

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 6th Sunday after Epiphany, February 12, 2023.

Our lessons today are about choices.

From Deuteronomy: blessings or curses.

From First Corinthians: milk or solid food.

From Matthew: yes or no.

Sometimes choices are not consequential. Chocolate or vanilla. Other times though the choices make a huge difference. Life or death.

One of the reasons you and I gather weekly is to help us make decisions that will enhance our lives and the lives of those we love and even the lives of those whom we don't even know.

Yes, there is a self-serving aspect to decision-making. What's best for me? But there is also an other-serving aspect. What's best for them?

And what's special about what we do in this place is that, when we serve others, we serve ourselves. We choose to help others because we know from experience that out-reach is also in-reach. We feel good when we help others.

And that is not an accident. It is by design. It is from God. A life without some form of outreach is an empty life. A life which includes giving, which includes sacrifice, which includes sharing, is a much fuller life.

Again, we gather to remind ourselves of this truth. And, in addition to reminding ourselves of this truth, we acknowledge that we could be sacrificing more, sharing more, making decisions more deliberately and more in accordance with what our Lord expects.

There is always some gap between what our Lord would like us to do and what we end up doing. It's our nature. But our nature is not the final word. God's Word – capital W – is the final word. God's nature is to provide second chances. God's nature is to forgive. God's nature is to give us new life by sacrificing God's own Son.

The Cross was not an accident. It was not a mistake. Jesus knew what he was doing. He was fulfilling a calling.

You and I are rarely called to die on a cross. But we are called daily to sacrifice at some level. And discovering that level, that calling – our cross to bear, if you will – is one of the reasons why we gather. Yes, “crosses to bear” can mean death. But, most of the time, our “crosses to bear” mean sacrifice of some sort, short of death. It’s a staple of our diet here and beyond these walls.

Many communities have as one of their options a Discovery Center. For example, Baltimore has the Port Discovery Children’s Museum. One goes there to learn, to get excited, to take a step forward. At its best, the Church is a Discovery Center. It reminds us who we are, from whom we came, and for what are we called to do.

But, we are more than a museum. Yes, we look back. But we also look ahead. That’s where God wants us to focus. What can we do to make the world a better place? What can we restore? Whom can we help save? What is the best way we can apply our gifts and talents?

There is plenty for us to do, choices to make, skills to apply, interests to explore, lives to enrich.

Are we called to die on a cross? As Jesus was? Probably not. But, is there a lesser cross that is calling us? Maybe so. From Deuteronomy: “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you.”

It’s called Win-Win. That attitude is at the heart of what you and I do right here. We reach out. We help. We apply our talents. We share the Love of God. We use our nourishment to nourish others.

And, when we don’t use our nourishment to nourish others, we get a strong tap on our shoulder. “Where are you? What are you doing? I gave you gifts to share. What are you doing with those gifts? Get back to work. Get back to sharing. Find your cross and bear it.”

To which we are tempted to say “Yes Sir!” Which is exactly what God expects to hear from us. We are loved by the Lord for a purpose, which is to share the love. It’s a pretty straight-forward relationship. It’s not complicated.

But it’s also not easy. So many choices. So many pressures to postpone.

Isn’t it better, though, to be in a challenging relationship than no relationship at all? After all, what should we expect when we’re dealing with the Creator of the Universe? It would be so easy for that Creator to ignore us, either individually or as a group. There are plenty of other things to which God attends. In some ways, we are a pest to the Creator. But, what Jesus tells us is that we are a very special pest. Given all the options that the Creator has, we apparently are very high on His/Hers/Its list of priorities.

So, back to our choices. A sobering exercise.

From Deuteronomy: “But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.”

From First Corinthians: “Even now you are still not ready.”

And from Matthew: “Truly, I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Yes, life can be a bowl of cherries, but it starts out as a bowl of choices. And cherries are not the only choice.

But the Good News remains. God gives us choices, and God gives us directions as to which choices to make. And God gives us His own Son as the very best choice to make.

Now, it’s up to us. Yes, we have a choice. A big choice. And that in itself is worth a big thank you.

So, thank you, Lord. Amen.

Service of Morning Prayer Epiphany 6 – February 12, 2023

Hymn 474 – When I survey the wondrous cross

When I survey the wondrous cross where the young Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pout contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the cross of Christ, my God:
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

BCP - Page 40 - Greeting

Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

BCP – Pages 41 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his Holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

BCP – Pages 41-42 – Confession and Absolution

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.*

*But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord;
And grant, O most merciful father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly,
righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

The almighty and merciful Lord, grant us absolution and remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit.
Amen.

BCP – Page 42 - Gloria

O Lord, open thou our lips.
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

BCP – Pages 44-45 – Venite

O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
 and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great god,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his and he made it,
 and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship; the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
 and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.

Psalm 119:1-8

First Reading – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Second Reading – I Corinthians 3:1-9

Hymn 627 – Lamp of our feet – stanzas 1-3

Lamp of our feet, whereby we trace our path when wont to stray;
stream from the fount of heavenly grace, brook by the traveler's way;

bread of our souls, whereon we feed, true manna from on high;
our guide and chart, wherein we read of realms beyond the sky;

pillar of fire, through watches dark, and radiant cloud by day;
when waves would whelm our tossing bark, our anchor and our stay.

Gospel – Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

BCP – page 53 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,*

Was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven.

and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

*I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

BCP – page 54 – the Lord’s Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

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.

BCP – page 55 – Suffrages A

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;

And grant us thy salvation.

Endue thy ministers with righteousness;

And make thy chosen people joyful.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in thee can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let thy way be known upon earth;

Thy saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect for 6th Sunday of Epiphany

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping our commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP Collect for Sundays

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

BCP Prayer for Guidance

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldest have us to do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that, in thy light, we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

BCP – pages 58-59 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men.*

*We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we beseech thee,
give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee
in holiness and righteousness all our days;*

*through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost,
be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long my our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *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 thee face to face.

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 6th Sunday of Epiphany – February 12, 2023

Collect: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-30

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

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

Psalm 119:1-8

Happy are they whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord!

Happy are they who observe his decrees
and seek him with all their hearts!

Who never do any wrong,
but always walk in his ways.

You laid down your commandments,
that we should fully keep them.

Oh, that my ways were made so direct
that I might keep your statutes.
Then I should not be put to shame,
when I regard all your commandments.
I will thank you with an unfeigned heart,
when I have learned your righteous judgments.
I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 3:1-9

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

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

Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser

while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of unchastity causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one."

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