

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher by the Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2023.**

From this morning's passage from **Isaiah**: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to bring good news to the oppressed."

Have you ever felt this way? I suspect so. You're here. We're here. Something is going on. Something is, maybe not driving us, but nudging us. And that Something just might be Someone. And that Someone just might be the Lord. God, not only speaking to us, but commissioning us. Officer Candidate School, if you will.

A nudge. A slight push. Maybe a slight pull. And maybe not so slight. Maybe with a little force behind it. Just enough, not only to get our attention, but to turn us in a particular direction. "Garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit."

For John the Baptist, the slight push involved being a **witness to the light**. Not "light" in general, but the Light of Christ. Very specific. "Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

"Witness" is an interesting word. Both a noun – a witness - and a verb – to witness. We have a collection of these going, don't we? And they're not just interesting, they're compelling. "Tell me more, Isaiah." And so he does. "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations."

And guess who that "springing up righteousness and praise" might be. That's right. And here we are. Workers in God's field. Spokespeople. Representatives. Witnesses.

It's nice to be wanted, isn't it? It's an honor to represent the Lord. And it's an honor to be part of a team, a congregation, a family of witnesses to the Love of the Lord and the joy of one another's company. Church at its best. Life at its best. Freedom at its best.

Yes, Jesus does more than get our attention. He gives us work to do. And it's not easy work to do. He expects us to share his love and forgiveness, even with those who don't want to hear about such love and forgiveness. But, guess what. We don't mind this kind of hard work. Why would we want a supervisor other than the Risen Christ? It's a privilege to work, study, and share on His behalf. The Son of God, for goodness sake. From today's **Psalm**: "Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed – the Good News – will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves."

In today's lesson from First Thessalonians (**I Thessalonians 4:23**), Paul reminds us what is in store for us if we simply accept the invitation to proclaim the Lord's love and forgiveness. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely." Sanctify, not just a little bit, but "entirely."

In today's insert, there are two **canticles** as options to the Psalm. Canticles are like hymns, with content often coming from scripture. They are upbeat, as in "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." In a way, canticles are dessert for the Lord's Supper.

People can be canticles. We can be dessert for others. We can emphasize hope in the face of sadness, beauty in the face of darkness, thanksgiving in the face of "what's the big deal." A canticle is the cherry on top. Just like "as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever."

Yes, the Risen Christ is a big deal. Not just past. Not just future. But present. Well worth our time and effort and sharing. That's our Story. A story delivered by a man from God whose name was John. "He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

This is what we do right here in this place on behalf of ourselves and all those out there. By our presence, by our helpfulness, by our hopefulness, by our trust in God's mercy, we proclaim God's Love. That proclamation is our gift to others. We receive this Good News from others, and now it's our turn to proclaim, to witness, to pass on, to model, to testify.

“Raise your right hand and tell the truth.” That’s what we try to do right here, first with one another, and then with others.

It’s a privilege, isn’t it, to be called on to testify. And it’s a really special gift that we can do so in a whole bunch of ways. Whatever gifts that we have as individuals can be employed in proclaiming God’s love in Christ. We are not asked to fit in a mold. We are asked rather to be the mold. We are visible. We are audible. We are witnesses.

It’s a privilege, isn’t it, to be asked by the Lord to testify, by how we live, how we speak, how we share, how we hope, how we bounce back, how we do pretty much everything. Lest we forget, people are watching and listening. In saying yes to Jesus, we are sharing the greatest Christmas gift ever. It’s an honor to testify. “Thank you, Lord, for trusting us.”

Our final hymn today is “Go tell it on the mountain.” One of the phrases in this hymn is “the angel chorus that hailed our Savior’s birth.” Well, guess who is the “angel chorus” on Gibson Island and everywhere else that you and I wander.

Stay tuned. It’ll be chorus time real soon. *Amen.*

**Service of Holy Communion**  
**Advent 3 – December 17, 2023**

**Hymn 56, stanzas 1-3 – O come, O come, Emmanuel**

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;  
awake and hearken, for he brings glad tiding of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin; make straight way for God within,  
and let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou art our salvation, Lord, our refuge, and our great reward;  
without thy grace we waste away like flowers that wither and decay.

**Page 355**

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.

**Page 356 - Song of Praise**

*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 Advent**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading – Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

### **Psalm 126**

### **Second Reading – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

### **Hymn 325 – Let us break bread together**

Let us break bread together on our knees;  
let us break bread together on our knees;  
when I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees;  
let us drink wine together on our knees;  
when I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun,  
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees;  
let us praise God together on our knees;  
when I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun.  
O Lord, have mercy on me.

### **Gospel – John 1:6-8, 19-28**

### **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 99 – Go tell it on the mountain**

*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;  
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!*

While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flock by night,  
behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.

*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;  
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!*

The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.

*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;  
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!*

Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,  
and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;  
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!*

### **Dismissal**

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

## Advent 3 Lessons – December 17, 2023

**Collect:** Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the people; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth is shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

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

## Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
*then were we like those who dream.*

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
*and our tongues with shouts of joy.*

Then they said among the nations,  
*“The Lord has done great things for them.”*

The Lord has done great things for us,  
*and we are glad indeed.*

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
*like the watercourses of the Negev.*

Those who sow with tears,  
*will reap with songs of joy.*

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed,  
*will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.*

## Second Reading: I Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and souls and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

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

## **Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."

"Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

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