our tears. May you strengthen us in both sorrow and rejoicing, knowing you are with us. Help us to order our lives not by law but by your great and abiding love. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

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 Acts chapter 9, verse 1 through 6.

*<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, <sup>2</sup> seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?" <sup>5</sup> Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:1-6 CEB+)*

Our next reading is from Revelation chapter 5, verse 11 through 14.

*<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the sound of many angels surrounding the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. They numbered in the millions—thousands upon thousands. <sup>12</sup> They said in a loud voice, "Worthy is the slaughtered Lamb to receive power, wealth, wisdom, and might, and honor, glory, and blessing." <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea—I heard everything everywhere say, "Blessing, honor, glory, and power belong to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb forever and always." <sup>14</sup> Then the four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped. (Revelation 5:11-14 CEB+)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 21, verse 1 through 19.

*<sup>1</sup> Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter told them, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We'll go with you." They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus called to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn't haul in the net. <sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren't far from shore, only about one hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you've just caught." <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn't torn, even with so many*

*fish. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. <sup>15</sup> When they finished eating, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> Jesus asked a second time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Simon replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He asked a third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was sad that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" He replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> I assure you that when you were younger you tied your own belt and walked around wherever you wanted. When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and another will tie your belt and lead you where you don't want to go." <sup>19</sup> He said this to show the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. After saying this, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:1-19 CEB+)*

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

Today begins our Salvation Revealed series, and every week we'll be reading from Acts, Revelation, and the Gospel of John. As we do so, we will explore how we live our lives in our risen Savior. That we learn how to accept salvation and how to share the love of Christ with others. Our first message in this series looks at how we share and imitate that love in our own lives. We explore the way that we accept the love of Christ because it is a very important step in how we begin our faith journey.

We are reminded of this in the beginning of Paul's journey. We find Paul here in Acts when he was still going by his Hebrew name, Saul. He is on the road to Damascus to persecute the church. We have covered this episode recently, but this does act as a reminder that Paul had to stop before he could ever start. His journey to harass the people of the church was put to a grinding halt so that Paul could stop and reflect on what Christ was saying to him. Because Jesus himself stops Paul on his way to go to persecute the church. He has stopped him so that he can accept the love of Christ. Because I don't think Paul would listen unless he is forced to stop. And it leads to this grand conversion and him sharing so much with the world after this. All because he accepts the love of Christ in his life and salvation is revealed to him. And it's the kind of love that we hear about in Revelation, that there's thousands upon thousands falling down to worship, calling out to the one seated on the throne. Blessing, honor, glory, and power they cry out. And they fall down to worship because of their immense love. Because they are celebrating the immense love that has been revealed to them. They recognize the love that Christ has shown to the world, and they sing about it.

This is the love that we see as we step into our reading from John. In John's gospel, this is the third time that Jesus has appeared to the disciples. There's a special interaction here with Peter. There are many different ways that we could look at this interaction, and I have come at this from many different angles. But today I wanted to focus on what Jesus is looking for from Peter. Because Jesus asks him three separate times if Peter loves Jesus. And each time he asks, he asks Peter in some manner to care for his flock. Today I was thinking about the fact that Jesus' repeated question can almost be read as, "are you sure?" I think that's a valid thing to ask. Because Peter has gotten caught up in his bravado. He has been bold and

then fallen on his face. Peter proclaimed he would be with Christ through thick and thin, and that nothing would take him away. Peter then denied Christ three times. Peter swore up and down he would be brave until he got scared. And I don't think this is a rebuke. I don't think this is meant to make Peter feel bad. I think it's that if Peter is going to take on this kind of responsibility, then he must have love. And he must have love that will endure. I think that's where this question comes from. That when Jesus says, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He is asking because he wants to know if Peter can say yes. But he also wants to tell him how he can show that he means it. Because saying the words aren't enough. This is something that I think Jesus comes across all the time. Saying things is not the same as doing them. I think he is trying to make sure Peter knows that.

Part of this is that Jesus isn't always going to be there in person. Peter has to learn how to stay on the right track himself. Jesus wants to know that Peter's love will be strong enough to endure whatever challenges he may face. I think that is what Jesus is thinking when he asks this three times. Because every time he responds along the lines of "feed my lambs" or "take care of my sheep." He wants to know that Peter is going to love the people put in his care. Jesus wants to make sure Peter understands that he is going to need to share the love that he has for Christ and he's going to need to share it with the people that are going to be under his care. I think that matters because it helps us to get a better understanding of why Jesus asks him three times. Because he wants to drill it into his head that this is not just about saying the right words. It's going to be about doing the right thing. Because the final command that we get in our reading today is, "follow me." And I don't see this as a physical command. That, yes, Peter could physically follow him around, but I don't think that is what Jesus was getting at. I think he is saying that Peter needs to follow in his footsteps, and that Peter is going to have to live the way that Christ lived. He is going to have to love others the way that Christ has loved him. That he is going to have to show them the same kind of care and patience Christ has had with him. That just as Christ has been patient with Peter, Peter will need to be patient. That he has forgiven Peter for his shortcomings, Peter will need to forgive others. That Peter is going to have to have the same kind of love for others that Christ has had for Peter. That if Peter wants to show how much he loves Jesus, he will need to love those that are being put in his care.

I think that calling is one that Jesus is trying to prepare Peter for. Because he can only do this with love. It doesn't matter how charismatic Peter is. It doesn't matter how forceful he is. Because what people are going to look for is genuine, authentic love. The love that Christ has demonstrated to the twelve. That for his closest disciples, they understand what it is like to be under Christ's care and to be in his love. And now Peter is being called to share that with others. That if Peter is going to take care of his sheep, he has to be able to love them in the way that Christ has loved Peter. And I think that's the lesson that we get out of all of this. The way that we help one another in Christ is with love. Because we won't always be able to say the right thing. Because sometimes we won't know what the right thing is. Sometimes there are no words that will actually speak what it is we mean. There will be times when we are faced with situations where there are no words that will make things better. There are no words that will heal. But it is the love of Christ that we share with one another that will help us through those difficulties. That it is the reminder of Christ's sacrificial love that helps us to heal. We remember the way that Jesus is willing to give of himself for his friends. That we are reminded of the way that we may give of ourselves for our friends. That we may give of ourselves in ministry to Christ.

We do this with love because love is what Christ demonstrated for all of us on the cross. That act was a sign of just how enduring that love can be. That the resurrection is a sign of just how powerful love is. That through love we may conquer sin and death. That we find life everlasting because of God's great love for his children. That is the love that Christ is encouraging Peter to have for others. I wanted us to think about this as we begin this series about salvation because it is always with love that we begin. It is always with love that we discover Christ. Because we do not discover Christ in judgment. We do not discover Christ in anger and hatred. We do not discover Christ in disappointment. We discover Christ in hope and light. We find Jesus through truth and with love. Because he is the shepherd and the lamb. And when he calls us to care for his sheep it's because he wants us to love the way he loves. That when he is doing something new, we pay attention. That he has given us new life by water and the Spirit. That we have been called to do the work of salvation. Those are the things that we will be exploring in the weeks to come. But I wanted to start with love because that is where it all begins. Because it always comes back to the great love that God has for his children. The love demonstrated in the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. And it is a love that we follow all the days of our lives. That when asked if we love Jesus, we too can say yes. And when we are called to care for his sheep, we do so with love. So let us remember the love that Christ has for all people that we may share in that love. And that we may always see salvation revealed in Christ our Lord. 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 eternal life. 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 – Salvation Revealed**

This series is a 5-week series and in it we will be looking at how we live a life in Christ resurrected. Each week will have readings from Acts, John, and Revelation and will cover a different subject during our Easter season. How is it that we accept salvation in Christ? How is it that we share the hope of the Resurrection with others? How is it that salvation in Christ is revealed to the world?

5/4: With Love

5/11: Shepherd & Lamb

5/18: Something New

5/25: Water & the Spirit

6/1: The Work

**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

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