

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 12, 2023.

St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans notes that “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.”

By our presence today, we buy into this notion that there is value in suffering. But sharing this notion is not easy. “You will be well soon, and you will be stronger for it.” A tough pill to swallow, isn’t it?

We have said this to family and friends, and family and friends have said this to us. But, whether speaking or listening, isn’t it true that we are a bit suspicious about the value of suffering? Given a choice, we would rather not suffer, and we would rather that others not suffer. Suffering just might be over-rated.

But choice is not an option, is it. At some point we and others will suffer, after which we and others will consider whether such suffering is worth it.

Most of the time, we conclude that suffering has value. But not all the time. Indeed, we spend considerable energy trying to avoid suffering.

Is there a way of avoiding suffering altogether? No, there is no escape. If we have life, we will suffer in some manner. This reality St. Paul acknowledges (**Romans 5:2**). But he doesn’t stop with a mere acknowledgment. He turns suffering into a virtue. A virtue that produces endurance which produces character which produces hope.

Today’s Psalm (**Psalm 95:1**) is even more positive. “Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.” In other words, the suffering we are enduring now is not anything like the blessings that are on the way.

Oh, that this would be the case. Of course, it is easier to believe in a positive outcome when we are not suffering. The goal, though, is to sustain hope when we are suffering.

Just how we do this, just how we sustain hope, is up to us. And, yes, to those around us. Including, we dare say, God Himself or Herself or Itself. You pick the pronoun. But faith in this God is our call. God can offer hope, but we are in

charge of receiving and digesting that offer. And one of the ways you and I do this is through prayer.

Today's **Collect** is an example. "Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul."

Note the distinction between adversities and evil thoughts. Most of the time – not always, but most of the time – we seek the help of others when we fight adversity. For evil thoughts, however, for reasons of pride or embarrassment perhaps, we try to handle them ourselves. Oh yes, our close friends might be candidates for sharing, but burdening friends with our challenges isn't something we like to do. Especially those "evil thoughts" that we hope even our close friends don't notice.

The hymn we just sang, ***What a Friend We Have in Jesus***, is not in our hymnal, but it certainly speaks to our lessons today. The theme of this hymn is "take it to the Lord in prayer." Use some initiative, in other words. God wants to hear from us. God wants to know what's on our minds. What are the adversities that confront us? What are the evil thoughts which assault us?

There are some adversities and evil thoughts that we simply can't handle or don't want to handle by ourselves. We do our best. We try really hard. But sometimes the hill is too steep. We need help. And so we pray to the Lord. And – this is key – the Lord hears us! From stanza 4: "Thou hast promised thou wilt all our burden bear."

Today's gospel is long and fairly complicated. It's a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. In other words, not Jewish. But she is curious. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" At this point, Jesus is aware of God's calling to him, and, as the conversation ensues, the woman wonders if this Jesus isn't in fact the Messiah, the Savior. Well, she's on to something, isn't she? And soon other Samaritans ask the same question. Is he "truly the Savior of the World"?

Well, just as the woman concluded that Jesus "truly is the Savior of the World," so have you and I concluded. Or, at least we are engaged in that process. If not already there, we are moving in that direction. And that engagement – that intellectual and spiritual engagement- includes wrestling with "adversities which

may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul.”

Bodily harm and soulful hurt can start out as roadblocks, but can end up as maps. As God incarnate, as God in human flesh, and by design, Jesus is that transition point. He is the One who can help us, and does help us whether we realize it or not, move to higher ground where we can see over the roadblocks and therefore see a clearer and more positive direction.

And how do we reach that “higher ground”? It’s called, again, “taking it to the Lord in prayer.” It’s an activity that we can handle if and when we give it a try. We try here as a congregation. And we try, away from here, as individuals. The goal is the same: to get closer to the Lord as he gets closer to us. In Jesus, God is intimately close. Jesus is a human being, just like us, but with a deeper relationship to the Creator. Indeed, Jesus is the Creator in human form.

So, when we are with Jesus, we are with God. It’s an upgrade. And that closeness can be really scary. But it can also be fulfilling. Remember in today’s passage from Exodus (**Exodus 17:6**), God assures Moses that he, God, is prepared to “strike the rock so that the people may drink.” We are among the thirsty people. And, in Christ, God has struck the rock and provided the water that we need and crave.

And, if and when we are uncertain as to whom to pray, when to pray, how to pray, and for whom to pray, we have the good fortune of the Lord himself as teacher. And one of his greatest lessons was to answer the questions that you and I have about prayer. Jesus anticipated these questions and gave us answers. Here are the questions and here are the answers from the Lord:

Our question:	The Jesus’ answer:
When to pray?	Give us this day.
To whom to pray?	Our Father who art in heaven.
How to pray?	As our Savior Christ hath taught us.
For whom to pray?	Forgive <u>us</u> and those <u>who trespass against us</u> .

It’s a pretty good start, isn’t it? Probably why the Lord offered it in the first place. And probably why it’s very good advice for you and me. In Jesus’ Name we pray. *Amen.*

Third Sunday of Lent – March 12, 2023
Morning Prayer

Prelude

Hymn 432 – O praise ye the Lord!

O praise ye the Lord! Praise him in the height;
rejoice in his word, ye angels of light;
ye heavens, adore him by whom ye were made,
and worship before him, in brightness arrayed.

O praise ye the Lord! Praise him upon earth,
in tuneful accord, all ye of new birth;
praise him who hath brought you his grace from above,
praise him who hath taught you to sing of his love.

O praise ye the Lord! All things that give sound;
each jubilant chord re-echo around;
loud organs, his glory forth tell in deep tone,
and sweet harp, the story of what he hath done.

O praise ye the Lord! thanksgiving and song
to him be outpoured all ages along!
For love in creation, for heaven restored,
for grace of salvation, O praise ye the Lord!

Opening sentence - BCP page 40

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

Invitation to Confession – BCP page 41

So that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship Almighty God, let us, with penitent and obedient hearts, confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

Confession – BCP pages 41-42

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, 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 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.

Absolution – BCP page 42

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

Gloria – BCP page 42

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.

Venite – BCP page 44

Come, let us sing to 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 he 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 people with his truth.

Psalm 95 – insert

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11 - insert

Hymn – *What a friend we have in Jesus* – see insert

*What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge, Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.*

Gospel Lesson: John 4:5-42 - insert

Sermon

Apostles' Creed – pp 53-54

*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.*

Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you.
And with thy spirit.
Let us pray.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be 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.*

Suffrages A – page 55

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 Third Sunday of Lent – insert

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Prayers for Sundays and Quiet Confidence– BCP pages 56 and 832

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.

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. *Amen.*

General Thanksgiving - BCP pp 58-59

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 ourselves 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 and *America*

Prayer of St. Chrysostom – BCP, p 59

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.*

The Grace – BCP, p 59

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

Hymn 657 – Love divine, all loves excelling

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation, enter ever trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder love, and praise.

Dismissal

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

Postlude

Lessons for Lent 3 – March 12, 2023

Collect: Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.
Amen.

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was not water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

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

Psalm 95

Come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the caverns of the earth,
and the heights of the hills are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands have molded the dry land.
Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee,
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!
Harden not our hearts, as your forebears did in the wilderness,
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah, when they tempted me.
They put me to the test,
though they had seen my works.
Forty years long I detested that generation and said,
"This people are wayward in their hearts; they do not know my ways."
So I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter into my rest."

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to his grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now receive reconciliation.

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

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be

the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then come the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to repay that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believe in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."