

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Pentecost 17, September 24, 2023.

If we were giving a name to today's lessons, that name might be "Too bad, so sad." This is an expression that we often use in a mocking sort of way.

An example. Earlier this season, the Orioles were playing the Astros. The Orioles had a three-run lead going into the top half of the 9th inning, with an impressive relief pitcher coming into the game to put the Astros out of their misery. Three quick outs, and Orioles fans could go home happy. Only one problem. The Astros loaded the bases, and the next batter hit a grand-slam home-run. The Astros won the game 7 to 6.

If you were an Astros fan, it would have been tempting to say to an Orioles fan as you both were leaving the stadium, "Too bad, so sad." Needless to say, the Orioles fan would not have been happy. Of course, the shoe is on the other foot now. But let's stay with the earlier situation.

Sometimes we just can't help ourselves. We have to rub it in. Could we have said something more charitable than "too bad, so sad"? Well, yes, perhaps. Something like "Gee, I'm sorry."

All of which takes us to our lessons today. "Too bad, so sad" sounds a bit like "The last will be first, and the first will be last." Now, if you were a disappointed Orioles fan, and an Astros fan quoted the 20th chapter of the Matthew's Gospel, you might have needed a lot of self-control.

The point is simply that there are plenty of times when things don't turn out as we hope. The early worker in the Gospel expected to receive more than the late worker. Both were paid the same. Jonah expected God to punish the people of Ninevah, but God chose a more lenient response.

Another example. A little brother misbehaves all the time and nothing happens. I misbehave one time, and I get a lecture. We can only hope that the little brother doesn't say to the older brother "Too bad, so sad."

And you probably don't want to make your older brother feel better by reading **Psalms 145**: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; there is no end to his greatness."

Well, is there a way to live with disappointment? And, if disappointment is likely, is there a way to prepare for it, and perhaps make something constructive of the situation?

Welcome to the Judeo-Christian Faith. By our presence here, and I suspect by our presence in all situations, you and I have elected to see, if not the bright side of things all the time, at least a side of things that contains positive possibilities.

The people of Ninevah were facing “calamity.” But God chose a different outcome: a shade bush. So Jonah accepted the shade, but then sat back to watch those without shade suffer. What Jonah didn’t realize was that God, who had provided the shade, could also take away the shade. Which God did. A form of “too bad, Jonah, so sad.”

Well, where is the “bright side” on this episode? Maybe St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians can help us. Here’s verse 10: “So that you may be able to discern what is best and maybe pure and blameless until the day of Christ.”

The short version is “What would Jesus do?” Would Jesus make fun of someone? Would Jesus invite an angry comeback? Would Jesus rub it in, as it were? Of course not.

And what about our parents or grandparents? What would they want us to do? Gloat over a last minute, come from behind, victory? No, their response would be some form of “Better luck next time.” Said, of course, not in a divisive way, but in a “I’ve been there too – I know how you feel” way.

Discernment. It’s an incredibly important skill. It means to recognize what is appropriate. What is best for a given situation? What will help rather than aggravate?

Perhaps the most familiar act of discernment for you and me in this setting is what we call the Golden Rule. “Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you.” In other words, what would Jesus do, and what would Jesus want us to do. “Rub it in” or “I feel your pain.”

Best, by far, is “I feel your pain.” Because it’s true, isn’t it? We know disappointment. We can identify with Paul when he writes: “We know what it’s like to see victory snatched away.” And, yes, we know what it’s like to be the snatcher as well as the snatchee.

And, most important, we know that moments of disappointment don't have to last.

That's our faith, isn't it? That's our contribution to any community. That's what should characterize us as citizens, as partners, as leaders, as followers, as fans, and, yes, as disciples.

"Better days are coming" might be our motto, but that would be shortchanging the Good News. For you and me in this setting, better days are already here. Not "He might rise." No, "He is risen!"

The best way to watch a baseball game or an orchestral performance is to appreciate the skills of the participants. And, guess what. Appreciation is what we do right here. Not performers, but the Love of God. Incredible power, incredible foresight, incredible engagement, incredible forgiveness.

We needed a Savior, and God delivered One, by sharing Self. Not just a victory for one team and a loss for the other team, but Victory for all of us. And how do we celebrate that Victory? We share it, especially in moments of disappointment.

And, speaking of disappointment, God wasn't happy with the people of Ninevah. But, guess what God changed His mind, and instead sent a Savior, whose birth, life, death and resurrection we celebrate each time we gather or pray in private. God's incredibly generous gift to you and me, whether we worked 8 hours or 1 hour. Whether we won a baseball game or lost.

It is God's Love that counts. A Love that is ours to share, with thanksgiving. This is what we do right here, and what we do when we leave here. You know what? I think we're on to something.

Amen.

Morning Prayer – Pentecost 17 – September 24, 2023

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 every 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.

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 145:1-8

First Reading – Jonah 3:10-4:11

Second Reading – Philippians 1:21-30

Hymn 587 – Our Father, by whose name

Our Father, by whose Name all fatherhood is known,
who dost in love proclaim each family thine own,
bless thou all parents, guarding well, with constant love as sentinel,
the homes in which thy people dwell.

Gospel – Matthew 20:1-16

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 17

Grant us, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; 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 Sunday– page 835

O God our King, by the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, you conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life: Redeem all our days by this victory; forgive our sins, banish our fears, make us bold to praise you and to do your will; and steel us to wait for consummation of your kingdom on the last great Day; through the same 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 544, stanzas 1-3 – Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moon shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made, and praises throng to crown his head;
his Name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue dwell on his love with sweetest song;
and infinite voices shall proclaim, their early blessings on his Name.

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 17th Sunday after Pentecost – September 24, 2023

Collect: Grant us, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Jonah 3:10-4:11

When God saw what the people of Nineveh did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind. And the sun beat down on the head of Jonah to that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 145:1-8

I will exalt you, O God my King,
and bless your Name for ever and ever.

Every day will I bless you
and praise your Name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;
there is no end to his greatness.

One generation shall praise your works to another
and shall declare your power.

I will ponder the glorious splendor of your majesty
and all your marvelous works.

They shall speak of the might of your wondrous acts,
and I will tell of your greatness.

They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness;
they shall sing of your righteous deeds.

The lord is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

To me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me: and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for what is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

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

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, "Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

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