

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, August 20, 2023.**

There are times when, after reading or listening to scripture, we scratch our heads. Things don't make sense. Or so it seems. Today is a good example.

At the end of the passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans (**Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**), he writes "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he – God – may be merciful to all."

Does this mean that, when we disobey, we can blame God? Well, perhaps we can blame God for giving us the choice between obedience and disobedience. But isn't the decision that follows on us? If we obey, we can take credit. And if we disobey, we should own the decision. What's fair is fair.

The point is simply that God gives us the freedom to obey or disobey. And God does so because God wants us to be happy creatures. "I can do it myself, and I want to do it myself. And if I can act obediently in accordance with what God wants, that's when I am really happy."

If my only response is obedience – in other words, no choice on our part – what's there to be happy about? I want to earn the A. But, here we are in a setting, where we acknowledge that, by ourselves, we can't earn the A. We're not in charge of salvation. The Devil seems too strong.

But we don't give up, do we, just because we're not in charge. We're here, looking for clarification, for assurance. And where do we find that clarification and assurance? In Scripture, the very place that sometimes puzzles us.

One of the benefits of this era, our era, is that we have been exposed to the comedy of Laurel and Hardy. And one of the memorable lines from that duo is "This is a fine mess." And it's usually followed by "that you've gotten me into."

Now, sometimes you and I attribute the responsibility for this "fine mess" to God. After all, it is God who gives us the freedom to misuse freedom.

But, most of the time, we own the "fine mess," whatever it might be. We have taken a blessing of freedom, and exercised that blessing in a negative way. Not God's fault. Our fault. Or perhaps someone else's fault. But again, not God's fault.

Now, with whomever the fault lies – probably us - there is a lesson to be learned. Yes, we can, we should, learn from our mistakes. Not from God’s mistakes, but ours. We own the “fine mess.” Oliver Hardy was right. St. Paul was right many centuries before. “God has imprisoned all in disobedience, but for a purpose, namely “so that God may be merciful to all.” **(Romans 11:32)**

But, first things first. There is a bigger issue than just the mess, and that is a tendency to miss an opportunity for growth as we respond to the mess. Enter the relationship of “mess” and “miss.” For every “mess” that we create or find ourselves in, there is opportunity for growth. Sometimes the opportunity is hidden. It doesn’t jump out at us. And even if the opportunity did jump out at us, we might miss it. It’s simply who we are. It’s the price of free will.

And that condition isn’t going to change any time soon, if ever. All the more reason to be alert and cautious and mindful that forgiveness is available in Christ, should we **miss** the **mess**. And we will. But it doesn’t have to be “always.” Isaiah reminds us that “salvation will come, and deliverance will be revealed.” **(Isaiah 56:1)**

But, back to our lesson for today from **Paul’s Letter to the Romans**. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

You know the term “original sin.” It’s the human condition to which we are all subjected. It’s the freedom to choose between good and evil. And, in most, if not all, cases, we know the difference going in. Yet sometimes we make the wrong choice anyway. We can knowingly miss the mess. It’s called “turn a blind eye.” Or we can address the mess. As in, “How can I help, Lord?”

And, here we are, confessing our sins, seeking forgiveness, and promising to do better as servants of a Living and Loving God. And we don’t do this just once. We do it often. Maybe daily, maybe weekly, maybe rarely, maybe only when the mess we are in is a really big mess. The response varies, but the condition, the reality of mess-hood, doesn’t vary.

But, here’s the Good News, the really awesome news, that news that draws us here, together. This Good News is available for the asking, and always delivered, if our hearts are open to that forgiveness and ready to adjust behavior.

Of course, accepting the Lord's forgiveness is almost as tough as believing in it. Just ask Peter. In today's Gospel, Peter innocently asks Jesus to explain a parable. And how does Jesus respond? He says to Peter, "Are you still without understanding?"

But, bless his heart, Peter kept working at understanding and sharing. Which is exactly what you and I do right here. We work at understanding. And, as we develop that understanding, we share God's love. Yes, "You, Peter, you St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, can make a difference. Share the love. Recognize the mess, address the mess, help clean-up the mess. Oh yes, there will be another mess, but we promise to grow in our role of both recognizing the mess and helping address the mess.

The last thing we want to do is miss the mess, whether out of ignorance or deliberately. It's a pretty clear choice, isn't it. The hymn we just sang reinforces the choice: "Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be." The "valley of love and delight." The valley where the Lord lives and wants us to live.

"Wait just a minute" you say. Today's gospel ends with this verse: "Then he, Jesus, sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he, Jesus, was the Messiah." Why would Jesus tell them to keep quiet? Because, at that point, the Crucifixion hadn't happened, much less the Resurrection. It would be the Resurrection that would confirm his identity as the Messiah. It would be at that point that the disciples could proclaim boldly that the Messiah had arrived.

And, lest we forget, that message of hope and conviction is now in our hands. We too live on this side of the Resurrection. We know the importance of not missing the mess. Indeed, you and I are members of the custodial staff. **With keys**. That's the Lord's confidence in us. He wants to be able to say to us, as he did to the mom in today's gospel, "Great is your faith."

The World is a messy place. We understand that. But we also know and appreciate that this mess has an antidote. And that antidote is from the Creator himself, herself, itself – pick your pronoun – and carries responsibility. Don't let the mess carry the day. Don't miss the mess. Using our gifts and talents, confront the mess head on. And know that we are in good company, the company of the Creator.

What a joy, what a privilege, what a team, what a captain. Jesus, for goodness sake. The Risen Christ. A healer (**Matthew 15:28**). And we can be healers too. And where does that healing take place? The hymn tells us: "In the place just right." That's where. Amen.



**Service of Holy Communion**  
**Pentecost 12 – August 20, 2023**

**Hymn 365 – Come, thou almighty King**

Come thou, almighty King, help us thy Name to sing, help us to praise.  
Father whose love unknown all things created own,  
build in our hearts thy throne, Ancient of Days.

Come thou, incarnate Word, by heaven and earth adored; our prayer attend:  
come, and thy people bless; come, give thy word success;  
stablish in righteousness, Savior and friend.

Come, holy Comforter, thy sacred witness bear in this glad hour:  
thou, who almighty art, now rule in every heart,  
and ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power.

To Thee, great One in Three, the highest praises be, hence evermore;  
thy sovereign majesty may we in glory see,  
and to eternity love and adore.

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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.

*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 Pentecost 12**

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading – Isaiah 56:1, 6-8**

### **Psalm 67**

### **Second Reading – Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

### **Hymn 554 – ‘Tis the gift to be simple**

**‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free,  
‘tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
’twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
when true simplicity is gained  
to bow and bend we shan’t be ashamed,  
to turn, turn, will be our delight  
till by turning, turning we come round right.**

### **Gospel – Matthew 15:10-28**

**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 pge 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 336 – Come with us, O blessed Jesus**

Come with us, O blessed Jesus, with us evermore to be;  
and though leaving now thine altar, let us never more leave thee.  
Be thou one with us for ever, in our life thy love divine  
our own flesh and blood has taken, and to us thou givest thine.

Come with us, O mighty Savior, God from God, and Light from Light;  
thou art God, thy glory veiling, so that we may bear the sight.  
Now we go to seek and serve thee, through our work as through our prayer;  
grant us light to see and know thee, in thy people everywhere.

Come with us, O King of glory, by angelic voices praise;  
in our hearts as in thy heaven, be enraptured anthems raised.  
Let the mighty chorus ever sing its glad exultant songs;  
Let its hymn be heard for ever peace for which creation longs.

### **Dismissal**

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

## Lessons for 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 15

**Collect:** Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8**

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

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

### **Psalm 67**

May God be merciful to us and bless us,  
*show us the light of his countenance and come to us.*  
Let your ways be known upon earth,  
*Your saving health among all nations.*  
Let the people praise you, O God;  
*let all the peoples praise you.*  
Let the nations be glad and sin for joy,  
*for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth.*  
Let the peoples praise you, O god;  
*Let all the peoples praise you;*  
The earth has brought forth her increase;  
*may God, our own God, give us his blessing.*  
May God give us his blessing,  
*and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him.*

## **Second Reading: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

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

## **Matthew 15:10-28**

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart comes evil intentions, murder adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "I Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

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