WWJD: Jesus Welcomes

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – September 20 2026

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Ephesians 2:11-19; Mark 2:1-17 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 103 CEB

Call to Worship: Come, those who seek mercy, healing, and a place to call home. We come to Jesus, who welcomes us all with open arms. As we come to worship, we ask ourselves: What would Jesus do? He would open his arms to all, so we come as those ready to welcome and be welcomed!

Prayer: Blessed God, we gather before you in prayer. We seek your love and your grace to be with us in our lives on this day. We come together to ask of ourselves what it is our Savior would do. We come to worship with a Spirit of truth and light as we come together as your people. We celebrate the Father that watches over us, helping us in our daily lives. We celebrate the Son, whose great love for us was demonstrated on the cross. We come to celebrate the Holy Spirit, whose presence we welcome into our lives so that your holy grace may continue to work within us. We pray you will help us to welcome everyone into your loving care. We pray you will help us to share your grace with a world in need of mercy and care. Help us to see the good in each other and to be the good we wish to see. May you continue to teach us what is right and good so that we may continue to grow in wisdom. May you continue to challenge us so that we may grow in faith. Help us to sing your praises this day, Lord. May we gather in the peace and love that you offer us each and every day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 103

> *6 The Lord works righteousness; does justice for all who are oppressed. 7 God made his ways known to Moses; made his deeds known to the Israelites. 8 The Lord is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love. 9 God won't always play the judge; he won't be angry forever. 10 He doesn't deal with us according to our sin or repay us according to our wrongdoing, 11 because as high as heaven is above the earth, that's how large God's faithful love is for those who honor him. (Psalm 103:6-11 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 103 and hear of the welcome God has for his people. That the faithful love of the Lord is always available to those who seek out God in their lives. That we should seek God's mercy always, because he is patient with us, offering us forgiveness and hope. Do you seek to live like Christ? Who can you lift in your prayers this week? Who can you help with your service? We should always ask ourselves: what would Jesus do?

Prayer: Most merciful God, we seek your grace and your mercy in our lives today. We turn to you in prayer with the joys and concerns that we have in our lives this day. We pray for the strength to do what is right and to walk in the way of salvation. We ask ourselves what Jesus would do so that we may strive to be more like our blessed Savior. We pray that you will grant us wisdom so that we may learn to think and act more like Jesus every day. We pray you will be with us in the good, the bad, and the unknown. Help to remember your love is with us in our

laughter and in our tears. May we know your grace in our sorrow and in our rejoicing. Let your steadfast love and faithfulness guide us all the days of our lives. 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 Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 7 through 9.

7 The Lord proclaims: Sing joyfully for the people of Jacob; shout for the leading nation. Raise your voices with praise and call out: "The Lord has saved his people, the remaining few in Israel!" 8 I'm going to bring them back from the north; I will gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the disabled, expectant mothers and those in labor; a great throng will return here. 9 With tears of joy they will come; while they pray, I will bring them back. I will lead them by quiet streams and on smooth paths so they don't stumble. I will be Israel's father, Ephraim will be my oldest child. (Jeremiah 31:7-9 CEB+)

Our second reading is from Ephesians chapter 2, verse 11 through 19.

11 So remember that once you were Gentiles by physical descent, who were called "uncircumcised" by Jews who are physically circumcised. 12 At that time you were without Christ. You were aliens rather than citizens of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of God's promise. In this world you had no hope and no God. 13 But now, thanks to Christ Jesus, you who once were so far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. 15 He canceled the detailed rules of the Law so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace. 16 He reconciled them both as one body to God by the cross, which ended the hostility to God. 17 When he came, he announced the good news of peace to you who were far away from God and to those who were near. 18 We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit. 19 So now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God's people, and you belong to God's household. (Ephesians 2:11-19 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 2 verses 1 through 17.

2 *After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. 2 So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. 3 Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. 4 They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" 6 Some legal experts were sitting there, muttering among themselves, 7 "Why does he speak this way? He's insulting God. Only the one God can forgive sins." 8 Jesus immediately recognized what they were discussing, and he said to them, "Why do you fill your minds with these questions? 9 Which is easier—to say to a paralyzed person, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk'? 10 But so you will know that the Human One has authority on the earth to forgive sins"—he*

said to the man who was paralyzed, [11] "Get up, take your mat, and go home." [12] Jesus raised him up, and right away he picked up his mat and walked out in front of everybody. They were all amazed and praised God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this!" [13] Jesus went out beside the lake again. The whole crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. [14] As he continued along, he saw Levi, Alphaeus' son, sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Levi got up and followed him. [15] Jesus sat down to eat at Levi's house. Many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples. Indeed, many of them had become his followers. [16] When some of the legal experts from among the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, "Why is he eating with sinners and tax collectors?" [17] When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to call righteous people, but sinners." (Mark 2:1-17 CEB+)

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

This week marks a new series called "WWJD" or "What Would Jesus Do?" Each week we will be asking ourselves that question so that we may understand what it is we are called to do. Each week we will ask what it is Jesus would do and how we can respond in the same way as our Savior. Our very first message is "Jesus Welcomes" and in it we explore the way that Christ welcomes people and the way that we are called to emulate him in the way that we welcome people. As such, our reading is mostly going to be based in our gospel reading today because we will be looking each week at the actions Jesus took in his ministry and how we can be more like Jesus in those actions.

So, we step into our reading from Mark. In that reading we have Jesus welcoming people, and we have him doing this in a couple of different ways. The first is the way that Jesus welcomes a man who has been paralyzed. Jesus is out visiting and teaching and people have gathered around him. As Jesus is speaking, they want to bring their friend to him, but they cannot get him through the crowd. These four friends are carrying this fifth person on a stretcher, and they cannot get past the crowds to get to Jesus. Instead of giving up, they tear the roof off and lower him down. Jesus sees their faith and he welcomes it and he speaks and says that this man's sins are forgiven. Some legal experts are around, and they feel that only God can forgive sins, so who is this man to say that they're forgiven? Jesus understands what they are arguing about and asks which is easier: to forgive this man or tell him to get up and walk? Jesus knows the answer but decides to show that since it is easier to tell him his sins are forgiven, he will do the harder part and tell him to get up and walk and he does. This relates to our reading from Jeremiah where God is calling people back in and calls everyone to him and that includes the blind, disabled, all those whose society looks down on, all those who are left behind. All who are forgotten, God welcomes. That's what we see in this event with Christ. He is there seeing this man and seeing the faith of his friends. Jesus could have complained that they tore the roof off and lowered this man in. He could have complained that they were interrupting him because he was speaking. He could have told them that they need to wait their turn. He could have said they should be on their way. But the great compassion that Jesus has makes him forgive and to understand. So, he welcomes them just as God welcomes in Jeremiah, with tears of joy bringing God's people home. That's what Jesus is doing with the way that he welcomes these friends because they have someone in need and they will do everything they can to help him. Jesus sees that kind of compassion and courage and tells

them that they are doing the right thing. When people challenge it, Jesus says that he will do the more difficult thing to show that the forgiveness is certainly possible. Jesus heals this man so he can get up and walk. I think that's an amazing image to have of the way that Jesus welcomes everyone. He even welcomes an interruption. He even welcomes an outsider.

But that's not all Jesus is doing in our reading to welcome people. Mark continues that Jesus teaches and preaches and when he's out by the lake he sees someone, Levi a tax collector. Now tax collectors are not considered to be people you want around. Tax collectors are not seen as the best of the best. People don't like what they're doing. People often feel they're corrupt. Jesus calling a tax collector seems like he is doing something that most people would not. But that's the kind of radical welcome that Christ has for his people and it's what we hear about from Ephesians as well. That in Christ we are “no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God’s people, and you belong to God’s household.” That is not just for the ones that people like. It's for everyone, for the tax collector, for the outcast, for those who frown upon a disability. Jesus says no he welcomes all just as he welcomes the paralyzed man being lowered by his friends. He welcomes the tax collector, looking at the fringes of society and saying these are my people. I think it's wonderful that he can do that because it's an example set for us of how to be welcoming of all people. That we throw away the suspicions and the doubts that come from our own fears and we embrace the hope of Christ, to be welcoming to all people. Because when we ask ourselves, “what would Jesus do?” the answer is Jesus welcomes the stranger. Jesus welcomes the outcast. Jesus welcomes the ignored. Jesus welcomes all because what we can note is that nowhere in here does Jesus turn other people away. He never says he will only take the outcast. No, Jesus is saying he is including them. No longer are we broken into different groups. No longer should we be separated but we are together in Christ.

As we continue through our gospel reading, Jesus does what some would think to be a horrible thing to do. He sits down to eat at Levi's house. He is eating at the house of a tax collector. And worse than that in Levi's house there are other tax collectors and there are sinners. Jesus sits down to break bread with them, many of whom have become his followers. Now the legal experts and the Pharisees cannot understand why Jesus would do such a thing. They ask why it is he is eating with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus replies “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.” There is something amazing happening in that statement. I think that there is a depth to what he says that we may not always catch. Because we might think righteous people aren't welcome and Jesus is not there for everyone. No, it's that we are all sinners. Jesus came for everyone, but it happens to be those sinners sitting around the table, those tax collectors who have become his followers. They aren't there because they feel there is nothing going on in their lives that they need forgiveness for. It's that they have heard the call to repentance because they want the life that they find in Christ. They have found that his radical acceptance and love is enough for them to want to be more like him. That they see Christ inviting others in and they want to love like he loves. They want to invite people the way that he invites people. Because they can see the way that Jesus welcomes others and they want to be welcoming just like him. When we think about those tax collectors and sinners who have gathered around him, they are there because of the hope that he brings. The pharisees and the legal experts are there because they want to see who they can judge.

And that's the difference that we see. Jesus does not show up wanting to judge all of the people that are there. Jesus comes wanting them to understand that he is not there to judge. When I see those different crowds interacting, the pharisees and the legal experts are asking why he would debase himself to be with those people who are not worth his time. Whereas the other people who are there are asking what it is Jesus would do, and they see him welcoming. They decide to carry on in his spirit and to welcome others. We see that type of welcoming echo throughout the Bible. That God is constantly trying to get us to realize that instead of dividing ourselves endlessly we should be drawn together to be his people. Jesus shows us such a radical departure from the way people live to show us that it's possible to love others and to live with them. That we can avoid being judgmental but instead choose to be welcoming. That when we ask what it is Jesus would do, we have to answer that Jesus would welcome others, not judge them. He would see others and want them to be a part of the group, not to turn them away and decide that they should never be a part. I think that's one of the things that we have to accept is that Jesus doesn't call us to endlessly divide ourselves and to wall ourselves off from others. Jesus calls us to open the doors and invite everyone in. We gather together in his name so that we can learn to welcome people the way Jesus did.

Now, throughout this series we are going to be asking that question: “What Would Jesus Do?” And I don't mean it in any kind of cliche way. Often, we hear those words but may not contemplate them fully. I hope that we can explore those words as a true way to understand our theology. Because at the end of the day that question helps to teach us how to live. Because when I ask, “what would Jesus do?” I hear that Jesus would welcome someone who is being lowered from a hole in the roof simply because it was the only way that they could get the attention their friend needed. That Jesus would welcome someone who is despised by others because he knows that they too deserve love. When I ask myself, “what would Jesus do?” I ask how God's grace would be a part of that equation. I ask how the Holy Spirit draws us to be closer to what our Lord and Savior would do. And I look at what Jesus does and I try to be more like him. We are all called to welcome each other and to welcome everyone to be able to join in and share a life in Christ. so, I pray that we all are able to understand that when we ask, “What Would Jesus Do?” that we would understand that Jesus welcomes. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. 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 – WWJD

Our series has us looking at what we think Jesus would do. After all, if Christ is the example we are to live by, shouldn't we ask what he would do? Each week we explore a different way that Jesus interacted with people so that we can learn to be more like him. We will explore how we can welcome others, how we share, how Jesus taught, and the way that he still challenges us to day. We should always be willing to go back to that simple WWJD: What Would Jesus Do?

9/27: Jesus Welcomes

10/4: Jesus Shares

10/11: Jesus Teaches

10/18: Jesus Challenges

Neoga Grace UMC
752 Walnut
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Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC
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Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC
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Worship 9:30a

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