

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,
2nd Sunday of Lent, February 25, 2024.**

We humans are born with curiosity. The very young are curious. The very old are curious. Those in between are curious. God apparently wants us to look ahead. Not to overlook the present. But to be thinking about the future and what that might mean for us. Are we prepared? Are we eager? Are we frightened? Is there something we should be doing in preparation?

In our first reading today (**Genesis 17:1**), Abraham is 99 years old. And, at age 99, God visits Abraham and announces that he, God, will make a covenant with Abraham. And it's not just any old covenant. "I will make you the ancestor of a multitude of nations."

Imagine. Being informed at age 99 that there is more work to do. Many of us are relieved when we're able to retire at age 65. And here's Abraham at age 99 being informed that he's just getting started. And not only getting started at work, but at home, with Sarah his wife. Another child for goodness sake.

Well, there was some consolation for Abraham and Sarah. Not just more work to do, but parenting a child before whom all nations would bow. Wow! That is a special assignment. Maybe Abraham and Sarah understand that what's ahead is not punishment from God, but blessing.

What St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans (**Romans 4:5**), would call "righteousness of faith." Referring not to a late arrival for Abraham and Sarah, but to the promised arrival of the Messiah. In his gospel (**Mark 8:34**), Jesus urged his listeners to "deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow the Messiah." God was keeping His promises. Now, it is time to keep our promises.

And, here we are. Not just reading about God's message to Abraham and Sarah. But celebrating the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus of Nazareth. And not just celebrating an historical event, but adding to that event by our faith and acts of obedience. Exactly what Mark foretold.

It all comes together, and you and I are part of it. By God's offer in Christ. And by our acceptance of that offer. And not just by our acceptance, but by our

advocacy. We have elected to share the Good News. Abraham and Sarah would be proud of us. The Risen Christ would be proud of us. And God the Father would be proud of us.

One of the miracles of history is that the Creator of the Universe would choose the Family of Abraham to bear the Savior. What are the odds? And, if you think those odds are out of sight, what are the odds of you and me thousands of years later still confirming the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of God's promise?

Truth be told, the odds of this happening are miniscule. Yet we are here. The Risen Christ has beaten the odds.

Should we be surprised? After all, it is the Creator of the Universe who has accomplished this miracle. If the Creator can launch Creation, that same Creator can reach down and touch you and me.

The Good News that you and I profess, and millions of others in their houses of worship profess, is either an accident of history or the fulfillment of a promise. God's promise. Not unlike God's promise to Abraham (**Genesis 17:16**). Sarah would bear the Savior. You and I share the Good News of that Savior, of that promise to Abraham fulfilled.

As you probably know, there is a men's organization called the Promise-Keepers. It was created to promote a more active role for men in the Church. It is an organization with by-laws, and with a presence in many denominations and congregations. Some of you might be members. But we're not talking about the Promise-Keepers organization. We're talking about God keeping God's promise of a Savior, and you and I and millions of other men and women, over 20 plus centuries, receiving that Divine Promise with thanksgiving and with determination to share Risen Christ.

In today's Gospel is the phrase "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (**Mark 8:34**) This is the opportunity that you and I have responded to, not as members of an organization like Promise-keepers, but as individuals, grateful for God's Love in Christ. We are nurtured, in all sorts of ways, by fellow parishioners and visitors.

Some of us are simply curious and want to engage more. Others are hurting and need a healing community. Most of us, I suspect, are both curious a lot and hurting a little bit. All of us, I suspect, are compelled by forces we might not fully understand, but about which we want to know more and eventually share more.

Can you say “Holy Spirit”? Yes, we can say it. And we can do more than “say” it. We can feel it. We can share it. We can give thanks for it. It’s what we do here, and it’s what we do out there.

And it feels RIGHT. And that it is because God is not our invention. God is not Object. God is Subject. “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations.”

The “I” in this passage is not you and me. It is the Lord. And He is the Subject of today’s Psalm. **(Psalm 22:22)** “Praise the Lord, you that fear him; stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob’s line, give glory.”

And, so we do, happily and thankfully. Week after week, year after year, tough situations after tough situations, pleasant surprises after pleasant surprises. Makes us want to sing, as we will in a few moments: “He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth, and love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth.”

Thank you, Lord. You kept your promise. Help us now keep ours.

Amen.

Morning Prayer – Lent 2 – February 25, 2024

Hymn 652, 3 stanzas – Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord, let us, like them without a word,
rise up and follow thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!*

BCP - Page 76 – Lent Greeting

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,
But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive in our sins and
cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

BCP – Pages 79 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to set forth his 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 79-80 – Confession and Absolution

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 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.

BCP – Page 80 - 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 – Page 44 – 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.

First Reading – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:22-30

Praise the Lord, you that fear him;

Stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob's line, give glory.

For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them;

but when they cry to him he hears them.

My praise is of him in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him:

"May your heart live for ever!"

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

For kingship belongs to the Lord;

he rules over the nations.

To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust fall before him.

My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him.

they shall be known as the Lord's forever.

They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn

the saving deeds that he has done.

Second Reading – Romans 4:13-25

Hymn 685 – Rock of Ages

*Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood from thy wounded side that flowed,
be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

*Should my tears for ever flow, should my zeal no languor known,
all for sin could not atone: those must save, and thou alone;
in my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death,
when I rise to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.*

Gospel – Mark 8:31-38

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

BCP – page 96 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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

BCP – page 97 – 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 97-98 – Suffrages A

Show us your mercy, O Lord;

And grant us your salvation.

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

Let you people sing with joy.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in you can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let your way be known upon earth;

Your 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 your Holy Spirit.

Collect for Second Sunday of Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 252 - Prayer for Renewal of Life

Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 257 – Prayer for Mission

O God of all the nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in our image but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that, by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and worship you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 101 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants
give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable 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, pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly
thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips,
but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking
before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory
throughout all ages. 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 may 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 616 – Hail to the Lord’s Anointed – stanzas 1-3

*Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.*

*He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong,
to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight!.*

*He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth,
and love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth:
before him on the mountains shall peace, the herald, go;
and righteousness in fountains from hill to valley flow.*

Dismissal

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

Lessons for Lent 2 – February 25, 2024

Collect: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." God said to Abraham, as for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 22:22-30

Praise the Lord, you that fear him;

Stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob's line, give glory.

For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them;

but when they cry to him he hears them.

My praise is of him in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him:

"May your heart live for ever!"

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
For kingship belongs to the Lord;
he rules over the nations.
To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;
all who go down to the dust fall before him.
My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him;
they shall be known as the Lord's forever.
They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn
the saving deeds that he has done.

Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25

The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") - in the presence of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. "Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

Jesus began to teach his disciples 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 their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the 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 be to thee, O Christ. Amen.*