

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,  
Lent 5, March 17, 2024.**

All of us, I suspect, have favorite Biblical passages. One of mine is in this morning's Psalm. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Why is this a favorite? Because 1) it recognizes that I have some things to work on, and 2) a correction is well within my power. Not a full-scale make-over. Rather a tweak here and there. An adjustment that I can make if I choose to do so.

So, what's stopping me? Why is it still an issue? I know I can do better. So I pray to the Lord. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Sound familiar?

Key word here is "renew." A "right spirit" is not a new experience, but sometimes the "right spirit" drifts away. We don't even recognize it. And that's when a correction is in order. So, assuming I am even aware, I go to the well one more time and ask God for a little help.

My guess is that this sentiment is not new to you. You might use a different prayer, but the element of renewal is common. Back to basics, if you will. A tweak here and there. Enough to get me, and maybe you, back on track.

This conversation with God is probably not something we share with others, even those closest to us. We hope that we can make whatever correction is necessary without going public. "Create in me." "Renew in me." This is between me and you, Lord. No one else. Please.

The irony here is that, if indeed we make a correction, if renewal does take place, those closest to us will recognize it. "What's gotten into you? You're cheery today. What's up?" To which we probably say, "Oh, it's nothing. Not to worry."

But, it is something, isn't it? A conversation with the Creator of the Universe? A one-to-one visit with God Almighty? Wow!

Such is the nature of prayer. Little old you and me having a chat with the Creator of the Universe.

Is that even possible? Well, you and I think so. We believe so. We have our doubts, but we continue to come down on the side of "Our Father, who art in heaven ...."

And, we're not the only ones. Belief in a Creator, a God, a Power responsible for all that is and will be, is universal. This common denominator alone ought to confirm what we do in this setting.

In every religion, there is a version of "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Whatever our religious background, we want to do better in all sorts of ways. The Christian Faith is one of the options for "doing better."

Clearly there are other options. And we respect those options. But one doesn't pray to an option. One prays to a Creator. And, in our case, one prays to a Creator who is also a Savior. The Creator who takes on our humanity.

Can you imagine a Creator who doesn't do this? Probably not. We are used to the notion, the possibility, that the Creator of the Universe does indeed take on our humanity. For you and me in this setting, the concept of Incarnation, of God appearing in human flesh, is not a stumbling block, but a confirmation of God as loving and forgiving and understanding.

And so, every now and then, especially when we recognize that we can do better, we fall on our knees and pray "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

A bit later in today's Psalm is this verse: "Give me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your bountiful spirit." Confession is tough to do, but absolution is worth it, isn't it. God couldn't be happier than to greet us, listen to us, and assure us that His Love is for real. What a good feeling that assurance is when you and I are down on ourselves.

“Get up” God says. “Go on your way. There is work to do. You’ve shared your heart. Now I’ll share mine. Remember Jesus? He died for you. But he also rose for you. I died for you. But I also rose for you. My choice. My decision.

A mystery? God continues: “For you, yes. For me, routine. And don’t be shy about coming back at any time for anything. That’s what I’m here for.”

“And don’t forget this. What you’re here for is to live a life of service. And when you falter at this task, don’t hesitate to seek my help. I actually love to hear these words: ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.’ Not because of what you might have done unfaithfully, but because you recognize where to go for help, for assurance, for yet another chance at being your best.”

It’s as if God himself composed our final hymn today:

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty: hold me with thy powerful hand;  
bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and ever more,  
feed me now and ever more.”

And so we gather at the Lord’s table, and we share in God’s favorite dish:  
“a clean heart and a right spirit.”

And, if we’re looking for a grace to offer over this special meal, St Patrick, who is remembered on this day, suggests this one:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ will win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 17, 2024**

**Hymn 142 – Lord, who throughout these forty days**

Lord, who throughout these forty days for us didst fast and pray,  
teach us with thee to mourn our sins, and lose by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst contend and didst the victory win,  
O give us strength in thee to fight, in thee to conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger bear and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord  
to die to self, and chiefly live by thy most holy word.

And through these days of penitence, and through thy Passion-tide,  
Yea, evermore, in life and death, Jesus! with us abide.

Abide with us, that so, this life of suffering overpast,  
an Easter of unending joy we may attain at last!

**Page 355**

Bless the Lord who forgives all our sins..  
*His mercy endures 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.

**Page 356 - Song of Praise - said**

*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 Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners. Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what your promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading – Jeremiah 31:31-34**

### **Psalm 51:13**

### **Second Reading – Hebrews 5:5-10**

### **Hymn 332 – O God, unseen yet ever near**

O God, unseen yet ever near, thy presence may we feel;  
and thus inspired with holy fear, before thine altar kneel.

Here may thy faithful people know the blessings of thy love,  
the streams that through the desert flow, the manna from above.

We come, obedient to thy word, to feast on heavenly food;  
Our meat the Body of the Lord, our drink his precious blood.

Thus may we all thy word obey, for, we O God, are thine;  
and go rejoicing on our way, renewed with strength divine.

### **Gospel – John 12:20-33**

**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 page 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 690 – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah**

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand;  
bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore,  
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow;  
let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through;  
strong deliverer, strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield,  
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;  
death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side';  
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee,  
I will ever give to thee.

### **Dismissal**

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

## Lessons for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent – March 17, 2024

**Collect:** Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

“The Days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,” says the Lord. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” says the Lord’ “for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

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

### **Psalm 51:1-13**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;  
*in your great compassion blot out my offenses.*

Wash me through and through from my wickedness  
*and cleanse me from my sin.*

For I know my transgressions,  
*and my sin is ever before me.*

Against you only have I sinned  
*and done what is evil in your sight.*

And so you are justified when you speak  
*and upright in your judgment.*

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth,  
*a sinner from my mother's womb.*  
For behold, you look for truth deep within me,  
*and will make me understand wisdom secretly.*  
Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;  
*wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.*  
Make me hear of joy and gladness,  
*that the body you have broken may rejoice.*  
Hide your face from my sins  
*and blot out all my iniquities.*  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence  
*and take not your holy spirit from me.*  
Give me the joy of your saving help again  
*and sustain me with your bountiful spirit.*

**Second Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10**

Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

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

### **Gospel: John 12:20-33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

**The Gospel of the Lord. *Pray be to thee, O Christ.***