

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, June 25, 2023.**

You know the phrase “tough to swallow.” Well, there’s no better illustration of this condition than today’s lessons.

Our initial reaction is confusion. We’re tempted to say “See you later, Jesus. You’re supposed to be an ‘upper.’ And what do we get? A ‘downer.’ Life is too short to try to understand what you are thinking, what you are promising, what you want us to buy into. There’s enough depression without adding to it. We’d rather ignore you than struggle to understand you.”

Yet, here we are, trying to understand. Which suggests that “See you later” might be premature. Maybe we need to give Jesus some more time. Or maybe we need to give ourselves some more time.

Which, of course, is exactly what we are doing. We’re here. Trying to understand this first century carpenter and what he might mean to us.

Clearly he means something to us. We responded to him because we were curious, and maybe even thankful. After all, Jesus offers himself as an answer to, or at least an indication of, the biggest question we all have. Which is “Where do I fit into this whole experience called life?”

We gather as curious people who want a satisfying life experience for ourselves and others. And the fact that we come together more than once – in many cases on a weekly basis – is a testament to our curiosity. We don’t want to “swallow” a falsehood. We want to engage the Creator of the Universe, who has decided to engage us.

The Creator is not a neutral bystander. The Creator wants us to exercise our lives in thanksgiving and creativity and wonder. We don’t want to be a “laughing stock.” We want to be grateful servants of the Creator. And it is in and through the community we call the Church that we come as close to the One behind this whole enterprise called life.

Does God operate outside the institutional Church? Of course. But God also operates by design in and through the Church. There are hiccups to be sure. Some small, some huge. Some incidental. Some, sadly, intentional. Look at today's Psalm (**Psalm 69:18**). "Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind. Save me from the mire; do not let me sink. Hide not your face from your servant. In your compassion, turn to me. And be swift, Lord, for I am in distress."

In his letter to the Romans (**Romans 6:8**), Paul underscores our longing for God's love and our belief in that love. "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."

This level of conviction in the "Love of God in Christ Jesus" is not automatic. We have to work at it. In God's wisdom, we have been given the freedom to reject God. And, at times, rejection is tempting. But God is never far away. We might not feel the Lord hanging on to us, but that is in fact how the Lord spends most of His time. Hanging on to His, Her, Its – pick your pronoun – favorite creature. And who might that be? You and I. Believe it or not.

Well, in this place, this setting, we believe. Belief is shaky at times. Maybe absent at times. But never far away. And why? Because God hangs on. God won't let us go very far. We're on a pretty long leash, but a leash nonetheless. And thank God for that!

And let's give ourselves some credit. We hang on too. We stick with the Lord even when it seems that the Lord has forgotten us. We know that the Lord doesn't forget us, but that conviction is tested, especially when we face situations that we feel we don't deserve. "Where are you, Lord? You promised me."

Not a good thing to question the Lord, but sometimes we feel that way, don't we. And then we take a deep breath, say to the Lord "I'm sorry," and move on. The cross we dropped in disappointment, we pick up again in faith. We remember the assuring words of Jesus (**Matthew 10:39**): "Those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

The hymn we just sang – "Sing, my soul, his wondrous love" – is a great reminder of the benefits of sticking by the Lord through thick and thin. Here again are the last phrases of the four verses:

“still to us extends his grace”  
“so much love to us below”  
“guides us by his Spirit pure”  
“trust his love for all to come”

“Trust his love.” Trust. That’s the key, isn’t it? As God hangs in there with us, so we hang in there with God. And the remarkable thing is that, even when we don’t hang in there with God, God still hangs in there with us. Everlasting love. No matter what.

Towards the back of the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 814 to 841) there is a wonderful collection of prayers and thanksgivings. We use these entries regularly in our Morning Prayer services. One of my favorites is “For Quiet Confidence.”

O God of peace who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sometimes it’s tough to lift ourselves to God’s presence. Things seem to be working against us. It’s the nature of life. It’s the nature of free will. It’s the nature of an imperfect world.

But we are not alone. Never. God is always present. God is always welcoming. It’s our trust in that Divine nature that is shaky. That’s the whole point of the Incarnation. God becomes one of us to remind us constantly of the Father’s everlasting love. God simply doesn’t give up on us.

The prophet Jeremiah understood this, well before Jesus arrived. “But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail.” **(Jeremiah 20:11)**

That kind of an attitude, that trust in the Lord, even when we are confused, is what God wants for you and me. And when we forget that trust or put it aside or get angry with it, God’s loving kindness does not waver. What a blessing!

Here's another of the collection of prayers mentioned earlier. This one is #38 on page 827.

*Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Probing the mysteries of God's Creation, and our role in that Creation, is what we do here. We hang in there with God, grateful for God hanging in there for us. Not always easy, but well worth the effort. Well worth the **trust**. *Amen*.

## Morning Prayer – Pentecost 4 – June 25, 2023

### Hymn 401 – The God of Abraham praise

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;  
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love;  
The Lord, the great I AM, by earth and heaven confessed;  
We bow and bless the sacred Name for ever blest.

He by himself hath sworn: we on his earth depend;  
we shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heaven ascend:  
we shall behold his face, we shall his power adore,  
and sing the wonders of his grace for evermore.

There dwells the Lord our King, the Lord, our Righteousness,  
triumphant o'er the world and sin, the Prince of Peace;  
on Zion's sacred height his kingdom he maintains,  
and, glorious with his saints in light, for ever reigns.

### BCP - Page 39 – Day of Pentecost Greeting

Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
*The Lord has risen indeed. Alleluia!*

### 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 69:8-11, 12-17, 18-20**

**First Reading – Jeremiah 20:7-13**

**Second Reading – Romans 6:1b-11**

**Hymn 467 – Sing, my soul, his wondrous love**

Sing, my soul, his wondrous love, who, from yon bright throne above,  
ever watchful o'er our race, still to us extend his grace.

Heaven and earth by him were made; all is by his scepter swayed;  
what are we that he should show so much love to us below?

God, the merciful and good, bought us with the Savior's blood,  
and, to make salvation sure, guides us by his Spirit pure.

Sing, my soul, adore his Name! Let his glory be thy theme:  
praise him till he calls thee home; trust his love for all to come.

**Gospel – Matthew 10:24-39**

**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 Pentecost 4**

O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **BCP Prayer for the Human Family – page 815**

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## **BCP Prayer for Joy in God's Creation – page 814**

O heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son 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 412 – stanzas 1-3 – Earth and all stars**

Earth and all stars, loud rushing planets, sing to the Lord a new song!  
O victory, loud shouting army, sing to the Lord a new song!  
*He has done marvelous things. I too will praise him with a new song!*

Hail, wind, and rain, loud blowing snowstorms, sing to the Lord a new song!  
Flowers and trees, loud rustling dry leaves, sing to the Lord a new song!  
*He has done marvelous things. I too will praise him with a new song!*

Trumpet and pipes, loud clashing cymbals, sing to the Lord a new song!  
Harp, lute, and lyre, loud humming cellos, sing to the Lord a new song!  
*He has done marvelous things. I too will praise him with a new song!*

### **Dismissal**

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

