WWJD: Jesus Challenges

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – October 18 2026

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Amos 5:21-24; Hebrews 4:11-16; Mark 10:17-31 CEB

Reflection: Psalm 15 CEB

Call to Worship: Come, for Christ calls all to follow him so that we may have life in abundance. We come ready to trust in his ways and to follow in his blessed footsteps. As we come to worship, we ask ourselves: What would Jesus do? He would challenge us to do more and be more, so we come as those ready to accept that challenge!

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 15

> ***15*** *Who can live in your tent, Lord? Who can dwell on your holy mountain? ² The person who lives free of blame, does what is right, and speaks the truth sincerely; ³ who does no damage with their talk, does no harm to a friend, doesn't insult a neighbor; ⁴ someone who despises those who act wickedly, but who honors those who honor the Lord; someone who keeps their promise even when it hurts; ⁵ someone who doesn't lend money with interest, who won't accept a bribe against any innocent person. Whoever does these things will never stumble. (Psalm 15 CEB+)*

We read the words of Psalm 15, and we hear about how we are challenged to turn away from what is wrong and turn to the Lord. That God will help us to seek the truth in all that we are and do. That when things are difficult, God is right there with us. We need to strive to challenge ourselves and to challenge others the way Christ does. Do you seek to learn and grow with God? 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 as we gather together. 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. May you know the prayers we have spoken aloud and the prayers of our hearts. 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 Amos chapter 5 verses 21 through 24.

21 I hate, I reject your festivals; I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies. 22 If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food— I won't be pleased; I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals. 23 Take away the noise of your songs; I won't listen to the melody of your harps. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-24 CEB+)

Our second reading is from Hebrews chapter 4, verses 11 through 16.

11 Therefore, let's make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience, 12 because God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions. 13 No creature is hidden from it, but rather everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we have to give an answer. 14 Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; 15 because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin. 16 Finally, let's draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help. (Hebrews 4:11-16 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 10 verses 17 through 31.

17 As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?" 18 Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. 19 You know the commandments: Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't cheat. Honor your father and mother." 20 "Teacher," he responded, "I've kept all of these things since I was a boy." 21 Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, "You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me." 22 But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions. 23 Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, "It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!" 24 His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, "Children, it's difficult to enter God's kingdom! 25 It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom." 26 They were shocked even more and said to each other, "Then who can

be saved?” [27] Jesus looked at them carefully and said, “It’s impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God.” [28] Peter said to him, “Look, we’ve left everything and followed you.” [29] Jesus said, “I assure you that anyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms because of me and because of the good news [30] will receive one hundred times as much now in this life—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms (with harassment)—and in the coming age, eternal life. [31] But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first.” (Mark 10:17-31 CEB+)

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

We are at the end of the “What Would Jesus Do?” series. We have asked ourselves how Jesus would handle different situations, the way that he did things in his ministry, and we have heard about how Jesus welcomes, how Jesus shares, and how Jesus teaches. Today we come to the hardest lesson that we are going to cover in this series, because it's about the way that Jesus challenges. And it's hard because it is always difficult when we are challenged, especially if we are challenged about what we believe, what we think, and what we should do. But Jesus challenged people to be better, and to do better, and to look at the way they were living their lives to see if they needed to change. Because one of the things that we have to address is that we only learn how to change if we are challenged to be different.

We hear this when we look at the gospel reading for today. Jesus is on the road, and someone asks what he must do to obtain eternal life. He says to him that he should know the commandments. Aren't those enough? And the man responds that he's always kept those things since he was a boy, but he wants to know what it is he needs to do now. Jesus studies him and tells him he's lacking something. That he needs to go sell everything he owns and give the money to the poor. This is not the message that the man wanted to hear and he walks away saddened because he has many possessions. That's the part of this that really matters. The challenge here is that he is talking about all the things he hasn't done. When you look at the things Jesus lists, don't commit murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie. Big things that people will think about to say they are keeping the commandments. They think they got everything right because they have been able to stay away from the big things. So, Jesus gives him this challenge. Take something very familiar and let it go. This being the many possessions he has. What is it that's holding him back? It's the things that he owns. And they're holding him back so much that when Jesus makes this challenge, the man leaves devastated. Because the challenge was too great for him to give up the things that he loves and follow Christ. I think what we see here is that this man felt that the law was not much because he focused on the laws he was already fulfilling. And when Jesus challenges him to go beyond what he's already doing, it takes him out of his comfort zone, and he would have to leave behind the life of luxury that he likes. He doesn't want to have to take the action that would be necessary for him.

We hear about this in Amos. Because Amos talks about the things that we want to offer up versus the greater things God wants. I say greater because I think that's what we're seeing here. Because Amos talks about the way that God rejects the festivals and the joyous assemblies. And we have to ask why. But it's because of the things that aren't happening. Because the thing that God is looking for in that situation is justice. The challenge is to forget the joyous festivals and the burnt offerings. Forget the stuff that's showing off and commit to justice. And then, then God is going to pay attention. Then God is going to be pleased. Because the people have forgotten what matters the most. They've gotten so wrapped up in

keeping their festivals and making their burnt offerings that they become empty gestures. The challenge to them is to forget the empty gestures and take on more meaningful ones. Don't just do the actions that make you comfortable, but do the things that truly inspire others to justice, to peace, to doing good. To turn away from the kind of indifference that the people have. They get comfortable. I think that's one of the themes that we see in the readings today. They get too comfortable in what they're doing. They aren't looking at what it is God really wants. They're doing the things that they're comfortable doing for God.

We hear about that in Hebrews when we hear about how we start to move past that type of temptation. Because when Hebrews talks about Christ being our high priest, they mention that we don't just have a high priest that looks at us and feels we're weak. Instead, we have one that can sympathize with our weakness. We have a high priest that faced temptation in the same way we do, except he does so without sin. He is the example of strength that we see. When we draw close to him, we gain that strength. That we enter into that strength when we draw near to Christ so that we face things not with fear, not with weakness, but with faith. The challenge we get from Hebrews is not to look at our weakness and feel that we are failures, but to look at our weakness and see how Christ may strengthen us. To be better and to do better. To see how we can live better lives because God is with us and God's word is with us.

We have everything we need to be able to strive to be better and do better. When we look at this challenge, the disciples were also not sure how to respond. Jesus turns to the disciples and tells them it'll be hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom and they are shocked. They are startled by his words, and he tells them again it's difficult to enter God's kingdom. He gives them even a visual for this. “It’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.” In case you have heard some of the creative visions for that, people like to try to retell this so that it isn't impossible. But this isn't about a gate. This isn't about camels kneeling. This isn’t about getting rope through a needle. This is about fitting a camel through the eye of a needle. And it's because he's trying to demonstrate just how difficult it is. Not because you cannot have wealth and worship God, but because of how difficult it is to hold on to wealth and faith at the same time. Because when we see that young man walk away, it's because he was challenged to give up wealth and pick up God and he couldn't do it. Because the temptation of that wealth was too great. And that's what Jesus is trying to convey here. He is challenging them to rethink the hierarchy they know. Because they think of rich people as being blessed and having all this good, and Jesus says rich people need to give up their wealth. They're shocked even more when he says that it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter God's kingdom. Now they want to know who can be saved. They think this is way too challenging. But Jesus tells them it's impossible, except he doesn't end there. If he did, this would be a very, very sad challenge that we have. It's impossible with human beings, but not with God, because all things are possible for God. Peter chimes in that they've given up everything and followed him and Jesus tells them that that's a good thing. He repeats the phrase that we hear very often, many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. The reversal of fortune in God's kingdom.

One of the things we see when Jesus challenges the disciples with this teaching is that he gives them something that's very hard for them to accept and then continues to let them know just how much they have to learn. The challenge is that they have to learn this lesson and

take it to heart and figure out what it means in the greater scheme of things. Because if we took this just as a lesson about wealth and wealth only, we might be missing the larger picture. Because wealth is simply the easiest thing we have to demonstrate the temptation to be drawn away from God. The temptation to pick things over the Lord. What Jesus is pointing out in this is that it can be very easy, very easy indeed, to be tempted into doing the wrong thing. Or more of what we often see of this, tempted to not do the right thing. And that's the harder challenge. It's one of the reasons that we always have that prayer of confession and pardon that we do together, because the challenging thing that Jesus does is reminds us that it's what we do and it's what we refrain from doing. That man that walked up and wanted to know what to do. He then walked away. He didn't do anything we would really call sinful except that he couldn't bear to do the thing he needed to do. He couldn't hold with giving up what he had to follow Jesus. Because the challenge we get is to let go of those things that give us comfort. To let go of those things that we hold so dear that we would value them over the love of God. Because anything that draws us away from God's love is a problem.

So, when we ask ourselves, "what would Jesus do?" We know that Jesus challenges us to let go of our preconceived notions and to begin thinking about things in a very different way. To let go of the ideas we have about who is successful and who is not, when we know what it is God seeks. Not to be conformed by this world, but to be transformed by the grace of God. To let the words of Christ resonate in our hearts so that we learn more. Because Jesus challenges us to be better people. To look at the things we have done and to look at the things we have not done and figure out what we need to stop doing and what we need to start doing. And that challenge comes every day. That challenge comes every morning with the first decision that we make of the day to the last decision we make before going to sleep. The challenge that we get in all of it is to be better and to do better. Because Christ is there to help us every step of the way. But we have to take the initiative and say that we want that in our lives. Then we challenge each other to live up to that. So, I pray that we will remember that when we ask ourselves, "what would Jesus do?", that we remember all we have learned. The way that he welcomes others. That we remember the way that he shares so that we all have plenty. That we remember Jesus teaches so that we may grow by faith and grow in understanding. And Jesus challenges us that we may live a life of love together as we strive for the kingdom of God. 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
PO Box 610
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(217)895-2809
Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC
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PO Box 267
Toledo, IL 62468
Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC
2799 Etna Rd
Mattoon, IL 61938
Worship 9:30a

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