

Sermon preached by The Reverend Charles Rowins at St. Christopher by the Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Pentecost 17, September 15, 2024.

I want to focus today on our second reading (**James 3:12**). From the Letter of James. It is a really interesting passage. Why interesting? Because we've been there. We are there.

The lesson reminds us of things we have learned, things that continue to challenge us, and things that can make a positive difference in our life and the lives of others.

First, things we have learned. Here's one of the main things we have learned from our lives and the lives of others. "For all of us make many mistakes." Who can argue with that? If "no mistakes" was an A on the report card, what would a B be, what would a C be, what would a D be, and what would an F be? Give yourself an overall grade.

Second, having given ourselves a grade – and it probably wouldn't be an A – what would we do? Be content with a B? Get mad at the teacher because we've always gotten an A, but all of a sudden we're getting Bs and Cs and Ds and an occasional F? What's our next step? Well, we can try to do better. Or we can be content with a lesser grade.

My guess is that we would like to do better. And just how would we pursue this goal? Maybe by getting back to basics. And here's a basic that the Letter of James suggests. (**James 3:1-12**) Try to be a bridle. Try to be a rudder. Try to watch your language. Try to help others. Try to be fresh water, not brackish water.

Well, easy to say. But challenging to do. But don't we like a challenge? Don't we want to do better? Don't we want to please ourselves and please others? Of course we do. That's one of the reasons you and I go to church and learn about Jesus. And what we learn is that perfection is not in the cards for you and me. But, not to worry, God understands this reality, and deals with it. From Isaiah: "It is the Lord God, who helps me; who will declare my guilty?" (**Isaiah 50:9a**)

What we do in this setting is to accept “the deal.” From today’s Gospel: “If you want to become my followers ... take up your cross and follow me.” **(Mark 8:34)** And here we are. Giving thanks to God for entering our lives, forgiving some behavior and praising other behavior, and giving us yet another chance to be the kind of people God expects.

Let’s think about “the deal.” And let’s think about it not as a verb – distributing cards - but as a noun, a relationship with the Creator of the Universe. And, at the heart of this relationship – the main ingredient, if you will – is Jesus.

An ace, if you will. And not just any old ace, but The Ace offered by the Creator. And it’s a relationship that is intended to be shared. Anyone have an ace? Yes, indeed, God has dealt us a winning card, the Lord Jesus.

Now, sometimes, when we are dealt an ace, we hang on to it. We hold it close to our vest. To be played at some later time. But God’s Ace, Jesus, is not intended to be protected. Jesus is meant to be shared. “Play it” God says. “Share it!”

And, here we are. Praising God for dealing a wonderful hand, with an expectation that we share the winnings. “Won’t you join us for worship?” “Won’t you take another look at Jesus of Nazareth and consider whether this historical figure just might be the pathway to a greater understanding of our purpose in the scheme of things?”

That’s what we’re about here. And that’s what we’re about when we leave here. We’ve been dealt a really interesting hand, with an expectation to share that hand in thoughtful ways. When people take a look at us, we want them to wonder whether we’re holding an Ace. And yes we are. And the incredible feature of this Ace, this Jesus, is that he makes us think, makes us be honest with ourselves, and suggests ways by which we can make the world a better place.

We have been dealt a wonderful hand. But it’s a hand not to be held, but to be shared. From the hymn we just sang: “Take my voice, and let me sing always, only for my King; take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose. Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.”

There are all sorts of options for sharing this incredibly Good News. You and I are part of this Enterprise. It's a good feeling, isn't it? We are aces, not in a hole, hidden from people, but out in the open for all to see. How we conduct our lives, by the choices we make, by the values we hold and share, we send a message about God's love. And it's a love so forgiving that all are eligible.

One of the great features of the Faith we proclaim is that this Faith is not required. No one is compelling us to believe. We are free to adopt it or keep it at arm's length. My guess is that we have done some of both. Fortunately though, the Risen Christ is patient. For some, acceptance is quick. For others, acceptance takes time. And, for still others, acceptance is not even on the radar.

That's where we come in. By a conscious decision on our part, after hearing all the faith options, we, you and I, become a blip on God's screen. We in turn promote curiosity. What's with him or her or them? I/we want to learn more.

Well, that's when the Holy Spirit takes hold. Actually The Spirit has been there all the time. We just haven't seen it. We have felt it though. And we have responded to the hint. That little, tiny blip on the screen suddenly becomes a force. Not a Space Force, but a Faith Force. That's when the excitement really begins. That's when the excitement is owned **and shared and newly owned**.

A blip. Not a very impressive identity – at first. But if spotted, and if studied, and if shared, little “b” blip becomes Big “**B**” Blip.

You and I are somewhere along this faith-centered adventure route. And, as we travel the route, we grow in faith. Oh yes, sometimes there are setbacks, but most of those times are followed by returns to the Fold. God's Fold. Christ's Fold. It's where we are meant to be.

And, and thanks be to God and all the hints along the way, we are here. Proud to be Blips ourselves. May the Faith be with us. *Amen*.

Pentecost 17 – September 15, 2024

Hymn 518 – Christ is made the sure foundation

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one;
holy Zion's help for ever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,
in exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
with thy wonted loving kindness hear thy servants as they pray,
and thy fullest benediction shed within its walls always.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain;
what they gain from thee, forever with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.

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

*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 17th Sunday of Pentecost

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may now how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

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

Psalm 116:1-8

Second Reading: James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small ruder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small

member, yet boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world in iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

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

Hymn 707 – Take my life and let it be

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Gospel – John 6:51-58

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 555 – Lead on, O King eternal

Lead on, O King eternal, the day of march has come;
henceforth in field of conquest thy tents shall be our home:
through days of preparation thy grace has made us strong,
and now, O King eternal, we lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King eternal, till sin's fierce war shall cease,
for holiness shall whisper the sweet amen of peace;
for not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums,
but deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King eternal: we follow, not with fears;
for gladness breaks like morning where'er thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted o'er us; we journey in its light:
the crown awaits the conquest; lead on, O God of might!

Dismissal

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

Pentecost 17 lessons – September 15, 2024

Collect: O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

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

Psalm 116:1-8

I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication,
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.
The cords of death entangled me; the grip of the grave took hold of me;
I came to grief and sorrow.
Then I called upon the Lord:
“O Lord, I pray you, save my life.”
Gracious is the Lord and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.
The Lord watches over the innocent;
I was brought very low, and he helped me.
Turn again to your rest, O my soul,
for the Lord has treated you well.

For you have rescued my life from death
my eyes from tears, and my feet from stumbling;
I will walk in the presence of the Lord
in the land of the living.

Second Reading: James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small ruder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world in iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

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

Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him,, “John the Baptist; and others Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and

after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save gospel will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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