

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins on 6th Sunday after Pentecost, July 9, 2023, at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland.

It is our practice here to include an insert in the Sunday program. The insert contains a prayer, psalm, and three lessons. The insert saves us all from bringing our own bibles and looking up the appointed lessons.

It is my practice to refer to these lessons in the sermon. As sometimes happens, one sees something new in a routine. This happened to me as I reviewed today's insert. What do you notice in the insert about today's first (**Zechariah 9:9-12**), second (**Romans 7:15-25a**), and gospel readings (**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**)?

The first words are capitalized. **"REJOICE GREATLY."** **"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND."** And **"JESUS SAID."**

The one lesson without a capitalized introduction is the Psalm. We'll come back to the Psalm shortly. But first, what's with the capitalization?

Now, I'm not sure if this works for every insert, but it works for this one. The three introductions tell a story with which you and I are familiar. We do REJOICE in God's love in Christ. But we don't always UNDERSTAND how God works. But, thanks to God, we have help. His name is JESUS.

REJOICE. Absolutely. But we don't always **UNDERSTAND.** Not to worry, though, God will help us. Enter **JESUS.**

Isn't this why you and I are here? We are constantly trying to figure out what life is all about, including the start of life and the end of life and everything in between and whatever is beyond. We are curious creatures. And we are particularly curious about how we fit into this whole business. "Why me?" And, in this setting, what you and I add is "Why me, **Lord?**"

We recognize, we acknowledge, that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We have a place in a huge mural, a huge portrait. If there was a single photograph of all of God's creatures over all of history – a class photo if you will – we would spend hours, maybe a whole lifetime, looking for ourselves in the photo.

And the reason that you and I are here, in this setting, is that we think we see ourselves in the photo. “Look, it’s me!”

This response is aptly called “rejoicing.” But we can’t explain it. It’s beyond our understanding. But we sure **feel** it. Why? Maybe because it really is true. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is the evidence.

Well, you say, maybe this analysis works for this Sunday’s insert, but what about the inserts for other Sundays? Funny you should ask.

Here are some samples.

Trinity Sunday. IN THE BEGINNING. FINALLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. NOW THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES.

2 Pentecost. THUS SAYS. THE PROMISE THAT. No capitalization.

3 Pentecost. WHEN THE PEOPLE. SINCE WE ARE JUSTIFIED. JESUS WENT ABOUT.

I could go on, but my conclusion is: **It doesn’t always work.**

But, as we have learned from this Sunday, it works some of the time. So, there might be some value in paying attention to CAPITALIZATION in the Sunday insert. And, even if we discover on a given Sunday that the CAPITALIZATION didn’t tell a story, we read the passage with care, which is a good and helpful habit. And you just never know. God works in mysterious ways. And sometimes God works in and through experiences that are different than we might expect.

Indeed, surprise is an interesting ingredient in religious faith. Without an element of surprise – such as God really does love us - we have a steady dose of the same old stuff. And it gets old after a while. And “getting old” isn’t what you and I look for in church. We want to be reminded that God loves us and sends his Son to assure us of that love.

So, let us not tell God what has to happen for us to believe. Rather, let’s accept the love that God offers without any qualifications. We’re the ones who qualify things, who waiver. God, though, loves us, period. **His choice.** Not ours.

And, one of the ways to receive the love of God and integrate that love in our lives is to accept with thanksgiving and joy the gift of Jesus. No demands on our part. No qualifications. Just acceptance. And, having accepted that love, share the love with others. Or, as today's insert puts it: REJOICE. UNDERSTAND as much as possible using our own brains and heart. And, what we don't understand on our own, check with JESUS.

It's a recipe that, by design, has served the Creation well. The Creator Himself, Herself, Itself – pick your pronoun – doesn't leave us up in the air, but engages us down on the ground. And what a difference it makes.

We're here, after all. Maybe we thought carefully about salvation. Or maybe we stumbled into it. God offers and God points the way and God assures us of everlasting love, with the understanding that we will share such love.

I think that whole decision on God's part, and our acceptance of that decision, is worth a big THANK YOU, LORD! In all CAPS, of course.

Well, enjoy the inserts Sunday after Sunday, with special attention to the CAPITALIZATION at the beginning of each lesson. Those words are for our benefit. And remember, when we are confused by what the Creator is trying to get across to us, look to JESUS in Caps. It's a pretty simple saving prescription on God's part.

Amen.

Morning Prayer – Pentecost 6 – July 9, 2023

Hymn 451, stanzas 1-3 – All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

All hail the power of Jesus' Name! Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him Lord of all!

Crown him, ye martyrs of our God, who from his altar call;
Praise him whose way of pain ye trod,
and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him Lord of all!

Hail him the heir of David's line, whom David Lord did call,
The God incarnate, Man divine,
and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him Lord of all!

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 145:8-15

First Reading – Zechariah 9:9-12

Second Reading – Romans 7:15-25a

Hymn 480 – When Jesus left his Father’s throne

When Jesus left his Father’s throne, he chose an humble birth;
like us, unhonored and unknown, he came to dwell on earth.
Like him may we be found below in wisdom’s path of peace;
Like him in grace and knowledge grow as years and strength increase.

Sweet were his words and kind his look, when others round him pressed;
their infants in his arms he took, and on his bosom blessed.
Safe from the world’s alluring charms, beneath his watchful eye,
thus in the circle of his arms may we forever lie.

When Jesus into Zion rode, the children sang around;
for joy they plucked the palms and strowed their garments on the ground.
Hosanna our glad voices raise, hosanna to our King!
Should we forget our Savior’s praise, the stones themselves would sing.

Gospel – Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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 6

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP Prayer for the Answering of Prayer – page 834

Almighty God, who hast promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in thy Son's Name: We beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ear to us who have now made our prayers and supplications unto thee; and grant that those things which we have faithfully asked according to thy will, may effectually be obtained, to the relief of our necessity, and to the setting forth of thy glory; through 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 460, stanzas 1-3 – Alleluia! sing to Jesus!

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;
Hark! the song of peaceful Zion thunder like a might flood;
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! he is near us, faith believes, nor questions how:
Though the cloud from sight received him, when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his promise, "I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

Dismissal

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

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Lessons for 6th Sunday of Pentecost – July 9, 2023

Collect: O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-12

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion?! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

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

Psalm 145:8-15

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and of great kindness.
The Lord is loving to everyone
and his compassion is over all his works.
All your works praise you, O Lord,
and your faithful servants bless you.
They make known the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your power;
That the people may know of your power
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;
your dominion endures throughout all ages.
The Lord is faithful in all his words
and merciful in all his deeds.

The Lord upholds all those who fall;
he lifts up; those who are bowed down.

Second Reading: Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I can't do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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

Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

Jesus said, "To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to one another 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, 'He has a demon': the Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.' At that time Jesus said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

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