

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Pentecost 25, November 19, 2023.**

All of us, I suspect, have annual visits with certain professionals. Maybe more than annual if circumstances suggest. For example, we try to see our physician at least annually. We try to see our accountant at least annually. We try to see our auto mechanic at least annually. If all is going well, maybe we stretch the interval. If all is not going well, we shrink the interval. An annual check-up becomes a quarterly check-up, maybe even a monthly check-up or weekly check-up. Or no check-up at all.

You get the point. We meet with professionals to see how we're doing. And we count on these professionals to give us sound advice, honest advice, sometimes tough to swallow advice.

The professional in our setting here, whose advice we seek on a weekly basis – we hope – is Jesus. Today's Gospel (**Matthew 25:14-30**) begins "Jesus said." We come for counsel, and sure enough, in the Gospel passage, counsel is forthcoming.

There are three clients in this passage. Each with a different starting point. One client followed the physician's directives and prospered. A second client followed the physician's directives some of the time and did so-so. The third client paid little attention to the physician's directives. Indeed he buried the physician's directives in a hole in the backyard. This client did not fare well at all.

The physician's response varied from very good to pretty good to "find yourself a new doctor." The exact words were "you wicked and lazy patient." With a prediction about outcome: "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Now, I admit that we are stretching things a bit, but not every thing. What's at the heart of this parable, and what is common to all three patients, is that the physician – God, if you will - can do only so much. The patient's role is critical. We can make a difference. We are the beneficiaries of God's Love, with an expectation to share the Love. If we horde the love – bury it in the back yard – we not only miss the point, we miss the benefit of knowing that we are doing what

our Lord wants to do, expects us to do, and even dies on cross to drive home the expectation.

And, again, what is the expectation? What kind of behavior does God have in mind? What level of sacrifice is God setting for us? We want to do the Lord's work, but sometimes we're not sure what that work is and whether, even with the Lord at our side, we can do that work.

Sound familiar? Backing off the high bar and settling for something lower? Doing just enough to give the Lord a sense that we might be on board for more responsibility?

Yes, that's where we are much of the time. Good intentions, a decent but not great level of response, and anxiety about the shortfall.

What we often forget though is that there is a counter to the "shortfall." A response that God himself provides. We are imperfect creatures. God knows that. He created us that way. But He is determined to help us use our gifts and talents in a positive way. And when we stray from the appointed path, He, the Lord, is going to work really hard to return us to the right track.

And, in this place, we know that. We know that God is on our side. We know that we are not alone. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are "children of light." (**I Thessalonians 5:5**) The experiences of others and of ourselves is powerful testimony to the loyalty of God. So, what is it that we are worried about? Why the anxiety? God is not going to change His mind. Maybe we're worried that we will change our mind.

Ah ha! That's it, isn't it. It's not that we don't trust God. It's that perhaps we don't trust ourselves. And self-mistrust is a tough nut to crack. We can be our own worst enemy. We know that this is true in many situations. Been there, done that. But we also know that this self-mistrust is not what God has in mind for us, or in store for us. Wrestle with it, yes, but don't let it – self-mistrust- carry the day.

There's a better outcome. And his name is Jesus. And his treatment method is called Forgiveness, including forgiveness of self. Forgiveness with a capital F comes in many forms. There is the forgiveness of God. There is the forgiveness

of our enemies. And, yes, there is forgiveness of ourselves. What they have in common is a fresh start. Otherwise known as the Empty Tomb. Not as in Egypt, but as on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

And it's not "empty" as in nothing. Rather it is full of fresh starts. This too has a name. It's called Resurrection. It's Easter. It's "stop feeling sorry for oneself. There's too much to do to get bogged down in self-pity.

"Create in me, a clean heart, Oh God." In Jesus, God has done just that. And boy does it pack a punch. The World can pack a punch also. That's for sure. And sometimes we punch ourselves. But, in our best moments, we don't stay down. And we probably don't recognize Who it was who helped us up. Something to think about. Someone to think about.

In today's passage from Thessalonians (**I Thessalonians 5:1-11**), St. Paul writes: "For God has destined us not for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him."

Sometimes the Risen Christ whispers to us. Other times he screams at us. He probably would prefer the whisper. And so would we. But sometimes we need a jolt.

And life is full of jolts. Today's lessons are jolt-filled. From **Psalms 90:5**: "You sweep us away like a dream." And the jolts are not all from the Risen Christ. But, again, some are. And that's for the best. So, even when we're angry with the Lord, we need to stay the course. There are good things on the other side of struggle. Again, from today's Psalm: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." (**Psalms 90:12**) Crucifixion was put in its secondary place by Resurrection. God's Love prevailed and continues to do so.

Our final hymn (#526) today speaks of "the narrow stream of death." But the hymn also describes the essential role of Jesus: "bring us safe to heaven." "Jolts" are real and tough. But the Lord is tougher, and bids us to follow, in this life and the next. And, here we are, in Jesus' Name, doing just that. And it feels mighty good. The good hands of the Lord.

Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**  
**Pentecost 25 – November 19, 2023**

**Hymn 423 – Immortal, invisible, God only wise**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;  
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,  
then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;  
all laud we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

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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 Pentecost 25**

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:  
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we  
may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you  
have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading – Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18**

### **Psalm 90:1-12**

### **Second Reading – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**

### **Hymn 615, stanzas 1-3 – Thy kingdom come on bended knee**

“Thy kingdom come!” on bended knee the passing ages pray;  
and faithful souls have yearned to see on earth that kingdom’s day.

But the slow watches of the night not less to God belong;  
and for the ever lasting right the silent stars are strong.

And lo, already on the hills the flags of dawn appear;  
gird up your loins, ye prophet souls, proclaim the day is near:

### **Gospel – Matthew 25:14-30**

**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 pge 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 526 – Let saints on earth in concert sing, stanzas 1-3**

Let saints on earth in concert sing with those whose work is done;  
for all the servants of our King in heaven and earth are one.

One family we dwell in him, one Church, above, beneath,  
though now divided by the stream, the narrow stream of death.

One army of the living God, to his command we bow;  
part of the host have crossed the flood, and part are crossing now.

## **Dismissal**

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