

## **Easter Spirit: Spirit Approaches**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 17 2026

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 1:6-14; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11 NRSVue

**Reflection:** Psalm 145:17-21

**Call to Worship:** Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139)

**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 seek to find you and to share in all that you have shown us in Christ. Let us celebrate the joy that we find in your steadfast love and faithfulness. Let the light of our Lord's resurrection lift our hearts on this day. Guide us and lead us in worship together so that we may praise your name. Lift up our hearts that we may sing of your miraculous salvation. May your love bless us this day so that we may love one another more deeply. Help us to celebrate the empty tomb as a sign of your great love for us. May we be freed from slavery to sin and death and arise into a life of righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 145:17-21

*<sup>17</sup> The Lord is just in all his ways and kind in all his doings. <sup>18</sup> The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. <sup>19</sup> He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. <sup>20</sup> The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. <sup>21</sup> My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever. (Psalm 145:17-21 NRSVUE\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 145, and we hear of praising the Lord. That God watches over his children and reaches out to help us when we call. That the Lord is our strength and our salvation in our time of need. That God is kind and merciful to those who seek him. That he gives us the Holy Spirit as our guide through difficult times. Who can you be lifting up in your joyful prayers in the week ahead? What can you do to help out a neighbor in need? How can we prepare our hearts and our lives to be ready for all things with Christ?

**Prayer:** O God, our Holy One, our altar, our cloud: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your temple. Accept the sacrifices we offer, and draw us into the fire of your Spirit. 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 share the celebrations that we have lifted up together. Help us to also share the silent pleadings from within. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears as you guide us through the unknown. May you strengthen us in sorrow

and in rejoicing, knowing you are with us. Help us to remember the promise we share as we seek you and your love on this day. 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 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 1, verses 6 through 14.

*<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*  
(Acts 1:6-14 NRSVue\*)

Our second reading is from 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 12 through 14 and chapter 5, verses 6 through 11.

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.*  
(1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 NRSVue\*)

Our final reading is from John chapter 17 verses 1 through 11.

*17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. <sup>6</sup>"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (John 17:1-11 NRSVue\*)*

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

This week our message is about how the "Spirit Approaches," and it was hard to convey what was in my head for this one. The way I wanted to think about this is the way that we have that feeling of the Spirit coming upon us and what it means to have the Holy Spirit enter into our lives. And this is part of the feeling that we have when we remember the Resurrection and we carry that Easter Spirit with us. Because one of the things that we have to do is to remember that the Spirit is there for us. I think sometimes we are looking in the wrong places, not realizing where we need to be looking for what it is we seek. The problem is that if the Spirit is approaching, are we looking in the right direction? And we get this from our readings for today.

When we look at our Gospel reading, we have Jesus talking about how the Father is glorified in the Son and how it is time for the Son to be glorified. All so that people will know that the Son and the Father are one. Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure. He is preparing them for the fact that he will not be physically there in the room with them. He wants them to know that they will be taken care of when the time comes. He looks to heavens and he gives this speech, this prayer, this blessing. He talks about how he is asking on behalf of all those that he has been looking after, that the Father will take care of them. Because he has been watching after them and he knows that if they are his, that they are the Father's. That if the Son cares for them, the Father cares for them. And that they will need the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them, to watch over them so that they won't feel alone. We have that feeling because he is asking, "Father, protect them." We know this will be done by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is to be that presence with us always so that we will never be alone. As He put it last week, that we will not be orphaned, that we will not be abandoned. But we have to know where to look. Because though we are promised this protection and this help, we have to know where to look if we are going to be able to accept that kind of help.

I was reminded of our reading from Acts as I was thinking about this. Jesus is telling the disciples that they will receive the Holy Spirit and it will help them witness in Jerusalem and all of Judea, everywhere. To Jew and Gentile alike, the Holy Spirit will help. That they will be lifted up and they will be watched over, and that they should expect the Spirit to come to them. There is that anticipation, waiting for the Spirit to approach. But they get asked a question after Jesus ascends. After he does so, two men in white robes appear. And they ask, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" It is a question about why the disciples are just standing there looking at the sky. One of the things I think of when I hear this question is, are you just going to stare at the sky? Don't you have better things to do? And I think that is a valid question. I think it's a valid question because it is something that we really have to consider. What are we doing? Are we using our time wisely? Are we looking for the Holy Spirit where the Spirit is going to be? Are we looking for Jesus where Jesus is going to be? Are we seeking God where God is going to be? Are we doing what we should be doing if we anticipate the Holy Spirit being with us? Now, one of the ways we can handle this is by thinking about what it was the apostles did. Because the apostles have a response to this. They're asked why they're looking up to heaven, and so they go back and they devote themselves to prayer. They devote themselves to breaking bread together. When the apostles needed to refocus themselves, they focused on what it was Jesus taught them to do, and they spent their time working together. They were looking at where they needed to be, and they had to change their focus. Instead of staring into heaven and waiting for what comes next, they had to face the now and to keep moving forward.

We hear about doing that in 1 Peter. 1 Peter is really giving a comfort in a time of trial and explaining that even in the times of difficulty, the Holy Spirit is there with you. If you are struggling, and if you are having problems, cast those anxieties on God. Turn to God with your problems. Turn to God with your prayers. Turn to God because the Holy Spirit is there to guide you and help you. That even in adversity, you are not alone. Even when we face the hardest things that we will ever face, we never face them alone because God is with us. That no matter what kind of suffering we may have, no matter what kind of difficulty, no matter what kind of heartache we may face, we can turn to face the new day, because we're not alone. And if we feel alone, maybe it's because we're not looking in the right place. Maybe we have forgotten where we should be focused and we're just like those apostles looking to the sky, waiting for what will come next when it's up to us to make it happen.

Because I'll tell you this; the Spirit approaches and we have to know which direction it's coming from. And it will always come from the direction that God is in. But we are so often looking to where we want to be, that we are not looking where God has called us to be. Because we get caught up in thinking that we know where we should be. That we know what comes next and that we know best. The thing is, is that we don't know where the Spirit is going to lead us. What we do know is what to look for. Because wherever the Spirit is, we will find peace. And we will find hope. We will find purpose. We will find comfort. We will find support. We will find protection. Because we will find grace. And the Spirit that approaches will restore us, support us, strengthen us. Will help us to be strong, to be kind, and to be compassionate. But we have to turn to the Spirit for help. Because we have a role to play. And one of the things

that it tells me when we go through these readings today is that we have to be vigilant looking for the Spirit and not just waiting for the Spirit to do everything for us. Because I think too often, we are waiting on God to do something so that we can just respond, forgetting that God is always active in our lives. The Holy Spirit is moving. But the only way we will know is if we are looking. And the only way we will find the Spirit is if we are looking in the right place. So, we have to ask ourselves where the Spirit is going to be for us to find the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not be in a place that calls us to be selfish. But the Spirit will be where we can be generous. The Spirit will not approach from a place of pride and arrogance. The Spirit will be in a place where we are humble. And we are thankful. The Spirit will not come from a place where we have power over one another. But from a place where we have grace to accept one another.

Because our Easter Spirit is not about the power that it gives us. It is about the freedom we may help others to achieve. Because we have been set free from slavery to sin and death. As we live in Christ, we die in Christ, and we are raised in Christ. And that is a gift that we have to share. The Holy Spirit will help us to share that gift. If we are willing to go where we need to go and to be the people we need to be. Because the only way that we can share that Spirit is if we can show others what it truly means to live and die and be raised in Christ. We have to show that the empty tomb has had an impact on our lives and has changed the way that we live. That we show others what it means to have that Spirit with us. And so I pray that we can carry that Easter Spirit with us always, and that it will help us to always see where the Spirit is and where the Spirit needs us to be. I pray that our Lord's resurrection inspires us to do more, to be more, and to cause us to go wherever it is we are called to go. Because we know that wherever God leads us, it is always going to be with love and mercy. 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 – Easter Spirit**

Our series is all about how we let the resurrection transform our lives. We will have a focus this year on the Spirit. Each week will look at another aspect of the Spirit and how it transforms how we live. This series will take us through Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. How can we let the resurrection of Jesus continue to transform our lives all the year round? We celebrate the resurrection of Christ as we rejoice in the Spirit.

5/3: Spirit and Glory                      5/10: Spirit of Truth                      5/17: Spirit Approaches

5/24: Spirit is Here    5/31: Spirit of Goodness

### **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 9:30a

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