

Let It Go: Doubt

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 22 2026

5th Sunday in Lent

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45 CEB

Reflection: Proverbs 3:3-10

Call to Worship: Bless the Lord because he has listened to my request for mercy! The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts him. I was helped, my heart rejoiced, and I thank him with my song. The Lord is his people's strength; he is a fortress of protection for his anointed one. (Psalm 28)

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: Proverbs 3:3-10

³Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and of people. ⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. ⁸It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body. ⁹Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; ¹⁰then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. (Proverbs 3:3-10 CEB+)

We read the words of Proverbs, and we hear how we need to remain faithful to the Lord. That we should not trust in our own wisdom but rely upon God to guide us. That we can trust that the Lord will get us to where we need to be if we trust and let go of doubt. That we prosper when we let God lead us by faith. 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 here together 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 Ezekiel chapter 37, verses 1 through 14.

37 The Lord's power overcame me, and while I was in the Lord's spirit, he led me out and set me down in the middle of a certain valley. It was full of bones. ² He led me through them all around, and I saw that there were a great many of them on the valley floor, and they were very dry. ³ He asked me, "Human one, can these bones live again?" I said, "Lord God, only you know." ⁴ He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, Dry bones, hear the Lord's word! ⁵ The Lord God proclaims to these bones: I am about to put breath in you, and you will live again. ⁶ I will put sinews on you, place flesh on you, and cover you with skin. When I put breath in you, and you come to life, you will know that I am the Lord." ⁷ I prophesied just as I was commanded. There was a great noise as I was prophesying, then a great quaking, and the bones came together, bone by bone. ⁸ When I looked, suddenly there were sinews on them. The flesh appeared, and then they were covered over with skin. But there was still no breath in them. ⁹ He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, human one! Say to the breath, The Lord God proclaims: Come from the four winds, breath! Breathe into these dead bodies and let them live." ¹⁰ I prophesied just as he commanded me. When the breath entered them, they came to life and stood on their feet, an extraordinarily large company. ¹¹ He said to me, "Human one, these bones are the entire house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely finished.' ¹² So now, prophesy and say to them, The Lord God proclaims: I'm opening your graves! I will raise you up from your graves, my people, and I will bring you to Israel's fertile land. ¹³ You will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you up from your graves, my people. ¹⁴ I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the Lord. I've spoken, and I will do it. This is what the Lord says." (Ezekiel 37:1-14 CEB+)

Our second reading is from Romans chapter 8, verses 6 through 11.

⁶ The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. ⁷ So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's Law, because it can't. ⁸ People who are self-centered aren't

able to please God. ⁹ But you aren't self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God's Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God's righteousness, but the body is dead because of sin. ¹¹ If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you. (Romans 8:6-11 CEB+)

Our final reading is from John chapter 11, verses 1 through 45.

11 A certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (² This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying, "Lord, the one whom you love is ill." ⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, "This illness isn't fatal. It's for the glory of God so that God's Son can be glorified through it." ⁵ Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. After two days, ⁷ he said to his disciples, "Let's return to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples replied, "Rabbi, the Jewish opposition wants to stone you, but you want to go back?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Aren't there twelve hours in the day? Whoever walks in the day doesn't stumble because they see the light of the world. ¹⁰ But whoever walks in the night does stumble because the light isn't in them." ¹¹ He continued, "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I am going in order to wake him up." ¹² The disciples said, "Lord, if he's sleeping, he will get well." ¹³ They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was in a deep sleep, but Jesus had spoken about Lazarus' death. ¹⁴ Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. ¹⁵ For your sakes, I'm glad I wasn't there so that you can believe. Let's go to him." ¹⁶ Then Thomas (the one called Didymus) said to the other disciples, "Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus." ¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha replied, "I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, the one who is coming into the world." ²⁸ After she said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister Mary, "The teacher is here and he's calling for you." ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰ He hadn't entered the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were comforting Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and leave, they followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb. ³² When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. ³⁴ He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to cry. ³⁶ The Jews said, "See how

much he loved him!”³⁷ But some of them said, “He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?”³⁸ Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance.³⁹ Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, “Lord, the smell will be awful! He’s been dead four days.”⁴⁰ Jesus replied, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believe, you will see God’s glory?”⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me.⁴² I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.”⁴³ Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came with Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him. (John 11:1-45 CEB+)

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

This last topic in our Let It Go series for Lent is doubt. Our doubts can cause us to lose sight of what's important. Doubt can cause us to give up before we've even started. Doubt can cause us to fail before we even begin. Because we can become too scared to even start. Doubt can seep into every single part of our lives. It's like an infection that just won't stop. And the moment we begin to doubt, it can cascade through everything. When we doubt, we struggle to be able to recover because it follows us around. Our readings today help us to explore faith and doubt together, because we can see both shining through today.

Our gospel reading from John is all about Lazarus. Jesus delays going to see Lazarus. The disciples have doubts about whether or not they should even go to Judea, resigning themselves to die with Jesus, doubting that they're going to get through this alive. When they come back, though, they find that Lazarus has died. What I wanted to point out here is what we see when Martha comes to see Jesus. I don't see doubt. And I wanted to highlight it because of the fact that sometimes when we see things, we imagine it is doubt when there is still faith. What we see is that Martha says to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.” Now, the reason that I wanted to point out that this is not doubt is because nowhere does Martha accuse. Nowhere does Martha say that Jesus couldn't have saved him. What Martha is saying is that she wishes he had been there sooner because she has faith that Jesus could have saved Lazarus. I mention this because sometimes we paint her as having doubt, and I don't think she does. She believes that he is the Christ. Martha's problem here is not doubt. She lacks understanding because she doesn't know resurrection is possible. She believes in the resurrection. She just doesn't understand that what Jesus is speaking of to her is now and not in a far-off distant future. Her faith is in Jesus, but she lacks an understanding of what could be. The doubt we see is from her inability to understand. I point this out because it's important that we understand how doubt works. We can recognize faith when we see it, and here I think Martha has faith. She does not begin to doubt what Christ can do.

Now when we get to our other readings, we hear about overcoming doubts. A vision is given to Ezekiel, and he is asked, “Human one, can these bones live again?” Ezekiel's response is, “Lord God, only you know.” This response is one that admits not knowing. It's one that kind of shifts the question over. It is basically Ezekiel is saying, “don't ask me, you're the

only one that would know.” God tells him to prophesy over the bones, and that the bones will raise up. When he does, they are raised up. Then he is told the bones represent the house of Israel. It represents their own doubt. I say this because one of the things we hear is that they believe themselves to be completely finished. That their bones are dried up, and their hope has perished. That is them not having any faith that they can be saved. Because faith would say that when we are dried up that we call to the Lord to save us. But they don't. Instead, they're saying their hope is gone. They have nothing. But God is saying that as long as he can give them breath they have a chance to live. I wanted to mention that because in this, it is very much shown that the people of Israel are as good as dead because of their doubt. Because they have faith in nothing. And because of that, they have become like dried up bones. That they don't trust that God will help them. They don't believe that God is there for them. They don't trust that God can see them through.

We hear about this in Romans. That the attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death. And I think that's the attitude that the people have in Ezekiel. It is the attitude some have in our Gospel reading. They believe only in what they can see. They believe in only what they know. They cannot trust that God could do anything beyond that. That selfish attitude is hostile to God. The opposite of that is to not be self-centered, but to be in the Spirit. That we find life beyond death. “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.” That we are given life when we don't doubt, but we trust in God. But that can be hard because those self-centered desires seem to be at the center of everything. We live in a very self-centered society. I think that's why it's so easy to doubt. Because we're always told to look out for number one. We are told to think about ourselves first. That we must always be thinking of ourselves before anyone else. We are asked to be selfish, to want more and more and more for ourselves. That when we are to work, we are to work to gain as much as we can for ourselves. That everything that we do is supposed to be for our own selfish ambition. And that, of course, is hostile to God. It instills doubt. Because when you think that you have to rely on yourself for everything, you begin to doubt that anyone can help you, including God. And we become like those dry bones in Ezekiel. All faith having fled because all we could believe in was ourselves. That kind of doubt is dangerous because we lose sight of what is important.

It's here that we circle back around to John. We see the doubt of the people around Jesus. We've already covered that Martha fully believes that Jesus is the Christ and that she believes in the resurrection. Martha goes and fetches Mary saying that the teacher is calling for her. Mary quickly goes to Jesus, she does not hesitate. And the Jewish people near there follow her assuming that she's going to go mourn at Lazarus's tomb again. Mary has the same statement that Martha did. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.” That is not a statement of doubt for me. I think we are given a shining example of faith to hold up to the doubt. Mary proclaims she fully believes Lazarus would live had Jesus been there. Not that she doubts Jesus' intentions. Not that she doubts his power. She laments that her friend was not there to save her brother. Jesus is moved by this and he weeps. As he cries, we see the doubt of the people around him. Because they doubt his tears. Because they need someone to blame. Now, the difference that I see here is that Mary is lamenting that her friend could not be there to save her brother. But when Jesus begins to weep showing his sorrow, some of them question. Because he healed the eyes of the man born blind. Shouldn't he have been here to save Lazarus? That doubt is because they expected more. And because they expected more,

they are disappointed with what they have. This is when it begins to turn into an accusation. Because some can recognize that Jesus is weeping out of love for his friend. But others think that it's guilt. Because they need someone to blame to fill in their own doubts.

I think Mary and Martha do highlight a different kind of doubt. Mary and Martha are shown to have great faith. They are great examples of overcoming doubt and trusting by faith. Even in this great time of difficulty, they do not lose faith in Christ. I read their statements not as accusations but as laments. But we can see how those laments can turn into accusations when we begin to doubt. It goes from trusting Jesus' intentions to questioning his power. But Jesus then asks for an even stronger faith, and that is when we see a kind of doubt arise. Mary begins to show a doubt born from a lack of knowledge. When Jesus tells them to remove the stone, Mary questions this. Not because she questions his intentions, but she questions what is even possible. Because when she mentions that he's been in the tomb four days, that is just recognizing that he is by tradition beyond any hope of healing. Her limited knowledge finally causes her to doubt. Not because she doesn't trust Jesus but because she doesn't understand what it is he can do. But Jesus reminds her that if she believes she will see God's glory. And that's enough for her. Because she overcomes the doubt from ignorance and says that she will trust him. Even if it's not in her knowledge. Too often we let doubt ruin us because we think our knowledge is complete. If we don't know something then it must not be knowable. We doubt and have no faith because we think that we know everything. We think things are not possible simply because we have never thought about them as possible. That kind of doubt becomes pervasive because it will insinuate itself in every part of life. It will sneak in and drive a wedge between us and God every time. Because we cannot have faith that things can get better. We will not have faith in things that we do not know. We will not have faith in things we cannot see. And that in turn will make us not have faith in each other and we will doubt everything including ourselves.

So, I say let it go. Let go of the doubt that causes us to forget our faith. Let go of the way that we doubt all of the good in the world. The way that we doubt our neighbors, and the way that we doubt ourselves in being able to make a difference. Learn discipline and learn self-control so that you can learn to have faith and to trust in God's goodness. To trust that the people around us are capable of goodness and light. Let us be willing to believe even when we cannot see. To trust even when we do not know. That we let go of the doubt that causes us to question everything. Instead, let us trust in the love of our Heavenly Father. Because if we can humble ourselves before God and acknowledge that we do not know everything, we will realize that there is plenty of room for faith. That we must let the Holy Spirit guide us. Because our Heavenly Father will always remind us of the trust that we may have and the faith that we have to overcome all doubt. 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.

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| 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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