

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins on March 19, 2023, 4th Sunday of Lent, at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland.

Today's first reading is about trust in the Lord.

The authorities are looking for someone to succeed Saul as King over Israel. The Lord says to Samuel, "You need to get over Saul. He hasn't been a good King. It's time to move ahead. Don't live in the past." But Samuel protests. "Saul will kill me, if someone else is selected." The Lord tells Samuel "Not to worry. I have a plan. And my plan involves one of sons of Jesse."

So, Samuel interviews some of Jesse's sons. There are seven sons altogether, including those mentioned in this morning's lesson. They are Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah. Samuel is not impressed, and says "These three and three others that we've looked at are not the ones. Are there any other candidates?" "Yes," the Lord says, "there is the youngest son, whose name is David."

Bingo! The Lord tells Samuel that young David is the One. "Anoint him." And Samuel does, in the presence of the older brothers. We aren't told how they reacted, only that "the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward."

Trust in the Lord is the predominant theme in the Old Testament. There is no better illustration of this trust than the 23rd Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want Surely, Lord, your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

And, sure enough, within a relatively short time, Jesus is born to Mary and Joseph. Their child grows into an adult, about whom others proclaim "Christ will shine on you." And indeed that happened. The Light of Christ went global. It even reached an Island on the Chesapeake Bay. It took centuries, but the Light did arrive, took hold, and continues to this very day. Welcome. Not to put any pressure on us, but we are now part of the Story. We are Light-proclaimers to our generation.

This proclamation of God's Love has taken many forms, and continues to do so. Today's passage from the Gospel of John describes a healing. The eyesight of a

man born blind was restored by Jesus. People didn't believe it at first. They knew that the man's sight was restored, but they didn't know how it happened, especially on the Sabbath. For Jesus, though, the best way to honor the Sabbath was to restore the man's sight.

Yes, it was a miracle, which the onlookers had no choice but to acknowledge. Jesus said that "You have seen the man. His sight is restored." Yet, some in authority simply could not accept the reality. But, more powerful than their unbelief was the evidence of the man who could now see. "Lord, I believe."

The New Testament is devoted to testimonies about the power of God to heal. One of the most beautiful of these experiences is from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. "Once you were darkness, but now, in the Lord, you are light."

Now, this light that can overcome darkness is not just about a person in the City of Ephesus. This light is about you and me and those who are touched by our faith, our thanksgiving, our belief, our trust.

We are players in this drama. We didn't make up the Story. We received it, with an expectation that we pass it on, along with our own healing stories. Our experiences might not be as dramatic as restored sight, but they can be compelling nonetheless. Maybe even more compelling because people don't expect this level of sharing.

Now, I would guess that our belief in the Risen Christ as the Light of the World, the One who heals, wavers from time to time. Things happen which seem unfair. But what we also discover is that faith bounces back. It is resilient, and not by accident.

And, when our faith, our belief, our trust, is restored, don't we wonder whether the Holy Spirit might have been involved in the restoration? And, if this has happened, I bet that you responded with a simple, but heart-felt, "Thank you, Lord."

Life is full of ups and downs. Both kinds of events are real and powerful. But for you and me in this setting, the "ups" have an edge. Remember the response of the man in today's gospel whose sight was restored. He described the experience

as an “astonishing thing.” And he gave credit to the Lord with these simple words: “I believe.”

Of course, belief is more likely when there is a positive outcome. Restored sight, for example, sends a powerful message. But so do responses that aren’t in the “restored sight” category.

And that’s exactly where you and I come into the picture. We don’t have to prove the healing power of God. Proclaim it, yes. Cite examples, yes. Be good neighbors, yes. Trust, yes. And, of course, if we have had a healing experience comparable to those in Scripture, by all means share it.

Sometimes, though, the Lord acts through second-hand experiences as well as first-hand experiences. Indeed, some of the most powerful endorsements of the Risen Christ are from those who simply have concluded, based on experiences of all sorts, that yes, there just might be a capital C Creator, who remains engaged with the Creation, and who, out of deep, deep love, joined the fray as a first century Hebrew carpenter, who then turned out to be a wonderful teacher and just perhaps the Savior of the World.

The message is simple: stay open to possibilities. You never know. What seems out of the question today just might change your life tomorrow in an “astonishing” way.

Thank you, Lord. I’m seeing better already. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
Fourth Sunday of Lent – February March 19, 2023

Hymn 433 – We gather together

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
he chastens and hastens his will to make known;
the wicked oppressing now cease from distressing:
sing praises to his Name; he forgets not his own.

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;
so from the beginning the fight we were winning:
thou, Lord, was at our side: all glory be thine.

We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant,
and pray that thou still our defender wilt be.
let thy congregation escape tribulation:
thy Name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

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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 Fourth Sunday of Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – I Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Second Reading – Ephesians 5:8-14

Hymn 531 – O Spirit of the living God

O Spirit of the living God, in all thy plentitude of grace,
where'er the foot of man hath trod, descend on our apostate race.

Give tongues of fire and hearts of love, to preach the reconciling word;
Give power and unction from above, where'er the joyful sound is heard.

Be darkness at thy coming, light; confusion, order in thy path;
souls without strength inspire with might, bid mercy triumph over wrath.

Convert the nations far and nigh the triumphs of the cross record;
the Name of Jesus glorify, till every people call him Lord.

Gospel – John 9:1-41

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John*Glory to you, Lord Christ*
The Gospel of the Lord.*Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

Sermon

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 Prepare the Altar

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.

Blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Hymn 345 – stanzas 1-3

Savior, again to thy dear Name we raise
with one accord our parting hymn of praise;
guard thou the lips from sin, the hearts from shame,
that in this house have called upon thy Name.

Grant us thy peace upon our homeward way;
with thee began, with thee shall end the day:
from harm and danger keep thy children free,
for dark and light are both alike to thee.

Grant us thy peace throughout our earthly life;
peace to thy church from error and from strife;
peace to our land, the fruit of truth and love;
peace in each heart, thy spirit from above:

Dismissal

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

Lessons for Lent 4 – March 19, 2023

Collect: Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: I Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” He said “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

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

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures

and leads me beside still waters.

He revives my soul

and guides me along right pathways for his Names' sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;

and you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

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

Gospel: John 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” when he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back, able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him

before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from?" The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and you are trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in

him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would no have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sins remains.”

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