

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 3rd Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2023.

This morning, I would like us to see ourselves as students in a classroom taught by Jesus. And it's toward the end of the day, and Jesus is giving us an English assignment. In one page or less, complete the following: "I love the Lord because"

If this language sounds familiar, it's because today's Psalm (**Psalm 116:1**) begins with these words. In the Psalm, however, the sentence is completed. The blank, if you will, is filled in. "I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication."

Well, is this how you and I would fill in the blank? Have we ever sensed that the Lord has heard our prayers? And, if so, have we ever sensed that the Lord answered our prayers? After all, it's one thing to hear; it's another thing to answer.

And, if we have sensed that the Lord has not only heard, but answered as well, what did we then do? What was **our response** to the **Lord's welcome response**?

This is the kind of engagement that is featured in today's Gospel (**Luke 24:13-35**). Two disciples are going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Jesus meets them and asks, "What are you discussing?" Not recognizing Jesus, the disciples share the gossip about Jesus.

A conversation ensues and a meal is shared. And it is, at this simple meal of bread and perhaps wine, that "the eyes of the disciples are opened." They recognize that their companion is the very One about whom they have been talking.

And what do they do? They tell others. "Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Wouldn't their response to "I love the Lord because ..." make for a really interesting essay? Their teacher is the Lord, after all. And they love the Lord because the Lord has entrusted to them his identity.

Now, where do you and I fit into this picture? Would our essay be as compelling? Well, it might not be as compelling, but it surely would be interesting.

This kind of sharing isn't something we do here very often. There are other settings, like Bible study, where such sharing takes place. And there are probably some discussions among close friends or family members where such sharing takes place.

But, for the most part, we keep our faith pretty close to the vest. Notice in today's Psalm (**Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17**), for example, the use of "I" not "We." "I love the Lord .. I called upon him ... I came to grief ... I will lift up the cup ... I will fulfill I am your servant I will offer."

Yet the notion of a private one-on-one relationship with the Lord is balanced by a sense of "we are all in this together." In today's Second Reading (**I Peter 1:17-23**), Peter suggests that we have been born anew. He speaks of "ancestors" and "mutual love."

This community right here is deeper than 20 or 30 or 40 or even 100 individuals sharing a space. We share more than space. We share a faith. And not just individual faith, but corporate faith. And that sharing of faith – whatever its form - takes place well beyond these walls. Often, without our realizing it.

We believe that God in Jesus is saving, not just one person at a time, but the whole Creation. Our individual responses might be different, but God's Love is broad. The Lord embraces all. Indeed one of the reasons you and I enjoy Church is because we feel blessed, not just as individuals, but as a whole community. We call our gatherings after the service "social" hours for a purpose.

Well, back to our homework assignment. "I love the Lord because" Complete the sentence.

Imagine having Jesus as our teacher. Not second hand, but first hand. In his presence. And imagine all the interesting assignments that he might give in the course of a semester or a year. And imagine all the individual sessions that we might have as well. School would be a privilege, wouldn't it? A joy. And, yes,

critical to the health of the larger community and the whole society and the entire world.

But that broad influence starts with one's individual faith. "I love the Lord because" And what do we get when we combine those individual responses? **We** love the Lord. As a congregation, as a family, as a prayer group. Both forms of love are powerful. The I's and the We's. Look at today's Collect: "Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work."

Engagement with the Lord. That's why we fill in the blank as individuals and as a congregation. It's the "filling in" that is key, whether personal or corporate. That's the excitement. That's the "burning in our hearts" that today's Gospel highlights (**Luke 24:32**).

Wouldn't it be interesting to sit in on a class on the day this "fill in the blank" assignment was due. Indeed, it would be more than interesting. It would be surprising. Our response would be "Who knew?" But it would be confirming. It would be stimulating. It would be broadening.

As followers of Jesus, you and I would be fascinated to hear, to see, how others in the class filled in their blank. "I follow because I'm inspired." "I follow because I'm challenged." "I follow because I'm curious." "I follow because, if Jesus really is the Son of God, I'm on the path that God intends for me."

Our goal right here is identified in the hymn we just sang (#707): "Take our lives and let them be consecrated, Lord, to thee."

That's why we signed up for this class. That's why we're here. We've heard about this Jesus person. And we're intrigued by this Jesus person. And we want to be closer to this Jesus person. We want to be in his class. And what does he give us as a first assignment? Fill in the blank.

Some assignments we dread. But not this one. This one is personal. This one has to do with who we are and whose we are. It is our pleasure to fill in the blank with the Name of Jesus. And to sing our final hymn today, the first line of which is: "At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow."

We don't bow to just anyone. Not here. No, we bow to the Lord. We fill in the blank with the Name of Jesus. And, when we do so, we are where and with whom we are meant to be. What a great feeling. What a great teacher. What a great God. And yes, what great classmates.

Amen.

Lessons for 3rd Sunday of Easter – April 23, 2023

Collect: O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

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

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication,
because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.
The cords of death entangled me; the grip of the grave took hold of me;
I came to grief and sorrow.
Then I called upon the Name of the Lord:
“O Lord, I pray you, save my life.”
How shall I repay the Lord
for all the good things he has done for me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call upon the Name of the Lord.
I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his servants.

O Lord, I am your servant;

*I am your servant and the child of your handmaid;
you have freed me from my bonds.*

I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call upon the Name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.

In the courts of the Lord's house,
in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

Second Reading: I Peter 1:17-23

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

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

The Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not

know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us because it is all most evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise be, O Christ.*