

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland , May 5, 2024.

If I was asked to recommend a set of prayers and lessons that would intrigue those outside the Christian Faith, I might well choose today's set.

For example, the Collect acknowledges that there is a lot that we don't know, that passes man's understanding. Yes, we have lots of questions, but we're here even with the questions. We don't want to critique. We simply want to feel more confident. It's a very human reaction.

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:44-48) cites the "speaking in tongues" as **confirmation** of a God who is beyond understanding, yet within our faith capability. But how many have had this experience? Not many.

Today's Psalm (**Psalm 98**) announces that God will judge the world and the peoples with equity. Really? This one we'll have to take on faith, because just looking around we see a lot of inequity.

The passage from First John (**1 John 5:1-6**) assures us that Jesus, the Son of God, "conquers the world." If that potential is true, Jesus has a lot of work to do, doesn't he?

In today's gospel (**John 20:11-18**), Jesus assures us that, if we love one another, real joy will follow. Now, this really is positive thinking. Especially if we take a risk that doesn't play out.

Now, do these lessons intrigue us or discourage us or assure us? That in itself would be an interesting exercise.

And, isn't it true that we have wrestled with these questions, these answers? Yes, of course we have. And isn't true that sometimes we come down on the side of Truth, with a capital T, and other times we feel that we might be barking up the wrong tree? That is also true.

A two-part conclusion. We have questions. But we still believe. Stated another way, we are thoughtful, sometimes to the point of skepticism. But, if we here are

any indication, we will be hopeful, maybe even confident. And even more than confident. Grateful!

And part of our gratitude is the freedom that we have to make our own decision. God doesn't demand belief, as in "You will believe or else!" No, God says "Here I am. I want you to believe. I will help in that effort. Indeed, I will come to you as a fellow human being. And I will heal in your presence, teach in your presence, even rise from the dead. All to confirm that I love you and that your life will be a whole lot happier with me than without me.

"Besides," God says, "You don't really have a choice. If I want to love you unto death and beyond, I'll do so. I, Jesus, am the Son of God. And there's nothing you can do to change that. You can refuse to believe, to accept, but you cannot deny what God wants to do. Which is to save you.

At this point, you and I have three choices. "Yes, Lord, I believe. "No, Lord, this profound love is beyond belief. A third choice is "Can I have some more time please?"

The interesting point about choice #3 – can I have some more time, please – is a kind a strong hint of choice #1. "I'm just this far from belief. A little more time, please."

If that is you and I, God has a smile on His or Her Face. We're hooked. We qualify. At least for the moment. God will take uncertainty any day of the week. "Welcome back" is second nature to God.

And, do you know what else is second nature? Yes, it is our response: "Glad to be back. Thank you, Lord."

We've had this exchange many times as well. "Down" experiences, unpleasant experiences, test our faith. But they don't test God's Faith. We can be really ugly to God, but God still says, "Come see me when you're ready. And, if I happen to help make you "ready" in some way you don't understand, just accept it, and get on with your life. We'll work together on all your questions. It's called prayer. I'm available 24-7-365.

One of the strengths of St. Christopher's is that it is never locked. You can come any day of the week at 3:00 am or 3:00 pm and the doors – plural – will be open. The only ones taking attendance are you and God. If it's night-time, and you can't find the light switch, God still listens. There are no pre-conditions.

And this church is not the only place on this Island where a conversation with God takes place. It can and does happen all over this Island and all over every place. God is a great listener. God wants to hear from us. No request for a conversation is turned down. There is no such thing as a busy-signal with God.

How does this happen? We don't have a clue. But that it does happen is evident by how many calls are made and received each and every day all over the World. Imagine how many operators would be needed if we were in charge. But we're not in charge. The Creator is in charge, and if the Creator wants to listen to all of us, both individual and corporate, all at the same time, so be it.

“So be it.” That's the theme of the very first Book of the Bible. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” God's choice.

But we have a choice too, don't we? Our choice is whether to get with God's program or to go out on our own.

Now, when we choose to get with the program, as it were, we agree to certain behaviors. “Love God and love one another” is one of those behaviors. And, here we are, trying our best. Sometimes described as “two steps forward, one step back.” Welcome to our world.

But also welcome to God's world. A world characterized by expectations and second chances. “Expectations and second chances” is in fact the theme of Scripture. And in fact the reason you and I like this setting. “What do you want us to do, Lord? And, if we fail to do it, can we please try again?”

And how does the Lord answer? Check out today's **Psalm verse 3**. “The Lord has made known his victory; his righteousness has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.” And how do we respond? Well, like the rivers in verse 9, we “clap our hands.” Yea, God! And thank you, Lord. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 5, 2024

Hymn 174 –At the Lamb’s High Feast

At the Lamb’s high feast we sing praise to our victorious King,
who hath washed as in the tide flowing from his pierced side;
praise we him, whose love divine gives his sacred Blood for wine,
gives his Body for the feast, Christ the victim, Christ the priest.

Where the Paschal blood is poured, death’s dark angel sheathes his sword;
Israel’s hosts triumphant go through the wave that drowns the foe.
praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, Paschal victim, Paschal bread;
with sincerity and love eat we manna from above.

Mighty victim from on high, hell’s fierce power beneath thee lie;
thou hast conquered in the fight, though has brought us life and light:
No more can death appall, now no more the grave enthrall;
thou hast opened paradise, and in thee they saints shall rise.

Easter triumph, Easter joy, theses along do sin destroy,
From sin’s power do thou set free soul’s new-born, O Lord, in thee.
Hymns of glory, songs of praise, Father, unto thee we raise:
risen Lord all praise to thee with the Spirit over be.

Page 355

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.

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 Sixth Sunday of Easter

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

Second Reading – I John 15:9-17

Hymn 615 – Thy kingdom come on bended knee

“Thy kingdom come!” on bended knee the passing ages pray;
and faithful souls have yearned to see on earth that kingdom’s day.

But the slow watches of the night not less to God belong;
and for the everlasting right the silent stars are strong.

And lo, already on the hills the flags of dawn appear;
gird up your loins, ye prophet souls, proclaim the day is near:

the day to whose clear shining light all wrong shall stand revealed,
when justice shall be throned in might, and every hurt be healed;

when knowledge, hand in hand with peace, shall walk the earth abroad;
the day of perfect righteousness, the promised day of God.

Gospel – John 20:11-18

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 516 – Come down, O love divine

Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame betstowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heart consuming;
and let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace, till Love create a place,
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Alleluia.