

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 20th Sunday of Pentecost, October 15, 2023.

The title I am giving to today's set of lessons is "3 out of 4 ain't bad." Excuse my English.

First, let's look at the 3.

- From Isaiah: "This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."
- From Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want."
- And from Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

Good stuff. What's not to like?

But, not so fast. Let's look at lesson #4, the passage from Matthew. It's the parable of the king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Well, that's not very hopeful, is it. We raise our hand to volunteer, and the teacher doesn't call on us. We identify with the "many" – lots of hands in the air, but perhaps not with the "few" – those who are called.

Even if we think we might be included in the "few," we don't feel right about those whom God does not call.

Yes, 3 out of 4 ain't bad, **unless you're the 1 out of 4, or unless you're disappointed for the 1 out of 4.**

"Come on, God, make up your mind. Is it all sheep, or is it some sheep and some goats? And, if it's just some goats – even if the goats are themselves responsible for their condition – is it fair, is it God-like, is it acceptable to save some and not others?"

“Truth be told, God, I would rather not be chosen than to be chosen but leave some family and friends and neighbors behind. Isn’t there an alternative?

Well, we think so, don’t we? God doesn’t give up on anybody. We might give up on God temporarily, but God’s love goes much deeper than our obedience. Even when we claim not to desire that love, God’s love is there. And it has a name. **And that name is Forgiveness with a capital F.**

That’s the great thing about God’s love. It has penetrating power. So strong, that God loves us **no matter what**. Even if and when we reject God’s love, it’s there, waiting to be acknowledged and accepted and shared.

Sounds a bit like **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. Or **Creator, Savior, and Sustainer**. Three in One. All encompassing. **Can’t escape it!**

Sometimes we get angry with God. We pray for A and we get B. Or so it seems. But maybe B is simply another dimension of A. Not different than, but a part of.

Let’s face it. We can’t be sure about God. We can’t even be sure if there is a God.

But, how could that be? Every culture from every age seems to have some form of a Creator and Savior and Sustainer. These dimensions are part of the fabric of Creation. They cross geographic barriers, language barriers, and time barriers.

But – and this is crucial – this over-arching control over everything is matched by a sense of personal contact, personal application. We are one tiny part of billions of entities over billions of years. Yet we, person by person, feel the love of God, or at least have a sense that the Creator is not only in charge, but interested in us.

Comprehending this reality is a challenge. We can’t do it ourselves. There is simply too much to digest. So, what does the Creator do? The Creator provides a path that we creatures can handle. That would be a fellow human being named Jesus. A very clever and generous response from the Creator, from God.

You can almost hear God saying to himself or herself - pick your pronoun – “They’re not handling my **Creative** power very well. So, let me try my **Saving** power. And let me instill that **Saving** power in a human being like the rest of them. A **Prophet on Steroids**, if you will. **Myself as a human being.**

One who will come back from, will conquer, even death on a cross. And let me install this **Prophet on Steriods** in the history of the Hebrew people, with whom I have had an on-again/off-again relationship for some time now. And let me share this **Prophet on Steriods**, not just with the Hebrew people, but with all people for all time. Give everybody an opportunity to respond to my **Love and Concern for the Creation**.

And one more thing. Let the people who receive this **Prophet on Steriods** share the Prophet with all people for ever and ever. No doubt this sharing will take some time. Many generations perhaps. But it will be worth it. Worth it for me as Creator, and worth it for them as **My Children**. I don't want to lose a single creature to doubt, to uncertainty, to sadness. I want my intervention to be viewed as **Good News, Great News, Outstanding News**.

And I want this **Outstanding News** to be passed on to future generations. I want this "passing on" to be received with thanksgiving and joy. And with a promise to share. And with no time limit. I want generations to receive and proclaim: "Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

In short, I don't want just "three out of four." I want it all. And I want it for them. And the **Good News** is that, as the **Creator**, I can make this happen. Which is what I am doing right this minute in small ways and big ways. It's exciting for me as the Creator, and I trust that it is exciting for my creatures. "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of Peace will be with you."

So there! Not 3 out of 4. **But 4 out of 4**. God's gift to all. From whom, God would appreciate – not demand, but appreciate – a heartfelt "Thank you, Lord." To which we say "Amen."

And not just once, but again and again and again. **Amen**.

Service of Holy Communion
Pentecost 20 – October 15, 2023

Hymn 267 – Praise we the Lord this day

Praise we the Lord this day, this day so long foretold,
whose promise shone with cheering ray on waiting saints of old.

The prophet gave the sign for faithful folk to read:
a virgin born of David's line shall bear the promised seed.

Ask not how this should be, but worship and adore,
like her whom heaven's Majesty came down to shadow o'er.

She meekly bowed her head to hear the gracious word,
Mary, the pure and lowly maid, the favored of the Lord.

Most blest shall be her name in all the Church on earth,
through whom that wondrous mercy came, the incarnate Savior's birth.

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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 Pentecost 20

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalm 23

Second Reading – Philippians 4:1-9

Hymn 526 – Let saints on earth in concert sing

Let saints on earth in concert sing with those whose work is done;
for all the servants of our King in heaven and earth are one.

One family we dwell in him, one Church, above, beneath,
though now divided by the stream, the narrow stream of death.

One army of the living God, to his command we bow;
part of the host have crossed the flood, and part are crossing now.

E'en now by faith we join our hands with those that went before,
and greet the everliving bands on the eternal shore.

Jesus, be thou our constant Guide; then, when the word is given,
bid Jordan's narrow stream divide, and bring us safe to heaven.

Gospel – Matthew 22:1-4

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 423 – Immortal invisible

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light in accessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
the clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree,
then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

Dismissal

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

Pentecost 20 Lessons – October 15, 2023

Collect: Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 25:1-9

O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong people will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all people, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

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

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures

and leads me beside still waters.

He revives my soul,

and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Philippians 4:1-9

My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

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

Gospel

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged.

He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

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