

Let It Go: Division

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 8 2026

3rd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 133

Call to Worship: Let us conduct ourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love. Make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties us together. We are one body and one spirit, just as God has called us in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all. (Ephesians 4)

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 133

¹ Look at how good and pleasing it is when families live together as one! ² It is like expensive oil poured over the head, running down onto the beard— Aaron's beard!— which extended over the collar of his robes. ³ It is like the dew on Mount Hermon streaming down onto the mountains of Zion, because it is there that the Lord has commanded the blessing: everlasting life. (Psalm 133 CEB+)

We read the words of Psalm 133, and we hear of God's unity. That we are blessed with the presence of the Lord. That God encourages us to be united together. That we must let go of division and be thankful for the blessing we find with our God. 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 Exodus chapter 17, verses 1 through 7.

¹ The whole Israelite community broke camp and set out from the Sin desert to continue their journey, as the Lord commanded. They set up their camp at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people argued with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why are you arguing with me? Why are you testing the Lord?" ³ But the people were very thirsty for water there, and they complained to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What should I do with this people? They are getting ready to stone me." ⁵ The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of Israel's elders with you. Take in your hand the shepherd's rod that you used to strike the Nile River, and go. ⁶ I'll be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Hit the rock. Water will come out of it, and the people will be able to drink." Moses did so while Israel's elders watched. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites argued with and tested the Lord, asking, "Is the Lord really with us or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7 CEB+)

Our second reading is from Romans chapter 5, verses 1 through 11.

¹ Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. ³ But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵ This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. ⁶ While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷ It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. ⁸ But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ So, now that we have been made righteous by his blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰ If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life? ¹¹ And not only that: we even take pride in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom we now have a restored relationship with God.
(Romans 5:1-11 CEB+)

Our final reading is from John chapter 4, verses 5 through 42.

⁵He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." ⁸His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food. ⁹The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.) ¹⁰Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep. Where would you get this living water?" ¹²You aren't greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave this well to us, and he drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will never be thirsty and will never need to come here to draw water!" ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, get your husband, and come back here." ¹⁷The woman replied, "I don't have a husband." "You are right to say, 'I don't have a husband,'" Jesus answered. ¹⁸"You've had five husbands, and the man you are with now isn't your husband. You've spoken the truth." ¹⁹The woman said, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you and your people say that it is necessary to worship in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you and your people will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You and your people worship what you don't know; we worship what we know because salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. ²⁴God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I Am—the one who speaks with you." ²⁷Just then, Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, ²⁹"Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus. ³¹In the meantime the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³²Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." ³³The disciples asked each other, "Has someone brought him food?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. ³⁵Don't you have a saying, 'Four more months and then it's time for harvest'? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. ³⁶Those who harvest are receiving their pay and gathering fruit for eternal life so that those who sow

and those who harvest can celebrate together. ³⁷ This is a true saying, that one sows and another harvests. ³⁸ I have sent you to harvest what you didn't work hard for; others worked hard, and you will share in their hard work." ³⁹ Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified, "He told me everything I've ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of his word, ⁴² and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world." (John 4:5-42 CEB+)

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

This message is all about division and how we learn to let it go. This was an interesting one. Because I think that we are more divided now than ever before. It seems that society wants us to constantly be picking sides. It invades every aspect of life. It is difficult when society throws that at us because it seems like there is no unity to be found. But the unity that we must seek is the unity that we find in the love of Christ. Because it reminds us of who we can be together. To let go of division, I wanted to look at our readings today.

We're going to start with our reading from John, and we will circle back around to John. Because John highlights the way that division becomes just a part of who we are. We see it in this interaction between Jesus and this Samaritan woman at the well. They have come to the Samaritan city of Sychar. Samaritans and Jews don't have much to do with each other. The divisions are mostly of territory and where to worship. But the division runs so deep that it makes it unusual for them to interact at all. I thought that there was something familiar about the way that they let those differences divide them. They share ancestry in being descendants of Abraham. They worship the same God. But over time they have become so divided they don't even interact with each other. Jesus comes to this Samaritan city and he sits down without anyone else around. While Jesus is alone, a woman comes to the well to draw water. He asks her for some water to drink. Her question in reply is rather telling about the division in society. "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" It is rather telling that that is her response to his request for something as simple as water. But it starts a dialogue. Jesus uses this opportunity to reach out and to bridge a divide. He speaks the truth. Not every truth is what she expects to hear, but it is all true. Because of this, she goes and tells the people there all about Jesus. Jesus is overcoming a divide, overcoming a barrier that others are hesitant to cross. His disciples are shocked to see him talking to a Samaritan woman. But in spite of their objections, there is Jesus bridging the divides. Because it's who he is and it's what he does.

I was seeing the divisions in our other readings. We see it in Exodus when the people begin to distrust both Moses and God. Another thing that can cause division is a lack of trust. Because when we stop trusting each other, we start creating divisions between us and those whom we don't trust. We see it is here over a request for water. Yet this time it's a division being caused through that request. The people are thirsty and they are losing patience with Moses. They are losing patience with God. Moses wants to know why it is they are arguing with him and why it is they are testing the Lord. There is no trust. So, Moses cries out to the Lord, and he strikes the stone to get water. But he names the place after the doubt the people had when they questioned if God was with them. That in itself creates a division. Part of that division

is those who can trust and those who cannot. Those who have faith and those who do not. Faith both in God and in each other. Because the instinct that the Israelites had was to think everything was bad and everything was going to be bad. That they could not trust that things could be good. They began to divide themselves along those lines. It's a dangerous thing when we start thinking of each other as enemies.

In Romans we hear about the salvation we have in Christ and how we need to be able to endure through our hardships. Because we know that trouble produces endurance and how endurance can produce character. And that character can produce hope. It's a reminder that Christ died for us as sinners. That his love for us was because of hope. Hope that we would understand love. Hope that we could share his love. And if we could be reconciled to Christ, even though there should be division between us, how much more can we heal the divisions that we have with one another? What are the divisions so great that Christ cannot overcome them? I'm reminded of John Wesley's attitude of "think and let think." Not about everything, mind you. Wesley could not be budged on his stance opposing slavery, because it related to his core idea of goodness. But if something was not at the core of who we are and the core of our salvation surely, we could disagree and let those disagreements create conversation. That they could create discussion. That it would not be because we had to be divided, but that we could overcome those divisions because Christ unites us in love and in hope. And that maybe we have a dialogue about those differences, and we learn to live through them.

Here I circle here back around to John. Because I see that's where this dialogue comes in. Jesus does not spurn this Samaritan woman who is different. She is not a Jew, and she is not a man. But Christ values her time and he values her opinion because he values her as a person. She is so moved by what Christ says that she goes and preaches to the people. She understands Jesus to be a prophet, and she suspects he could be the Messiah. Jesus is planting seeds of faith. His disciples are not sure what's going on. They are confused by his reconciliation here. The woman puts down her jar, and she goes into the city and she preaches. "Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" And you know what? Some would say that she's not really preaching because it's a question, but I ask plenty of questions still. But she had the boldness to suggest that they needed to overcome this division and see if this man was the Messiah. People listen and they lift to go see Jesus. Jesus is telling his disciples about how he is there to heal division. That those who sow and those who harvest can celebrate together. Not divided, but together. That we will share in the work together. Some sow and some harvest, but in the end it's the results that matter. And many Samaritans come to believe because of this one woman's testimony. These people that are supposed to be the outsiders, the other, the people who are unclean and shouldn't be around, come to believe.

When we have to overcome division in our own lives, we have to recognize that often the things that divide us are superficial. That we have created divisions merely because we have always been told that we need to have them. We create divisions based on nationality, based on heritage, based on traditions, based on anything we can find. The problem with division is that we let it cause us to not want to understand and love each other. We let every division be a wall instead of a table. You cannot overcome a wall, but you can reach out a hand of understanding and respect across a table. No division is so deep that we cannot overcome it. Because the divisions that we create separate not just ourselves from each other, but when

we separate ourselves from loving our neighbor as ourselves, we are separating ourselves from Christ, and we are divided from him and his love.

So, I say, let it go. Let go of the need to divide yourself from your neighbor. Learn discipline and learn self-control so that you can learn to share those experiences with your neighbor, and not to divide ourselves endlessly along countless lines. Because we must be willing to come together in the love of Christ. Which means we let go of the selfish desires to endlessly divide ourselves into smaller and smaller groups until we are an island of one. That we must humble ourselves before God. Because instead of thinking of endless ways to divide, we must think of ways that we may be drawn together in the love of Christ. We must let the Spirit guide us because our Heavenly Father will always remind us of his grace to heal any division. 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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