

## **Our Vision: Serve Joyfully**

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – February 8 2026

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

**Readings:** Joshua 1:7-9; Ephesians 6:10-17; Matthew 10:16-20, 26-27 CEB

**Reflection:** Psalm 31

**Call to Worship:** The Lord is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The Lord is a fortress protecting my life, should I be frightened of anything? Lord, teach me your way and lead me on a good path. Hope in the Lord! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the Lord! (Psalm 27)

**Prayer:** Eternal God, we seek your presence with us on this day. May you help us to remember your steadfast love and faithfulness from generation to generation. May we remember your goodness and mercy that are from of old. We give thanks for the many ways in which you have touched our lives. That you are there to guide us and lead us so that we may know love. You show us that there is joy in the way that we serve one another as we serve you. Help us to grow in wisdom so that we may lead others in the way of righteousness. As we join together on this day, may you bless us that the song in our lips and the words of our hearts will be lifted up together so that we may praise you. By your Holy Spirit, help us to join together as one body, united as the people of your holy church. Help us to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously so that we may share the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 31

*<sup>21</sup> Bless the Lord, because he has wondrously revealed his faithful love to me when I was like a city under siege! <sup>22</sup> When I was panicked, I said, "I'm cut off from your eyes!" But you heard my request for mercy when I cried out to you for help. <sup>23</sup> All you who are faithful, love the Lord! The Lord protects those who are loyal, but he pays the proud back to the fullest degree. <sup>24</sup> All you who wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage. (Psalm 31:21-24 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 31, and we hear of God's faithful love. That the Lord helps us when we feel lost and alone. That we know God's mercy is there for us always. We are to remind each other of faithful love and mercy with the Lord. That we should be strong and have courage when we lead. How can you lead others to Christ this week? Who can you lift up in your prayers? How can you check in on them to help them with whatever it is they need? Who can you be strong for in the coming week? How can you show kindness in a world full of difficulty? How can you share the love of God with others in this new year?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we turn to you in prayer, knowing that you are always more ready to hear than we are to speak. We come before you to seek your grace and your blessing in our lives. We give you thanks for the joys that we have, both the joys that we have in our personal lives and the joys that we lift up together as a community. We raise them all to you with thankful hearts. We also come to you with our concerns, both those that we name together and the concerns that we only speak in our hearts. But we know that when we share them with you,

Lord, that you listen to our every worry. We pray that you will be with us and comfort us in our difficulties. We pray that you will rejoice with us in our celebrations. For we know that you are with us in all things. You are there for us in the happy and the sad. You are there for us in the confusion and the unknown. Because your steadfast love and faithfulness are always with us. We pray you will continue to bless us in our sorrow and our joy. That you will guide us in our triumphs and our tragedies. May you always help us to love, to serve, and to lead by your gracious hand. And may you continue to walk with us all the days of our lives. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Savior, and our friend. 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 Joshua chapter 7, verse 7 through 9.

*<sup>7</sup> “Be very brave and strong as you carefully obey all of the Instruction that Moses my servant commanded you. Don’t deviate even a bit from it, either to the right or left. Then you will have success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> Never stop speaking about this Instruction scroll. Recite it day and night so you can carefully obey everything written in it. Then you will accomplish your objectives and you will succeed. <sup>9</sup> I’ve commanded you to be brave and strong, haven’t I? Don’t be alarmed or terrified, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:7-9 CEB+)*

Our second reading is from Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 17.

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. <sup>11</sup> Put on God’s armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. <sup>12</sup> We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. <sup>14</sup> So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, <sup>15</sup> and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. <sup>16</sup> Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word. (Ephesians 6:10-17 CEB+)*

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 10, verses 16 through 20 and 26 through 27.

*<sup>16</sup> “Look, I’m sending you as sheep among wolves. Therefore, be wise as snakes and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Watch out for people—because they will hand you over to councils and they will beat you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> They will haul you in front of governors and even kings because of me so that you may give your testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> Whenever they hand you over, don’t worry about how to speak or what you will say, because what you can say will be given to you at that moment. <sup>20</sup> You aren’t doing the talking, but the Spirit of my Father is doing the talking through you. <sup>26</sup> “Therefore, don’t be afraid of those people because nothing is hidden that won’t be revealed, and nothing secret*

*that won't be brought out into the open. 27 What I say to you in the darkness, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, announce from the rooftops.*  
(Matthew 10:16-20,26-27 CEB+)

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

This week we come to the third and final part of our series "Our Vision." We once again explore the United Methodist Church's new vision statement, and I would like to start by reiterating what that vision statement is. It is the way that we live out our mission in the church, the direction that the church is going, and how we are going to get there. Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. In order to live out that mission, we have a vision statement. Our vision statement reads, "the United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections." We have looked at loving boldly. We have looked at serving joyously. This week we look at how we lead courageously. It is about the way that we stand up for what is right and the way that we lead in the church and in the community. To look at that, we turn to our readings for today.

We begin with Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua picks up with Joshua becoming the leader of the Israelites, now that Moses is gone. The people are called to be brave and to be strong. They are to remember the instructions they have been given and to keep it with them always. That they are not to allow fear to overcome them because they need to have courage. When we talk about leading courageously, it is the idea of being brave and strong when we speak the truth of Christ. Because a lot of times the fear comes from ourselves. Our worry, our alarm all stems from how we see ourselves in the world, and we frighten ourselves. We frighten ourselves because we often will convince ourselves that we cannot do what is right because of what may happen to us. We scare ourselves out of doing good, out of fear of what the consequences might be. Often the consequences are just that things might get difficult, but sometimes it is difficult to do the right thing. But we still are called to do the right thing. To speak God's truth. To be brave so that we can share God's message with the world. That if we stick to God's teaching we'll be all right. That was the message there in Joshua.

It's a message that we hear reiterated in our reading from Matthew. And Matthew especially talks about the fact that it will not be easy, that it is going to be difficult. It is considered to be sent as sheep among wolves. When we hear that sometimes we feel that it's going to be a scary thing, but we're told not to be afraid. It's more about being aware of your surroundings than it is being afraid of your surroundings. Because the point isn't how bad things could be. The point that we get is that no matter what things are going to be like, we are still called to share the truth. We may be sheep among wolves, but the good shepherd still watches over us. That it doesn't matter if people may hate us for what we say. It does not matter if they'll drag us in front of officials. That we aren't to be afraid of earthly powers when we are sharing the gospel message. That we should not be afraid because the truth is revealed to us, and that we should announce it from the rooftops. That we should not let it be hidden. I think that's a great message, because it reminds us that we aren't called to hide the message of Christ from others. We are called to share it. That nothing that is hidden won't be revealed. That we are called to share that message. And that we should shout the truth from the rooftops, even if the truth might get us in trouble. That we should speak for the least in the last,

even if others won't like it. That we should be brave and be strong and be courageous in how we lead, so that others take strength from us.

We hear about that strength in Ephesians, when Paul talks about the way that God strengthens us to be able to always share the message of Christ. He compares it to putting on the full armor of God, because it will help us to stand no matter what. That we will be strengthened by the Lord when we put this armor on, because the truth will fortify us. When we talk about the full armor of God, he talks about what it is. The belt of truth around your waist. Justice as your breastplate. That the shoes on your feet help you to go and spread the good news. And we carry the shield of faith. We take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. Now, basically what Paul is saying here is that we strengthen ourselves in God's word. That we wear the truth. That we seek justice. That we be ready to act by faith. That we hold fast to salvation and we be guided by the Spirit. And that through it all, we are guided by God's word. Now, when I hear all that, I hear God giving us the strength we need to face anything, so that we may lead others. And you might be wondering where leadership comes into all this. It takes strength to lead. It takes strength to stand up for justice and truth. When you can lead others, you lead them by strength, because they see you being strong and they are strengthened by it. When we lead as Christians, we lead by the power that God gives us so that we may help one another. That we lead through difficulty. We lead by example. That's exactly what we see when we talk about putting on the full armor of God. We put those things on to teach others how to use them. We wear the truth around our waist so that others understand the importance of truth. We stand with a breastplate of justice so that others know that we must seek justice and honor justice in everything that we do. That we are ready to act always and that we lead in that way with courage. That when we carry the shield of faith, it is that we can defend not only ourselves but others by faith. Because faith strengthens us to do what is right. It helps us to extinguish the flaming arrows of evil. The piercing lies that we are told by the world. The selfish wishes the world would place on our lips and in our hearts. That we block them by the shield of faith. That we are able to defend against hurtful words and baseless accusations because we put on the full armor of God. That we wear the helmet of salvation because we wear God's word on our forehead and on our wrist like a sign to always be there that God is with us. That salvation is there for us and for all. That we wear that helmet as a way of showing that we have accepted salvation in Christ in our lives. And that we carry the sword of the Spirit, God's word, because it helps us to cut down any hate, any oppression, any injustice.

That we use God's word to carve a way in this world to show the path of righteousness, of goodness, of grace. Because those are the things we need to be able to lead courageously. Because leadership is an important part of the church and Jesus demonstrates to us how to lead through servant leadership. The thing is that we cannot lead if we cannot love. We cannot lead if we cannot serve. Because to lead, you lead the people that you love. To lead, you serve the people that you lead. To lead courageously means that you put on that full armor of God, not just so that you are protected, but you wear it so that others can see it in action. You put it on so others see how they can put it on. It is like what they say about putting on your own oxygen mask first, so that you have the clarity to help others. That we shout from the rooftop that which has been given to us, the salvation we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. That we are brave and we are strong in the face of adversity because we stand up for those who have no hope of their own. That we share the hope of Christ with them. That we lift up the least and the

last. Those who have been pushed down, we raise up. We speak up for those who have been silenced because when we lead courageously, we give voice to the voiceless and we give hope to the hopeless. Because when we stand up for justice, we stand up for justice for all people. We stand up for justice and mercy and grace because they are gifts of God that all people are worthy of receiving. So, we make sure that we lead by example.

That we are not leaders because we are better than anyone else. We lead because we love and we lead so that we may serve. And that is the gist of our vision in the United Methodist Church right now. That we love boldly, we serve joyfully, and we lead courageously because those things all tie together in living a life in Christ. We love boldly when we love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. Because when you love your neighbor, you will seek justice for them. You will seek comfort and peace for them. We serve joyfully because it is a joyful thing always and everywhere to serve our God and to serve one another. Because when we love our neighbor, we will do all that we can to help them. We will lift them up so that they may know joy and peace and love in their lives. That we may serve joyfully with all that we have and all that we are. And that when we can love boldly and we can serve joyfully, it teaches us to lead courageously because it helps us to be an example to others to show them the way that we are to go. That when we lead courageously, we do so with love serving others. Because to lead someone, you must love them. You must care about them. You must serve those people as you lead by example, showing how it is that we love Christ so others may see. Let us do all that we can that we may love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously so that we may make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. 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 – Our Vision**

This series takes inspiration from the new vision statement of the United Methodist Church. That we should love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously. These biblically inspired themes are part of the way that we are to live a life in Christ together as a church. Each Sunday we will take a look at one of those statements and what they mean to us in our lives as Christians. So let us walk with Christ every step of the way as we share together in our vision for a better tomorrow.

1/25: Love Boldly      2/1: Serve Joyfully      2/8: Lead Courageously

### **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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