

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 3rd Sunday of Epiphany, January 21, 2024.

Some of you, I trust, have discovered that when you are physically away from St. Christopher's on a Sunday morning, you can still "be present." Not only can you watch the service in progress, you can prepare for the service by reviewing the lessons that are posted each week prior to the Sunday service. Typically there are three documents posted: the service itself; the sermon; and the lessons.

My habit is to create the "lessons" document by typing the lessons. I have found that when I do so, I engage the lessons in a little deeper way than simply reading the insert. I often see things that I don't see otherwise. Things that don't jump off the page when I read them, sometimes jump off the page when I type them. And when they do catch my attention, they are part of a theme.

Maybe not the theme that the editors had in mind, but a theme that struck me as important and really interesting, or both.

Today is an example.

From the Collect, the adverb "readily."

From the Jonah passage, the phrase "second time."

From the Psalm, the phrase "fleeting breath."

From First Corinthians, the phrase "appointed time."

From Mark's Gospel, the phrase "time is fulfilled."

The combination of these "time" entries suggests that you and I need to get to work. Not just because "putting off things" is a dangerous habit, but because "putting off things" can mean that we are missing out on the joy of those "things." It's the difference between avoiding the bad and inviting the good.

This environment – right here, with all of you - is the latter. We gather to enjoy, to give thanks, to see how we can help one another, including those we do not even know. We don't gather, I trust, to keep the devil at bay. We meet rather to give thanks for the Lord being in our midst and encouraging us to lead lives of joy and service.

We are in the midst of our “appointed time.” And the appointment is not to slam the door on the devil, but to invite the devil in, so that the devil can see what real joy is all about. “Welcome, Mr. Devil. Have a seat please. Let me introduce our family.”

In Jesus, you and I are experiencing what the world needs. Hope, thanksgiving, promise, joy, confidence, beauty, forgiveness. We don’t focus on limitations. We focus on possibilities. And, indeed in Jesus, we focus on Victory. Not just a “full net of fish,” but a “community of believers.”

Yes, in his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul warns us that “The appointed time has grown short.” Well, guess what. We took heed. St. Christopher-by-the-Sea is alive and well. We don’t take continuity for granted. Rather we recognize that we have a responsibility to dig deep and to share generously and to view time as an opportunity rather than as a limitation. We are part of a continuum. We have received a blessing. Now we share the blessing. Our generation has a foot in history and a foot in the future. And, as we know right this minute, we have our time right now. The Present.

As fisher-people, you and I have a choice. We can pull the net in and enjoy a final meal. Or we can pull the net in, renew our energy by sharing the meal, and then re-cast the net. Well, we are in the re-casting business, aren’t we? And we’re pretty darn good at it.

At our Christmas Eve service, there were quite a few little people whom we had baptized this past year. And, for a few moments, some of them were no longer being held by parents. They were romping around, with big smiles.

In the spirit of today’s theme, their time is coming. And, more to the point of today for you and me, our time remains active. Baton passing, after all, requires practice, practice, practice.

And, during practice, we enjoy one another’s company. We are a team. Who knew that practice could be so much fun. Well, we came to know, didn’t we? This is our time, and we’re treating it with loving care. Not only in honor of those who have gone before, and not only in encouragement of those who will come later, but in thanksgiving for what’s going on right now in this generation of

St. Christopher-by-the- Sea.

We are custodians of the Good News. What an honor and what fun. Is God calling us to have fun? I think so. Yes, the Good News is entitled appropriately. Our time is here, and, may I be so bold as to suggest that we are upholding our custodial responsibility pretty well. It's not only re-assuring. It's re-invigorating. Which I think is what our Lord had in mind all along. Others will learn from us. And we, as teachers, will enjoy that process.

As this little gem of a church heads into a new century of proclamation and service, it will be the privilege of others to accept the baton of faith, and run yet another leg. Our job, our privilege, our joy, at this point in time – our time – is to lay the ground work for another century.

The critical moment in a relay race is of course the passing of the baton. The one with the baton doesn't toss it to the next person. He or she places the baton in the next person's back-stretched hand. The reception is complete, at least for one more leg of the journey.

Right now, we are a mix of passers and receivers. And what's even more exciting is that we are both. We don't just pass or don't just receive. The exchange varies, doesn't it? In a sense, we are all learners and we are all teachers. And the roles vary depending on the subject.

What we have in common though, at all times, in all centuries, is the Love of God in Christ Jesus. He is the Subject. That's the Good News that we share with one another in this setting and beyond. This is our time, our turn, to share, to model, to proclaim. The baton is in our hands, not to keep, not to store, not to ignore, but to share in ways that make sense to us and that might well make sense to others.

I'm not sure which is more exciting: the reception of the Good News or the passing of the Good News. The best answer, of course, is not one or the other, but both.

Here's to our time. Our generation. Our century. And, as a reminder, here's a baton. May the pass be with you. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21, 2024

Hymn 119, stanzas 1-3 – As with gladness men of old

As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped to that lowly manger bed;
there to bend the knee before him whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet ever seek the mercy seat.

As they offered gifts more rare at that manger rude and bare;
so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring, Christ! to thee, our heavenly King.

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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.

Page 356 - Song of Praise

*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 Third Sunday of Epiphany

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ, and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous work; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Jonah 3:1-5, 1-10

Psalm 62:6-14

Second Reading – I Corinthians 29-31

Hymn 470 – There's a wideness in God's mercy

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice, which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good;
there is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.

There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven;
there is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.
There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader than the measure of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful we should take him at his word;
and our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

Gospel – Mark 1:14-20

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 368 – Holy Father, great Creator

*Holy Father, great Creator, source of mercy, love, and peace,
look upon the Mediator, clothe us with his righteousness;
heavenly Father, heavenly Father, through the Savior hear and bless.*

*Holy Jesus, Lord of glory, whom angelic hosts proclaim,
while we hear thy wondrous story, meet and worship in thy Name,
dear Redeemer, dear Redeemer, in our hearts thy peace proclaim.*

*Holy Spirit, Sanctifier, come with unction from above,
touch our hearts with sacred fire, meet and worship in thy Name,
Source of comfort, Source of comfort, cheer us with the Savior's love.*

*God the Lord, through every nation let thy wondrous mercies shine.
In the song of thy salvation every tongue and race combine.
Great Jehovah, great Jehovah, form our hearts and make them thine.*

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

Collect: Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The Word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw what they 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.

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

Psalm 62:6-14

For God alone my soul in silence waits;

truly, my hope is in him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation,

my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

In God is my safety and my honor;

God is my strong rock and my refuge.

Put your trust in him always, O People,

pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.

Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath,

even those of low estate cannot be trusted.

On the scales they are lighter than a breath,

all of them together.

Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no empty pride;

though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it.

God has spoken once, twice have I heard it,
that power belongs to God.
Steadfast love is yours, O Lord,
for you repay everyone according to his deeds.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 7:29-31

I mean brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealing in it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

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

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*