

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, on the First Sunday of Lent, February 18, 2024.

I would like us today to focus on our Second Reading today from the First Letter of Peter.

When Peter authors this letter, Peter is committed to Jesus. For Peter, Jesus is exactly what Jesus claimed he was: the Son of God. Peter is a fan. He and Jesus have been through a lot together. And now Peter is sharing with others his experience. His attitude is “Good enough for me ... then good enough for you.”

We are part of the “you.” We have come to know Jesus through the eyes of the contemporaries of Jesus. Peter is one of the authors.

This is how the Good News of the Resurrection works. Individuals sharing a positive experience, one generation after another. 2,000 years of transmitting a life-changing experience. You and I are the current generation of this Good News.

As we grow in our faith – and I suspect that our experiences are similar – we test the Good News. We go back and forth in terms of buying what others are saying. But we end up where they ended up. They believed. And so do we.

Or, at least, we are considering belief, maybe even closing in on belief. So close, in fact, that we look forward to sharing our growth with others. And, as we share, our own faith continues to deepen.

Back to Peter. In today’s lesson (**I Peter 3:18-22**), he speaks of baptism. He describes what it is: an appeal to God for a good conscience. And he describes what baptism is not. It is “not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.”

Most of us here are baptized. But that baptism doesn’t cleanse us, as in “there’s nothing to worry about.” Rather, baptism reminds us that there is a God who “helps us meet those challenges.” Baptism also reminds us that, as we are helped, we are to help others.

The “good conscience” that Peter describes is the assurance and the conviction that we are not alone. In addition to family and friends and neighbors, there is a loving God, who is on our side. And who would like nothing more than for you and me to extend that love to others, particularly to those who are in trouble of some sort. This is the “Good News” that Mark speaks of in today’s Gospel **(Mark 1:9-15)**.

And it is the “Good News” that is described in today’s lesson from Genesis **(Genesis 9:8)**. Note that the Covenant that God makes with Noah is not just for Noah. It is for “every living creature that is with us, and for “future generations.” You and I are part of the “us” in this passage. We have an assignment. A critical assignment.

And, to carry out that assignment, we need help. We will falter along the way. That’s who we are. But God knows that. God knows that His special creature will need help to fulfill God’s expectations. And it is that “help from God” that you and I, in this setting, are both reminded of and strengthened for.

In a way, baptism is like a membership in a conditioning club. But not quite. We are conditioned, not to look in the mirror after a workout, but to be strengthened for service. The stronger we are, the more help we can provide. And, as we help – and here is the real payoff - we grow closer to the Lord. We are doing what we are meant to do. And isn’t that a good feeling!

Which is an interesting point in itself. We often think of the Season of Lent as a “downer.” “All work – no play” as it were. But “work” and “play” are not opposites. They are partners. They go together. They feed one another. Is there a better feeling than to help others? And, if so, doesn’t it make sense to strengthen our ability to help?

In a way, it is selfish to strengthen ourselves to help others. Talk about “looking in the mirror.” Don’t we feel better when we have shared? But that’s okay. God works in mysterious ways. And when we see the positive results of helping others, we forget all about the hard work that prepared us for service.

Speaking of “hard work as preparation for service,” is there any work harder than dying on a cross? And is there any gift more special to humankind than the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth?

We are so fortunate, given our shortcomings, to have a God who addresses these shortcomings in a miraculous way. And, in a manner as creative and as beautiful as baptism. In this simple ceremony, we are reminded of our need for God’s help and God’s decision to provide that help.

Infants, of course, don’t understand this relationship, but parents and Godparents do. And, at some point, infants themselves become parents and Godparents. And life moves on. A new generation of believers. Just as the Risen Christ hopes.

And, here we are. And it’s a pretty good feeling, isn’t it? It’s the feeling that we just experienced in singing *Simple Gifts*:

**‘tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free,
‘tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,**

**and when we find ourselves in the place just right,
‘twill be in the valley of love and delight.**

**When true simplicity is gained
to bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed,
to turn, turn, will be our delight,
till by turning, turning we come round right.**

And here we are. In the company of one another, including previous generations and future generations. And with our Lord Jesus at the helm. We are in good company indeed.

Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
First Sunday of Lent – February 18, 2024

Hymn 142 – Lord, who throughout these forty days

Lord, who throughout these forty days for us didst fast and pray,
teach us with thee to mourn our sins, and lose by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst contend and didst the victory win,
O give us strength in thee to fight, in thee to conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger bear and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord
to die to self, and chiefly live by thy most holy word.

And through these days of penitence, and through thy Passion-tide,
Yea, evermore, in life and death, Jesus! with us abide.

Abide with us, that so, this life of suffering overpast,
an Easter of unending joy we may attain at last!

Page 355

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins..
His mercy endures for ever.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no
secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy
Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Page 356 - Song of Praise - said

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

*Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.*

*For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the father. Amen.*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Collect for First Sunday of Lent

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

First Reading – Genesis 9:8-1

Psalm 25:1-9

Second Reading – I Peter 3:18-22

Hymn 325 – Let us kneel together on our knees

Sing now with joy unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously!
The horse, the rider, and the sword he cast into the ranging sea.

God is our strength, he is our song, he saved us from our enemy.
All praise and thanks to him belong who came to set his people free.

He only is the mighty Lord, He only can destroy the foe.
He only is to be adored for he alone can strength bestow.

Gospel – Mark 1:9-15

Sermon

The Rev. Charles Rowins

Nicene Creed – page 358

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.*

*Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again In accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father,
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Prayers of the People Form IV – page 388

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Confession and Absolution – page 360

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.*

*We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.*

*We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

The Peace – page 360

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Announcements and Preparation of the Table

Eucharistic Prayer – page 361

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise, you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: this is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Breaking of the Bread

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion

Post Communion Prayer – BCP page 365

*Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us
as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with
spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world
in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness
and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Hymn 632 – O Christ, the Word Incarnate

O Christ, the Word Incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth, unchanged, unchanging, O light of our dark sky;
we praise thee for the radiance that from the scripture's page,
a lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The Church from our dear Master received the word divine,
and still that light is lifted o'er all the earth to shine.
It is the chart and compass that o'er life's surging sea,
mid mists and rocks and quicksands, still guides, O Christ, to thee.

O make thy Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,
to bear before the nations thy true light as of old;
O teach they wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace,
till, clouds and darkness ended, they see the face to face.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Lessons for 1st Sunday of Lent – February 18, 2024

Collect: Almighty god, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help; us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature, that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 25:1-9

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you;
let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
Let none who look to you be put to shame;
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.
Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are form everlasting.
Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O Lord.
Gracious and upright is the Lord;
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
He guides the humble in doing right
and teaches his way to the lowly.
All the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Second Reading: I Peter 3:18-22

Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when “God waited patiently in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel : Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*