

Sermon by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 23 2023.

The language of the Church – capital C - is beautiful. This beauty is one of the reasons why you and I are drawn to church in general and more specifically to the Book of Common Prayer and to a number of different versions of the Bible.

But this language is more than beautiful. It speaks to us, individually and collectively. Today's Collect is an example. It looks like a paragraph, but it is in fact a single sentence. But it's not just any old sentence. It's a summary of why you and I are here. We need help! Our opening hymn echoes this plea: "Enter every trembling heart."

This individual and collective need is evident in these words from today's Collect: necessities, ignorance, weakness, blindness.

But there's more to this language than our needs. And the "more" is what God offers as an antidote to our situation. Here you go: "wisdom, compassion, mercy, worthiness."

These are the gifts of the Creator to you and me when we find ourselves in trouble. And by "trouble" I mean simply an awareness, a confession, that some situations are beyond our control. We are very capable creatures, but not all the time. We get ourselves in trouble. We often misuse the freedom God has given us.

Freedom is a wonderful gift, to be sure, but it is a gift that has to be monitored carefully. Why? Because, again, we sometimes misuse the gift. And other times, we are impacted when others misuse the gift of freedom.

Either way – our fault or someone else's fault – **we need help**. And we respond favorably when that help is offered, and especially when that help makes a positive difference in our lives and the lives of others. And, what do we say in response? **Thanks be to God.**

Today's passage from Isaiah (**Isaiah 44:6-8**) underscores God's decision to help us when we find ourselves in trouble, whether the trouble is of our making or the making of other fallible creatures. **"Do not fear or be afraid."**

Could the language be any clearer? Could the strategy be any clearer? Both our dilemma and God's response to our dilemma are **crystal clear**.

Well, maybe not "crystal" clear. "Crystal" suggests "at all times" and "in all ways." And we know that belief in God and faith in God and thanksgiving for God, as a comprehensive approach to life, is not a slam-dunk. We have to work at belief and faith and thanksgiving.

That's why we gather. We offer praise together. We struggle together. We share successes and failures when it comes to religious belief. It is a challenge, which is exactly why we need regular assurance from God and from others on a faith journey.

When we greet one another on Sunday morning, we are at a minimum thanking one another for being on this journey together. But there is more to do than thank one another for sharing a journey. There is mutual advice about how to make that journey as fruitful as possible. And there are mutual experiences between church services that either put what we do on Sunday in context or provide a context for what we do every other day.

And these exchanges don't happen necessarily on Sunday morning between 10:00 and 11:00. They can happen anytime, anywhere. They can be planned or unplanned. As structured as Prayer Book worship can be, often Surprise is the greatest teacher.

But don't shortchange Bible and Prayer Book worship. Such worship is intended as a catalyst, not a finished product. We can recite or hear or read a line weekly over the course of years, and still be surprised on some Sundays or any other day. Surprise is a huge technique of God, and can be difference-maker in our lives, and, through us, in the lives of others.

In his Epistle to the Romans (Romans 8:12-25), St. Paul uses the phrase "spirit of adoption." People adopt out of love, out of need, out of thanksgiving, out of all

sorts and conditions. But at the heart of adoption is a conviction, a belief, in a positive outcome for self and others. You can adopt a child. You can adopt a set of principles. You can adopt a cause. And, as Paul did, you can adopt with a powerful sense of hope.

Which just happens to be the subject of today's gospel (**Matthew 13:24-43**). Now, this gospel passage is heavy. "Sunshine" or "furnace of fire." But it does contain an important ingredient. Namely that we have a choice. We are free people. We can live in fear and anger. Or we can live in hope and thanksgiving. We're here, professing for one another the option of **hope and thanksgiving**.

We are aware of course of the other option. We know it well. We contend with its appeal daily. But we don't stop there. We know better. Giving into fear and anger is not what God wants. And it's not what we, in our best moments, want.

A short summary: good for God and good for us. And here's to the Church, which for all its human flaws, reminds us of God's blessings and God's expectation that, in thanksgiving for these blessings, we care for one another.

"Furnace of fire" or "Sunshine"? Not even close. Here's to sunshine! And, lest we forget, here's to the One whom God the Father sent to remind us of Good News, our Lord Jesus Christ, Mr. Sunshine Himself. *Amen.*

Morning Prayer – Pentecost 8 – July 23, 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 they 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 86:11-17

First Reading – Isaiah 44:6-8

Second Reading – Romans 8:12-25

Hymn 552 – Fight the good fight

Fight the good fight with all thy might,
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes and seek his face;
life with its sway before us lies,
Christ is the path and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside, lean on thy Guide;
his boundless mercy will provide;
trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove
Christ is the life and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arms are near;
he changeth not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.

Gospel – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

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 8

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP Prayer for Protection – page 832

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers, and dispose the way of thy servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among all the changes and chance of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by thy gracious and ready help; through 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 may 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 371 – Let there be light!

Thou, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard, and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray, and, where the Gospel day sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring on thy redeeming wing healing and light,
heal to the sick in mind, sight to the inly blind, now to all human-kind,
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love, life-giving holy Dove, speed forth thy flight!
Move on the waters' face bearing the gifts of grace, and, in earth's darkest place,
let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three, glorious Trinity, wisdom, love, might;
boundless as ocean's tide, rolling in fullest pride, through the world far and wide,
let there be light!

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 8th Sunday after Pentecost – July 23, 2023

Collect: Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 44:6-8

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

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

Psalm 86:11-17

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth;
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.

I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and glorify your Name for evermore.

For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.

The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent men seeks my life;
they have not set you before their eyes.

But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

Turn to me and have mercy upon me;
give your strength to your servant; and save the child of your handmaid.

Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed;
because you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Second Reading: Romans 8:12-25

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Another parable Jesus put before the crowds: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seeds are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of this kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

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