

Let It Go: Entitlement

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 1 2026

2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 121

Call to Worship: Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus. He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. He emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2)

Prayer: Everlasting God, because of your tender mercy toward all people, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our flesh, and to suffer death up on the cross, that all should follow the example of his great humility. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of his patience and also be made partakers of his resurrection. In this season of preparation, help us to learn to let go of the things that hold us back from your grace and love. Help us to let go of temptation, entitlement, division, presumptions, and doubt. May you strengthen us in your goodness and let us be a reminder of your light. Help us by self-denial, prayer, and meditation to prepare our hearts for deeper penitence and a better life. And give us a true longing to be free from sin, through the deliverance won by Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 121

¹ I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? ² My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. ³ God won't let your foot slip. Your protector won't fall asleep on the job. ⁴ No! Israel's protector never sleeps or rests! ⁵ The Lord is your protector; the Lord is your shade right beside you. ⁶ The sun won't strike you during the day; neither will the moon at night. ⁷ The Lord will protect you from all evil; God will protect your very life. ⁸ The Lord will protect you on your journeys— whether going or coming— from now until forever from now. (Psalm 121 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 121, and we hear of God's protection. That we are blessed with the Lord watching over us. That God is always with us no matter where we go and what we do. That we hold fast to the help that the Lord provides. That we must let go of entitlement and be thankful for the protection God offers us all. What are you giving up for Lent to draw you closer to God? How will you reach out to your neighbor in this time of reflection? Who can you lift up in your prayers? What does Lent mean to you?

Prayer: Gracious God, you know our hearts and our lives; we are ever before you exposed and vulnerable. We turn to you once more as we seek your guidance and your mercy in our lives. May you bless us and keep us in all that we are and do. We give thanks for the many wonderful things we see every day. We thank you for the joys we share as a community and for the joys that stir in our secret heart. We also turn to you with the concerns that we have, knowing that

you are always listening. We look to you as our rock in shifting sand and as the calm in the storm. We lift up to you the worries that we keep deep inside and the worries that we share as a community. May you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us in this season of preparation so that our hearts may be renewed in your love. Let us turn from those things that draw us from you, that we may let go of the ways that pull us from your love and mercy. May you lead us through the good and the bad, through the confusion and the unknown, that we may follow you always. May we walk with you through sorrow and joy, knowing that you are our all in all. May we rest assured because of the salvation we find in your Son, our Savior, 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 Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 through 4a.

¹ The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse; all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you." ⁴Abram left just as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. (Genesis 12:1-4a CEB+)

Our second reading is from Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 5 and 13 through 17.

¹ So what are we going to say? Are we going to find that Abraham is our ancestor on the basis of genealogy? ²Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God. ³What does the scripture say? Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. ⁴Workers' salaries aren't credited to them on the basis of an employer's grace but rather on the basis of what they deserve. ⁵But faith is credited as righteousness to those who don't work, because they have faith in God who makes the ungodly righteous. ¹³The promise to Abraham and to his descendants, that he would inherit the world, didn't come through the Law but through the righteousness that comes from faith. ¹⁴If they inherit because of the Law, then faith has no effect and the promise has been canceled. ¹⁵The Law brings about wrath. But when there isn't any law, there isn't any violation of the law. ¹⁶That's why the inheritance comes through faith, so that it will be on the basis of God's grace. In that way, the promise is secure for all of Abraham's descendants, not just for those who are related by Law but also for those who are related by the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us. ¹⁷As it is written: I have appointed you to be the father of many nations. So Abraham is our father in the eyes of God in whom he had faith, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that don't exist into existence. (Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 CEB+)

Our final reading is from John chapter 3, verses 1 through 17.

¹ There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ²He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one

could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.”³ Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it’s not possible to see God’s kingdom.”⁴ Nicodemus asked, “How is it possible for an adult to be born? It’s impossible to enter the mother’s womb for a second time and be born, isn’t it?”⁵ Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom.”⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.⁷ Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’⁸ God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”⁹ Nicodemus said, “How are these things possible?”¹⁰ “Jesus answered, “You are a teacher of Israel and you don’t know these things?”¹¹ I assure you that we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don’t receive our testimony.¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?¹³ No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One.¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.¹⁷ God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:1-17 CEB+)

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

This week’s message is all about entitlement and how we learn to let it go. I think this one can be a difficult one because I think we struggle to find the words to speak about entitlement. I think that problem happens because we are a people that often think about what it is we deserve, the things that we have earned. In a very individualistic society, we can often feel that we are entitled to things. However, that feeling can creep into our faith and can cause us to struggle because we struggle to understand the free gift of God’s grace. It also means that we can reject loving our neighbor as ourselves because we will think that we are entitled to something that our neighbor isn’t. And the moment we think that we have drawn a line between us and them, and we have decided that we are special.

I wanted to begin with the definition that I’ll be working with for entitlement so that we’re all on the same page. Because I think out of everything that I chose to go over for Lent, I think this one was the one that was the hardest to explain. Because entitlement is a belief that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges. I wanted to start with this definition because I think that it helps us to set in mind what it is we are talking about when we talk about letting go of entitlement. That if we are to let it go, we have to understand what we’re letting go of. It’s not a belief that people should have basic rights. It’s not an idea about things that everyone should have. Because those basic rights aren’t what I would consider to be an entitlement. Those are just what we all need. Entitlement is something special, which is why I wanted to use this definition because it pertains to certain privileges. Privileges are given to some, but not others. It’s when we feel that we are supposed to get them and no else that we begin to divide ourselves from our neighbor and from God.

We need to look at this free gift of God's grace. Our other readings will be sandwiched in between John's gospel. Because we have the very famous words of John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life." And I'm sure that we have heard that in many versions. But I wanted to think about it today as the free gift because of God's extensive love. Another way we might translate that line is this: God loved the world by sending his Son so that all can believe in him and have eternal life. I like to think of it that way because it talks about the way that God loves the world with this free gift of grace, making it an act of love itself. I talk about it as a free gift because sometimes we can act like we have some sort of special entitlement to the kingdom of heaven because of who we are. I have known Christians that think that they are entitled to some sort of special privilege because they are God's chosen people. When I think about that, it contrasts with this because it is God loving the world. Not just some, but it is God offering this gift to everyone. And because of that gift being free to everyone, it means that invitation is to all people.

I wanted to start with this because I think it helps us to think about what Paul is saying. When Paul is talking, Genesis is the background. Because Genesis is Abraham being told that God is going to make a great nation of him. That Abraham is going to leave his land, his family, his father's household to come into the land that God is going to offer because God is giving him a gift. And because of that, this gift is going to mean that Abraham will have many descendants, including many by faith. Paul talks about this promise to Abraham and how it doesn't come through the law, but it comes through righteousness by faith. Because had it come by the law, it wouldn't be a gift. It would be an entitlement. Abraham would say, well, this is what I am supposed to have. This is mine by right. Instead, it is Abraham, you are going to have a multitude of nations to follow you and it's going to come by faith. And it is by faith that it comes. Paul says that the law brings about wrath, but when there's no law, there's no violation of the law. The inheritance is by faith because it is by God's grace. Abraham never earned that spot. Abraham didn't show up one day and thinking he completed all of the work he needed to do, asking "Where is my reward?" That would have been entitlement on Abraham's part. That's what we too often see in this world. People think that they do the work and that they have earned a reward. I think that kind of entitlement bleeds into every part of our life, our spiritual well-being, our physical well-being, our relationship with our neighbors. Entitlement can poison all of that because we start thinking that we are privileged and that we have earned something. But Paul talks about how wages are earned, but faith is credited as righteousness.

Because God didn't send his son into the world to judge the world, but the world might be saved through him. I wanted to come back to John because when Jesus and Nicodemus are talking, they're having this long back and forth about needing to be born from above or by faith. That it is this second birth by the Holy Spirit, being born spiritually, not physically. Because what is flesh is flesh and what is spirit is spirit. And so, when Nicodemus is confused by this, this is what Jesus tells him. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life." But it's followed with "God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him." I highlight this for two reasons. One is that this helps us to stay away from thinking that we have earned a spot in heaven because too often we get the idea that we are earning a place in heaven, that we are earning salvation, that we are earning God's grace, and we cannot, because it is a gift offered to us before we even know we need it. The other is that too

often that entitlement leads to judgment, and we become judges of who is worthy and who is not. We become the arbitrators of who is faithful and who is not. We want to decide who is entitled to heaven and who is not. But God didn't send his son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Because God loved the world so much, he would offer his son for our salvation to be an example of what perfect love looks like. Not so that we would be judged, not so that we would judge each other, but for love, so that we would learn to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love God with our whole being.

The thing about entitlement is that it is so pervasive, because the moment we think we are entitled to something, we begin to think that the whole world owes us, and that those who haven't worked as hard as we have or done exactly what we have done are not entitled to the same privileges we have. We think we become the litmus test. We become the standard for who is good enough for Christ. And the moment we have done that, we have turned our backs on him. Because entitlement pulls us away from God and into selfishness. Entitlement draws us into the world and away from Christ, because it makes us want the attention that it gets. It makes us want to be special because of what we have done and not special because we are loved by our Savior. That is the danger I see in entitlement, because when we think we are owed everything, we end up with nothing.

So, I say let it go. Let go of that selfish need to think that you deserve more than your neighbor. Learn discipline and self-control so that you can learn to love your neighbor and not feel entitled to more than anyone else. Because we must be willing to accept God's gift of grace and we must share it with others. Which means we have to let go of selfish desires and we must let go of that need for attention. That we must let go and humble ourselves before God. Because instead of thinking of what it is we are owed, we need to think about what it is we can do for Christ. We must let the Spirit guide us, because our Heavenly Father will always remind us of his grace to free us from entitlement. And if we are willing to follow, we can always learn to let it go. 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 – Let It Go

Our series for Lent is all about what we can give up as we follow Christ. “Let It Go” starts with an introduction on Ash Wednesday and then goes through the different things we can let go of. We explore the idea of giving things up for Lent as we explore how we can let go of temptation, entitlement, division, presumptions, and doubt. Let us work together to let go of worldly desires as we walk towards the cross.

2/18: Learning to Let Go	2/22: Temptation	3/1: Entitlement
3/8: Division	3/15: Presumptions	3/22: Doubt

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