

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins on 5th Sunday of Epiphany, February 4, 2024, at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island Maryland, February 4, 2024.

Have you wondered why you continue to do what you're doing right now? Why are you here? What are you looking for? And, if this is just an occasional visit, why did you return?

Well, we have those moments, don't we. And so did St. Paul have such moments. Why am I doing what I am doing? Well, being the prolific writer that he was, Paul sat down and wrote to the folks in Corinth who themselves had committed to the Risen Christ. We, here, could be that audience. **(I Corinthians 9:16-23).**

Paul assumed that people might be interested in his motivation. Why did you do this, Paul? Or, why do you - fill in the blank - go to Church?

Sound familiar? People wonder about us, don't they? Well, my guess is that those who wonder about us, and about Jesus, conclude, as Paul did, that we want to know more about this person, Jesus of Nazareth, and how this person, Jesus of Nazareth, can impact our lives in a very special and positive way.

We know that we are not Jesus, but we also know that being close to Jesus is a plus for us and those around us. The Risen Christ, and the Church that carries his Name, encourages us to be the kind of people we are meant to be. Presumably there is a gap between where we are and where we would like to be. And, again, presumably, we can narrow that gap by inviting the Risen Christ into our lives more fully.

It worked for Paul. It is working for us. We're here. And, we hope, it is working for those whom we love and care about, and for others whom we don't even know.

Paul uses the term "commission." We know this term in the military. "I am commissioned as a second lieutenant." And we also know this term in baptism: "Love God and love neighbor." Both involve opportunity and expectation.

Presumably Paul did what he did, including authoring letters that we continue to digest, because he felt an obligation and joy in sharing . Not only “felt,” but “acted on.”

Our hero in this regard is not only Paul. Who was Paul’s hero? It was Jesus, wasn’t it? “What then is my reward?” asks Paul. “Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge.” The Good News of whom? The Good News of Jesus.

And what does Jesus enable us to do? From today’s Psalm: “He makes grass to grow upon the mountains and green plants to serve mankind.” **(Psalm 147:9)**

Welcome to St. Christopher-by-the-Sea!

You and I are here because we want to be here. We know what the Lord’s commission is. And we not only accept that commission, but hold up our acceptance as a model, an invitation, as a way of life to others looking for meaning and satisfaction and excitement and joy.

Today’s Psalm has a label for this: Hallelujah! Look at the verbs in this Psalm: sing, honor, rebuild, gather, bind up, make music, prepare rain, serve mankind, provide food, has pleasure.

Yes, it’s a way of life that St. Paul captures in his letters and that you and I try to capture in the way we lead our lives. It’s not an easy goal to attain, but it’s not as if we are alone in the effort. We have company. We are company. In addition to what we do as individuals, we do a lot as a team.

And it’s all gratifying. Just the way that God has designed it. We will faint and be weary, and fall exhausted, but the Lord shall renew our strength and we will mount up with wings like eagles. We shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not faint.

St. Paul studied Isaiah. And, so of course, did Jesus. And, by our presence and choosing, so have we. A pretty interesting student body, by any measure. And we’re part of it.

Now, being “part of it” - accepting the Lord’s commission, in other words – is hard work. But hard work is doable, indeed rewarding, if we are motivated. No one is telling us what we have to do. We are free people. But there is One who is telling us where to find real happiness. And that avenue is in service to others. Jesus says in today’s Gospel passage: “That is what I came out to do.” To show you The Way. **(Mark 1:38)**

Now, military service is one environment of service. But there are, of course, many such environments. This congregation is a wonderful illustration of these many service opportunities. And I suspect that there is an ingredient in each one of pride. Pride in serving. Pride in doing what we can do to make the world a better place. Pride in making the lives of colleagues, neighbors, family members, and, yes, strangers, better. “Better” in small ways and sometimes in big ways. Big or small, we are doing the Lord’s work.

What a privilege. What a joy. Exactly what Paul is expressing to the folks at Corinth. “I have become all things to all people, that I might, by all means, save some.” **(I Corinthians 9:18)** Our goals are probably smaller than “all things to all people.” But, to the people being helped, our efforts can be huge. Maybe life-changing. Pretty special in other words.

Thank you, Jesus. You really are the way, the truth, and the life. *Amen.*

Service of Holy Communion
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany – February 4, 2024

Hymn 443 – We gather together

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
he chastens and hastens his will to make known;
the wicked oppressing now cease from distressing:
sing praises to his Name; he forgets not his own.

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;
so from the beginning the fight we were winning:
thou, Lord, wast at our side: all glory be thine!

We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant,
and pray that thou still our defender wilt be.
let thy congregation escape tribulation:
thy Name be ever praised ! O Lord, make us free!

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Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and 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 Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in our Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Isaiah 40:21-31

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

Second Reading – I Corinthians 9:16-23

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 1:29-39

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 525 – The Church's One Foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the word:
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died!

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth.
her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed;
yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation of peace for ever more;
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blessed,
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly on high may dwell with thee.

Dismissal

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

Epiphany 5 Lessons – February 4, 2024

Collect: Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in our Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one god, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who creates these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you now known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

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

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!

how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem;

he gathers the exiles of Israel.

He heals the broken hearted

and binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars

and calls them by their names.

Great is the Lord and mighty in power;

there is no limit to his wisdom.

The Lord lifts up the lowly,

but casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;

make music to our God upon the harp.

He covers the heavens with clouds

and prepares rain for the earth;

He makes grass to grow upon the mountains

and green plants to serve mankind.

He provides food for flocks and herds

and for the young ravens when they cry.

He is not impressed by the might of a horse;

he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him,

in those who await his gracious favor.

Hallelujah!

Second Reading: I Corinthians 9:16-23

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law, but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

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

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

When Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go onto the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

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