

Epiphany 5 – February 5, 2023

One of the characteristics of the Christian Faith that appeals to me, and I suspect to you, is the assurance that every time we take a wrong turn there is an option to take a right turn.

Would we be interested in a faith that is one and done? Or, would we prefer a faith that offers a do-over? By our presence today, the answer is a faith that offers a do-over. In other words, we know that we need second chances, and often third and fourth and fifth chances.

It's who we are. We want to follow the Lord where the Lord leads us. But sometimes we wander off course. And, when we do, sometimes we get lost. It's not easy to get back on track by oneself. We need help. And, thanks to a forgiving God, we get that Divine help, chiefly in the Lord Jesus.

Many years before Jesus appeared, the prophet Isaiah described the forgiveness that the Savior will offer. "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, 'Here I am.'" (**Isaiah 58:9**) In other words, "Let's work together to get back on track where you belong."

Jesus is like a help-line that God provides. And this help-line is like no other. We are never put on hold. Right now, I could invite us to pray individually to the Lord. And the Lord would hear our individual prayers. This shouldn't surprise us. If you can create the Universe out of nothing, you can hear a bunch of prayers.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 2:8**), St. Paul reminds us that "No one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God." It's another way of saying that forgiveness, recovery, and a new start is not something that you and I can do by ourselves. We need help.

Even those who do not believe in a God, much less the Son of God, acknowledge that self-help has its limits. At a minimum, we need the company of others in the same boat. At a maximum, we not only have the company of others in the same boat, we have the Son of God working on our of the whole boat, including you and me.

But, what if we don't accept Jesus as the one who takes up the slack between where we want to be and where we sometimes end up? If not Jesus, who or what?

Well, we don't lack for candidates. If Jesus is not for us, there are other possibilities. Wannabe saviors, if you will. And you and I spend some of our adult life exploring these options. But, if I read us, who are here, correctly, we haven't found a better alternative.

And perhaps the reason for that is that there is not a better alternative. Maybe you and I need to work on our acceptance skills rather than our evaluative skills. It is God's call, after all, not ours. If God wants us to enter our lives in a miraculous way, God will do so. And if God wants to model sacrificial love by dying on a cross, God will do so. And if God wants to rise from the dead to new life to demonstrate God's commitment to life rather than death, God will do so.

For me, and I suspect for you, the most persuasive evidence that Jesus is indeed God Incarnate is the staying power of the Christmas Story. It is alive and well. It continues to inspire and confirm. It highlights the best of humanity without denying that there is a worst of humanity. Think the Cross. But don't stay there. Think the Empty Tomb as well.

Today's passage from Matthew (**Matthew 5:13**) reminds us that we are the salt of the earth, a light to all in the house. We have been so designated for these crucial assignments by the Lord himself.

God could have left us to our own devices, which would have been a recipe for disaster. But God chose instead to equip us with a model, a fellow human, who shows a better way. It is not an easy way, but it is a better way. It is not a way without pain, but there is no way more healthy and happy.

Today's Psalm (**Psalms 112:7**) echoes this claim. "They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; their heart is right; they put their trust in the Lord."

We have to contend with “evil rumors,” don’t we? It almost seems easier to get down and stay down than to climb back to where we want to be and where God wants us to be.

But – and this is central to our Faith – as we try to climb up, God reaches down and offers, not just assistance, but assurance, that recovery, rescue, renewal is available. Not just possible in theory, but present in fact. This assured presence is what we know as the Holy Spirit, that ever-present saving dimension of the Creator.

But also central to our Faith is an active response on our part. A “Thank you, Lord.” Yes, Jesus died for us. But he also rose for us. He picked us up, and gave us, gives us, a fresh start. We don’t earn that fresh start. That bar we can’t clear by ourselves. We need a lift. And we have that lift in the Lord Jesus.

Yes, life is full of wrong turn options. But, thanks to a forgiving and loving God, life is also full of right turn options, including a first century carpenter named Jesus. A fresh start is always available. It’s called Good News. And we have the privilege and joy of not only proclaiming that Good News, but living it.

Many vehicles now come with verbal driving directions. And if we are about to miss our appointed turn, the voice will say with urgency “Turn right, turn right, turn right!” And often our frustrated response is “Okay, okay, okay, I’ll do it.”

And that response – “I’ll do it” - stated more joyfully, of course, is exactly what the Lord wants to hear from you and me.

Amen.

Service of Holy Communion
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 5, 2023

Hymn 375 – Give praise and glory unto God

Give praise and glory unto God, the Father of all blessing;
his mighty wonders tell abroad, his graciousness confessing.
With balm my inmost heart he fills, his comfort all my anguish stills.
To God be praise and glory.

The host of heaven praiseth thee, O Lord of all dominions;
and mortals then, on land and sea, beneath thy shadowing pinions,
exult in thy creative might that doeth all things well and right.
To God be praise and glory.

What God hath wrought to show his power he evermore sustaineth;
he watches o'er us every hour, his mercy never waneth.
Through all his kingdom's wide domain, his righteousness and justice reign.
To God be praise and glory.

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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 Epiphany 5

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 112:1-10

Second Reading – I Corinthians 2:1-16

Hymn 586 – Jesus, thou divine companion

Jesus, thou divine Companion, by thy lowly human birth
thou hast come to join the workers, burden bearers of the earth.
Thou, the carpenter of Nazareth, toiling for thy daily food,
by thy patience and thy courage, thou hast taught us toil is good.

Where the many toil together, there art thou among thine own;
where the solitary labor, thou art there with them alone;
Thou, the peace that passeth knowledge, dwellest in the daily strife;
thou, the Bread of heaven, art broken in the sacrament of life.

Every task, however simple, sets the soul that does it free;
every deed of human kindness done in love is done to thee.
Jesus, thou divine Companion, help us all to work our best;
bless us in our daily labor, lead us to our Sabbath rest.

Gospel – Matthew 5:13-20

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to ...*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 555 – Lead on, O King eternal

Father eternal, ruler of Creation,
spirit of life, which moved ere form was made,
through the thick darkness covering every nation,
light to our blindness, O be though our aid:
thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

Races and peoples, lo, we stand divided,
and, sharing not our griefs, no joy can share;
by wars and tumults love is mocked, derided;
his saving cross no nation yet will bear;
thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

Envious of heart, blind-eyed, with tongues confounded,
nation by nation still goes unforgiven,
in wrath and fear, by jealousies surrounded,
building proud towers which shall not reach to heaven;
thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 5th Sunday after Epiphany – February 5, 2023

Collect: Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up; your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thong of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into our house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

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

Psalm 112:1-9

Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the Lord
and have great delight in his commandments!
Their descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.
Wealth and riches will be in their house
and their righteousness will last for ever.
Light shines in the darkness for the upright;
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.
It is good for them to be generous in lending
and to manage their affairs with justice.
For they will never be shaken;
the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.
They will not be afraid of any evil rumors;
Their heart is right; they put their trust in the Lord.
Their heart is established and will not shrink,
Until they see their desire upon their enemies.
They have given freely to the poor,
*and their righteousness stands fast for ever; they will hold up their head
with honor.*
The wicked will see it and be angry; they will gnash their teeth and pine away;
the desire of the wicked will perish.

Epistle – Epiphany 5 – I Corinthians 2:1-16

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" – these

things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

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

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let our light shine before others, so that they may see you good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

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