

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 24th Sunday after Pentecost, November 12, 2023.

Some thoughts today about pronouns.

What do you notice about today's Collect? God is "he" and "him." And what do you notice about today's first reading? Wisdom is "she" and "her."

Is there a message here? Perhaps. God wondered how He could accomplish the things He wanted to accomplish. The solution He came up with was to ask a woman.

Too simple? Too complex? Too silly? Or, perhaps worth our time? Let's go with the latter. Worth our time.

Some things are easy to describe, and other things are difficult to describe. God is one of the really difficult things to describe.

By definition, God is "All." Not one or the other. Rather "everything that was, is, and will be." Comprehensive, inclusive, all-embracing, total. It makes sense. It is an umbrella under which everything can reside.

Imagine anything else being better for you and me than the notion of an all powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, all-forgiving, all-everything creator. Someone in charge. Someone to create. Someone to redeem. Someone to challenge. Someone to forgive. Someone to heal.

And someone to share responsibility. You and I worship a God who could hoard responsibility, but who chooses to share it. Someone who identifies an element of Creation and then charges that element – that would be you and I – to take care of the Creation, as best we can.

It's a little scary having that kind of responsibility, but it's also reassuring that we are trusted enough to accept responsibility and exercise it. God has made us partners, with God's Son as our supervisor and co-worker.

Yes, we might be mere specs in the scheme of things, but the Creator doesn't regard us as "mere." We are front and center. We have responsibility. We are worth being saved. Even from death.

This is the message of St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. "For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

Yes, you and I are on God's radar. That's a blessing in itself. But we are more than a blip. We have responsibility. We have things to take care of. Not just of ourselves, but of the whole Creation. And part of taking care of things, of accepting and executing responsibility, is to keep ourselves in shape.

Keep awake," Jesus said, "for you know neither the day nor the hour" when you will be needed. "Make sure you have sufficient oil for your lamps." Preparation. "Stay ready. You are not bench-warmers. You are first stringers. You are my choice" says the Lord.

Note that the preposition here is not "he" or "she." The preposition God wants us to remember and take to heart is "you." You are God's soldiers in a ready-state. Ready and willing and grateful that you, God, would even consider us as partners in a great enterprise.

But, this is God's choice. Maybe the toughest part of religious faith is accepting God's choice in helpers. Little old us. Simply accepting God's reality is a big enough challenge. But accepting that you and I have a critical role as God's assistants is perhaps tougher.

Yet here we are, with a sense that God knows us individually. God's favorite preposition is "You." Our immediate response is "Who?" And, when God designates us again as soldiers in his Army, we are likely to say again "Who?" Indeed, God has to do a lot of repeating when it comes to convincing us that we are not only loved, but wanted and, more important, needed.

God could do everything Himself, Herself – pick your pronoun – but that apparently is not what God has in mind. "I want You!" is God's poster.

In our poster closet, we have one that asks, "You want whom?" God says, over and over, "It is you whom I want."

And here we are. For a whole bunch of reasons, you and I have said "Here I am – I think. Send me – I think." Our presence today is a mixture of caution and maybe fear. But also desire. "Thank you, Lord, I think I'm ready."

And, maybe we are ready. God has equipped us with lots of helping tools. Ability is not in doubt. And even desire is not in doubt. We want to help. But there is some fear, isn't there? "What if I can't do what the Lord wants me to do? What if I give it my best shot, and I miss?"

Short answer: The Lord will understand. And the Lord will be grateful that we have agreed to share responsibility for the welfare of the planet and its people.

Isn't it something that the Lord will understand and accept us as we are? That's a gift in itself. But it's not a gift to take for granted. We need continually to say "Thank you, God. Thank you for entrusting to us the welfare of your Creation. We promise to do our best, knowing that we will falter at times, and grateful that our faltering is more than compensated by your Forgiveness."

So, let us remember to get our posters straight. There is God's poster: "I want you." And there are two possible posters for you and me. One is "You want whom?" The other is "Here I am, send me."

The choice is not even close, is it? *Amen.*

Morning Prayer – Pentecost 24 – November 12, 2023

Hymn 616, stanzas 1-3

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong,
to help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth,
and love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth:
before him on the mountains shall peace, the herald, go;
and righteousness in fountains from hill to valley flow.

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 70

First Reading – Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

Second Reading – 2 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Hymn 279 – For thy dear saints

For thy dear saints, O Lord, who strove in thee to live,
who followed thee, obeyed, adored, our grateful hymn receive.

They all in life and death, with thee their Lord in view,
learned from thy Holy Spirit's breath to suffer and to do.

Thine earthly members fit to join thy saints above,
in one communion ever knit, one fellowship of love.

Jesus, thy Name we bless, and humbly pray that we
may follow them in holiness, who live and died for thee.

Gospel – Matthew 25:1-13

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 24

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP Prayer for Sunday – page 835

O God our King, by the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, you conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life: Redeem all our days by this victory; forgive our sins, banish our fears, make us bold to praise you and to do your will; and steel us to wait for the consummation of your kingdom on the last great Day; through the same 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 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 540 – Awake, thou Spirit of the watchmen

Awake, thou Spirit of the watchmen
who never held their peace by day or night,
contending from the walls of Zion
against the foe, confiding in thy might.
Throughout the world their cry is ringing still,
and bringing peoples to thy holy will.

O Lord, now let thy fire enkindle
our hearts, that every where its flame may go,
and spread the glory of redemption
till all the world thy saving grace shall know.
O harvest Lord, look down on us and view
how white the field; the laborers, how few!

Send forth, O Lord, thy strong Evangel
by many messengers, all hearts to win;
make haste to help us in our weakness
break down the realm of Satan, death, and sin;
the circle of the earth shall then proclaim thy kingdom, and the glory of thy Name.

Dismissal

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

Lessons for 24 Pentecost – November 12, 2023

Collect: O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her; and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate. To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

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

Psalm 70

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me;

O Lord, make haste to help me.

Let those who seek my life be ashamed and altogether dismayed;

Let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced.

Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat over me turn back,

because they are ashamed.

Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;

let those who love your salvation say for ever, "Great is the Lord!"

But as for me, I am poor and needy;

come to me speedily, O God.

You are my helper and my deliverer;

O Lord, do not tarry.

Second Reading: I Thessalonians 4:13-18

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the cloud together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

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

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

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