

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Last Sunday of Epiphany, February 11 2024.**

Today is the last Sunday in the Season of Epiphany. Its purpose is to underscore the importance of sharing the Light of the World. That would be Jesus.

By our presence in this setting, we profess two things. First, we believe that Jesus is the Light of the World. And second, we have the responsibility to share this Light.

The word “Epiphany” means “Insight.” The “ah-ha moment.” The moment when things come into focus, and we understand what our next step should be.

There are lots of those moments, aren’t there? And we have been on both sides of those moments. Confusion and then Understanding. Often this process takes a long time. Indeed there are some things we still don’t get. Other times, though, this process is sudden. “I get it!” Or, at least, “I think I get it.”

Now, having gotten it, or gotten closer to it, what is our next step? Well, we share our experience, our understanding, especially if we believe that what we’re sharing, or with whom we are sharing, can make a difference for someone else.

Which takes us to our Old Testament lesson (**2 Kings 2:1-12**): the relationship of Elijah and Elisha. Teacher and Student. If we were to ask Elijah, who was one of your best students? Elijah would probably identify Elisha. And if we were to ask Elisha, who was one of your best teachers, Elisha would probably identify Elijah. An academic relationship made in heaven, we might say.

That’s the relationship featured in today’s lesson. That relationship is underscored by Elisha’s promise never to leave Elijah. “I will not leave you” repeated several times. But, as happens in these relationships, Elijah must leave.

But not without a gift for his outstanding student. A cloak, with impressive power. “When Elisha took the cloak and struck water, the water divided to the right and to the left, and he, Elisha, crossed over.”

A miracle? For you and me, yes. For God, business as usual. Well, maybe not “as usual,” but well within God’s power.

Now, I suspect that most of us have not had this kind of experience, this intensity of Light. What Mark's gospel describes the Light as "dazzling." **(Mark 9:3)** Today's Psalm uses the phrase "consuming fire." **(Psalm 50:3)**

Our faith in God and in His Son Jesus is probably less dramatic. It's not a moment in time. It's a process over many years. And, if you have had a more dramatic experience, you probably don't share it very often. You don't want to brag. And you probably feel that others might not believe you, even if you do share a dramatic experience. The result is that you share your faith in more modest ways. Can you say St. Christopher-by-the-Sea?

Yes, this worshipping community is comfortable. There's a range of backgrounds and experiences that is broad enough to encompass all. Some might say "too comfortable." Do we lack an "edge" in sharing our faith? I don't think so. Indeed, if we have an "edge," it is a positive one. Inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. God's love in broad strokes rather than narrow ones. A spirit of "welcome." Comfortable, but not lax.

Indeed the blend of experiences and approaches and convictions is what appeals to us. Remember Peter from today's Gospel reading. "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." **(Mark 9:5)** Different dwellings, different customs, different looks, but under the same roof.

Yes, it is good to be here. We contribute our experiences and we honor the experiences of others. Peter didn't say "let us make one dwelling." He said let us make three dwellings. Another way of saying, let us honor each other's experiences and perspectives. We can learn from one another. Don't shut anybody out. Indeed, it is the contributions of lots of people with different backgrounds that enhance the experience.

Remember the conclusion of our first lesson today **(2 Kings 2:12)**. "But when Elisha could no longer see Elijah (because of Elijah's death), Elisha tore his (Elisha's) clothes in two pieces." Tearing garments was an act of respect for the departed. An acknowledgement, if you will, that there had been a special teacher-student relationship that would continue. Today's Corinthians passage uses the phrase "Let light shine out of darkness." **(2 Corinthians 4:6)**

My guess is that our favorite teachers were those/are those who address darkness in comforting ways.

Yes, we're not speaking just of teachers we had when we were going to school. No, we have teachers right now outside of school, who impact our lives in positive ways. And, what is more to the point, you and I are teachers for others. What we value, what we hold dear, counts. People learn from us. It's a little scary, but it's true.

Life is one big classroom. And there are also sorts of possibilities in terms of how we instruct, knowingly and unknowingly, and how we learn, knowingly and unknowingly. Our goal as teachers is to be lights that shine in darkness, and our goal as students is to appreciate the light and return the light.

And one of our best lessons, if not the best, is an introduction to Jesus. Not in a formal way, but by how we live, how we engage the world, how we treat people. We want people to wonder where we get our hope, our faith, our commitment.

From lots of sources, of course. But also from the Lord, with the understanding that we will share that Source – capital S Source - by how we live and what we hold dear.

Here's a little exercise for us. Thinking of our faith in school terms, at what stage are we? Pre-school, kindergarten, elementary, junior high, high school, college, grad school. Or are we constantly moving between stages? And are we always a student, or are we sometimes a teacher? And, whether a student or teacher, what are people learning from us about our faith?

The big question is "Are we lights that shine in darkness?" If this community is any indication, I would say "Absolutely." Our final hymn today is "Love divine, all loves excelling." It has a wonderful phrase: "Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart." Trembling. That's what happens in this place and many other settings, public and private. And it is the "trembling" in our hearts that we then share gladly with others in all sorts of ways. We help spread the Light of Christ. What a privilege and what a joy.

Amen.



## **Morning Prayer – Last Epiphany – February 11, 2024**

### **Hymn 388, 3 stanzas – O worship the King**

O worship the King, all glorious above;  
O gratefully sing his power and his love!  
Our shield and defender the Ancient of Days,  
pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

O tell of his might! O sing of his grace!  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,  
Almighty, thy power hath founded of old,  
hath stablished it fast by a changeless decree,  
and round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

### **BCP - Page 76 – Epiphany Greeting**

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of  
the earth.

### **BCP – Pages 79 – Invitation to Confession**

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our  
heavenly Father, to set forth his 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.

## **CP – Pages 79-80 – Confession and Absolution**

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 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.*

## **BCP – Page 80 - 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 – Page 44 – 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.

### **First Reading – 2 Kings 2:1-2**

#### **Psalm 50:1-6**

The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken;  
*He has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.*  
Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,  
*God reveals himself in glory.*  
Our God will come and will not keep silence;  
*before him there is a consuming flame, and round about him a raging storm.*  
He calls the heavens and the earth from above  
*to witness the judgment of his people.*  
“Gather before me my loyal followers  
*those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with sacrifice.”*  
Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause;  
*for God himself is judge.*

### **Second Reading – 2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

#### **Hymn 661 – They cast their nets in Galilee**

*They cast their nets in Galilee just off the hills of brown;  
such happy, simple fisherfolk, before the Lord came down.*

*Contend, peaceful fishermen, before they ever knew  
the peace of God that filled their hearts brimful, and broke them too.*

*Young John who trimmed the flapping sail, homeless in Patmos died.  
Peter, who hauled the teeming net, head down was crucified.*

*The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod.  
Yet let us pray for but one thing – the marvelous peace of God.*

## **Gospel – Mark 1:21-28**

### **Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins**

#### **BCP – page 96 - The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### **BCP – page 97 – 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 97-98 – Suffrages A**

Show us your mercy, O Lord;

*And grant us your salvation.*

Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

*Let you people sing with joy.*

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

*For only in you can we live in safety.*

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

*And guide us in the way of justice and truth.*

Let your way be known upon earth;

*Your 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 your Holy Spirit.*

## **Collect for Last Sunday of Epiphany**

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **BCP – page 828 - Prayer for Families**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families: We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh. Turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we may evermore be kindly affectioned one to another; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

## **BCP – page 101 - The General Thanksgiving**

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants  
give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness  
to us and to all whom you have made.*

*We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your immeasurable 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, pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly  
thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips,  
but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking  
before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ  
our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory  
throughout all ages. 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 my 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 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 it 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.*

## **Dismissal**

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



## Lessons for Last Sunday after the Epiphany – February 11, 2024

**Collect:** O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12**

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The Chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

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

## **Psalm 50:1-6**

The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken;

*he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.*

Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,

*God reveals himself in glory.*

Our God will come and will not keep silence;

*Before him there is a consuming flame, and round about him raging storm.*

He calls the heavens and the earth from above

*to witness the judgment of his people.*

“Gather before me my loyal followers,

*those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with sacrifice.”*

Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause;

*for God himself is judge.*

## **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

If our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

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

**Gospel: Mark 9:2-9**

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud over shadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

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