

## The Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 29, 2018

Preached by Hayden Harris, graduating high school student

St Michael's Episcopal Church, Barrington, IL

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Please be seated,

First off, I would like to thank everyone for allowing me have the opportunity to speak about the messages from God that we have heard today, specifically the Youth Advisory Committee, Father Jesse, Mother Lisa for helping me out during this process, and my parents for encouraging me to take this opportunity.

There's a new song out by Canadian rapper Drake, it's called *Gods Plan*. Drake ended up making a music video for it like every bigshot musician does, but he added a twist to it. Most big artists when they make music videos have large budgets for the video and end up spending it all on the content of the video. Fireworks, backup dancers, lights, camera's, locations, cars, but not with this particular Drake music video. He had a budget of one million dollars and ended up touring around Miami giving back to those in need. This resonates with me throughout my time at St. Michael's and what I plan on doing in the future, because acts of kindness that people do for the less fortunate have greater impacts than what you would have originally expected them to have. Living God's plan has the capability to change someone's life.

No matter what, God will always be by your side no matter where the path ends up you will always have the presence of God amongst yourself. I have been going to St. Michael's for 18 years of my life, I was baptized at this Church, confirmed with a group of the Congregation from this church and I hold St. Michael's near to my heart. As I think of the line "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" from the first reading. What the angel said to Philip it makes me think of what I will be doing come August. I will be creating a new path for myself from here in Barrington all the way through Indiana across the Ohio River and settling in Louisville, Kentucky. When I began all the college searching I would have never thought that I would end up in Louisville, Kentucky. I would have expected somewhere more ornate, somewhere further away, perhaps in a warm sunny environment all year long. That's the thing though, God has our back, he set me on my path to what I am doing in my life, and where I am going in my life. As I think about the next path for my life it hasn't come easily, I have sometimes pondered late at night when I am unable to sleep and wondered "Is God really at my side on this one?". All the stress and pressure that comes with moving on from my typical life as a Barrington High School student and now heading to a place where I don't know a soul. As I stay up late at night wondering that, I always remember that God has his plan for me and he wouldn't send me off to a place where I wouldn't grow and succeed as not only a worshipper of God but also a person that he created. We all have our passions and ambitions, we are all on this Earth to do something for ourselves and for the people who have been there for parts of our lives, or our whole lives. Without God pushing me to achieve more than I thought I could achieve I wouldn't be ending up where I am now.

As I think of my time at St. Michaels and what I have done in the past 18 years specifically my high school time it has been the most rewarding time I have spent in my entire life. A couple June's ago I embarked from Midway with a group of our congregation and from St. Mark's congregation in Barrington Hills. As I looked out of the window on that plane that would drop us off in San Diego

and not bring us back for another week I was still confused as to what we were going to San Diego for. I knew that we were headed there to help people from a different community in need, but what did that exactly entail. Over the course of the week, I would learn that we were there to help people who we didn't even know but ended up loving due to how much they appreciated and needed help from simple volunteers like us. Line 25 of the Psalm says "The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him". We weren't doing this for ourselves, we were doing it for those in need and for the Gift of God, we packed hundreds of meals each day and delivered meals to the homes of those in need to help the ones less fortunate than we are. The joy that I got from doing things for others was a feeling I want to experience every day in my life, the Mission Trip inspired me to take part of activities going on in church. It inspired me to take an opportunity to become the Youth Representative for the Vestry, sleeping on the ground of a local San Diego church and being taken in by a congregation that had no clue what Barrington, Illinois was made me realize that there is plenty of good in our world, you just have to go out and search for it. I wanted to be a part of the good that was being spread not only in San Diego but also here in Barrington and all around the world.

Love is another key that God preaches to us, John perfectly explains it to us in the Second reading, as he talks about how "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God will abide in them" that truly showed me how if you show love to God and have love as a tenant, God will always be there for you. My Confirmation group was a time where I really saw this tenant in action, our monthly meetings where we would discuss what God does for us and what being Confirmed truly means to us showed me how God is always in action. As a Confirmation group, we embarked on a trip to Stronghold, this was one of the most beneficial experiences I have had throughout my time at the church. As a group, we had time for fellowship, we ended up learning from Bishop Jeffery and Deacon Laurie by going through stations that taught us more about what God was all about and how we could use them in our daily lives. Being with a group for a year allowed me to engage with people who I just saw on a regular Sunday and learn new things about each person, we even created nicknames for the entire group on the van ride to Stronghold. As I read the last sentence of the Second reading I notice how it says "The Commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also". Don't hold a grudge, don't see someone as bad because of an action they do, or because they are different. As worshippers of God, we are all brothers and sisters created by God and we must love each other and embrace our differences.

We have all had times where we have sinned, that is why we have a weekly confession and repentance. We call someone something we know we didn't mean, we do something we know we shouldn't have done, but we then head to church on Sunday knowing that there will be a chance for us to have our Sins forgiven by God. The Gospel explains how God will accept us even after our Sins in a perfect way. Jesus talks about how he is the Vine and God is the Vine grower, God will remove every branch on us that bears no fruits. I see the branches that don't have fruits as branches that once bear fruit, but then lost the fruit due to a Sin. Just because you lose a branch that lost fruit doesn't mean you have lost God at your side. As it further explains "Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers". As I read that it speaks volumes to me, it shows me how God does not disown you due to a sin that you have made he merely throws that one branch away and lets it wither on its own, but he still stays at your side. As he says "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you". As I think of my life and I think of how many times I go to God for help, many times come to mind. Each time I take a test I make sure to ask God for a good score on the test, as I chose my college God was a part of

that decision. Although I have sinned in my life and I am not a perfect worshipper of God, I know that each and every day God is there for me, he is at my side, he is someone I can talk to when I am in a time of distress. God loves each and every person on this Earth because he has created everyone that has come after him.

As I close, let me leave you with this message: I have learned throughout my time at St. Michael's that volunteering and being a worshipper of God for recognition and praise is fleeting. If that's what you chase, you will never be able to experience what it is like to do something good for the sake of helping someone less fortunate than yourself. At the very least, if you do survive, it will be empty because you're chasing praise. On the other hand, if you make sure others eat first, you'll end up with more than you can ever eat. By creating relationships with others, investing in their dreams and aspirations, and chasing those dreams and aspirations with them, you become a dream fulfiller. What's better than that? Amen.