

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland. Third Sunday of Lent. March 3, 2024.

Here's a question for you. Can you imagine what life would be like without the 10 Commandments?

It would be a mess, wouldn't it? A free-for-all. We have enough trouble with the Commandments, never mind without them.

And, can you imagine any number of Commandments that someone other than God might establish? That would be a mess too. Commandment-establishers would be competing with one another. The physically strongest might prevail and be the author of record. Or the mentally strongest might prevail and be the author of record.

Either outcome would be devastating. We are challenged living with the Commandments. Imagine the challenge living without them. No thank you!

Yes, we'll take the Commandments that God established and communicated to the Creation through Moses and generations of other God-appointed servants. **(Exodus 20:1-17)** A smart decision on God's part to set boundaries. And a smart decision on our part to respect those boundaries.

Notice that, in setting boundaries, God did not establish a police force. Pretty brave on God's part. Although I suspect that God wonders at times whether this was His best decision. After all, there is a risk in "free will."

But, of course, it was a good decision, maybe the best decision. The alternative is chaos. Everybody for himself or herself. And, because it is the best decision, we ought to respect it and promote it.

And we do, don't we? We try to honor the Commandments, and we try to honor especially the Author of the Commandments. And, in this setting, we honor the Author who becomes one of us in order to make up the ground between expectation on God's part and reality on our part.

It's called Forgiveness. Not just forgiveness from anyone, but capital F Forgiveness from the One in Charge of the Whole Enterprise. God could cast us out, but chooses to invite us to stay. Saint Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, notes that this decision on Gods' part is viewed by some as "foolishness." But not you and me. "To us who are being saved it is the power of God." (**I Corinthians 1:18**)

Is this level of love too much to believe, too much to count on? Are we being naïve, thinking that Almighty God would put up with our disobedience? Certainly God could withhold His Love if He wanted to. He could even make a "whip of cords" and drive us out of the Temple. (**John 2:15**)

But apparently that's not what God wants. Rather, God gives you and me yet another opportunity to accept His Love and express that Love in **our lives**. Our love for God will never be as impressive as God's Love for us. But God doesn't expect perfection. What God expects from us is thanksgiving and fresh starts and better performance.

Today's Psalm includes the phrase "the statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart." (**Psalm 19:8**) "Rejoice the heart." That's how we feel, isn't it. God gives us another chance to do His will. Of yes, we might well squander this new chance, as we have done before. But, God has promised to stick by us. And here we are.

Not with records of perfection. But with hearts of thanksgiving. Forgiveness is beautiful and powerful. And if we accept God's forgiveness, we will make life better not only for ourselves. We'll do so for others. Perfection will still be a ways off. But we'll be on the right track, to everyone's benefit.

And, if and when we wander off track, the Risen Christ will be by our side, helping us right the ship one more time. The hymn we just sang includes the phrase "bid mercy triumph over wrath." And that's exactly what you and believe in this setting. Life is full of darkness. It's the price of freedom. But life is also full of Light. Not little "l" light, but capital "L" Light. Good is stronger than evil. Hope is stronger than fear.

God reigns, and invites us, in and through the life, death and resurrection of a first century carpenter, to join God in caring for the Creation. What a privilege. God must think we are worth saving. And for that confidence in us, we are deeply thankful.

And the way we show our thanks is to run interference for the Lord. We are his representatives in a world in need of help. Buckle up! We have work to do.

Or better yet, we have more work to do. We're starting a second century of service in God's Name. It's not the only service we provide. You all are sharing the Love in what you do every day in all sorts of settings. But it is pretty special, isn't it, to gather regularly to share our disciple experiences in this lovely chapel.

Here's to another century of fellowship and discipleship and stewardship. Three really special "ships." How appropriate for this special water-centered community. I have to think that God is really well pleased with what this worshipping community has contributed and is contributing to the welfare of God's creation.

Our concluding hymn today will be the Naval Hymn (**#608**), which includes this final phrase: "thus ever more shall rise to thee glad hymns of praise from land and sea." There have been a lot of "glad hymns of praise" from this congregation over its first century of service. With more to come.

Nice work, everybody. And, lest we forget Thank you God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
Third Sunday of Lent – March 3, 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!

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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 Third Sunday of Lent

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

Second Reading – I Corinthians 1:18-25

Hymn 325 – Let us kneel together on our knees

Sing now with joy unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously!
The horse, the rider, and the sword he cast into the ranging sea.

God is our strength, he is our song, he saved us from our enemy.
All praise and thanks to him belong who came to set his people free.

He only is the mighty Lord, He only can destroy the foe.
He only is to be adored for he alone can strength bestow.

Gospel – John 2:13-22

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 608 – Eternal Father, strong to save

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep, and calm amid its rage didst sleep:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

O Christ, whose voice the waters heard and hushed their raging at thy word,
who walkedst on the foaming deep, and calm amid its rage didst sleep:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

Most Holy Spirit, who didst brood upon the chaos dark and rude,
and bid its angry tumult cease, and give, for wild confusion, peace:
O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

O Trinity of love and power, thy children shield in danger's hour;
from rock and tempest, fire and foe, protect them whereso e'er they go;
thus evermore shall rise to thee glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Dismissal

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

Lessons for Lent 3 – March 3, 2024

Collect: Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

God spoke all these words to Moses on Mount Sinai: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your live stock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be so long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

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

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God,

and the firmament shows his handiwork.

One day tells its tale to another,

and one night imparts knowledge to another.

Although they have no words or language,

and their voices are not heard,

Their sound has gone out into all lands,

and their message to the ends of the world;

In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun;

it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

It goes forth from the uttermost edges of the heavens and runs about to the end of it again;

nothing is hidden from its burning heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures of ever;

the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,

sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

By them also is your servant enlightened,

and in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can tell how often he offends?

cleanse me from my secret faults.

Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me;

then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,

O lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

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