

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, the 5th Sunday of Easter, April 28, 2024.

I want to focus today on our second reading today: the passage from the First Letter of John.

Now, the first thing to remember is that there are a number of people named John in the New Testament. The one we're talking about today is John the Apostle, one of the twelve followers of Jesus. He had a brother named James. But it's John who is our subject today. And it is this John who is responsible for the Gospel of John and the three Letters of John towards the end of the New Testament. At least that's what most New Testament scholars believe.

Of all the verses attributed to this John, today's passage from the First Letter of John is one of the most familiar. In part, because, in the 14 verses we read today, love is mentioned 24 times: 14 as a verb and 10 as a noun. I think this number of references in the space of 14 verses might be some kind of record.

What strikes most about this passage, though, is not the 24 total "love" references, but that the references are fairly balanced – 14 verbs and 10 nouns.

Is there a sermon in there somewhere? Of course, there is.

The kind of love that the New Testament speaks of is a mix of theory and practice. We don't just talk about love. We do love. Emphasis on do. We love, or at least we are supposed to love, in concrete ways. Not just talk, but action. Jesus doesn't just sit down and teach. Jesus walks to the cross and sacrifices self.

This is what you and I respect in others, and what others respect in us. Yes, this passage is a really strong reminder of what Jesus was all about and what we, in His Name, are all about. Not just theory. But practice. We are to model love. Not just talk about love, but do love. Make love come alive. Model love in our own behavior.

We want people to wonder about us. What drives them? What's behind their behavior? Where do they get their energy? Not just to love others, but to forgive others. What do they know that we don't know?

Well, here's the answer. We know Jesus. Not completely, but partially. We know Jesus objectively and we know Jesus subjectively. Just as he knows us. In fact, **Jesus** knowing us fully precedes **us** knowing Jesus partially. With the "partial" growing all the time.

It's not an accident that "growing" is a theme of Jesus. From today's Gospel: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit." And "every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."

I suspect that, for all of us, positive "growing" is also a theme of ours. Whether it's physically or emotionally or intellectually or spiritually, we want to grow in positive ways. We want to grow into our potential. And, if God helps in this growth, we want to thank God. That's in large part why you and I gather. To thank God for helping us grow in all sorts of ways **as we are meant to grow**.

One of the toughest parts of parenting is to help children get over the rough spots. We try really hard to keep them pointed in a positive direction. And, isn't it true, that our kids hate to see us discouraged. "Come on, Mom. Come on, Dad. Everything is going to be okay."

In all of these relational issues, there are verbs and there are nouns. That's what caught my attention, and I suspect your attention, about today's Epistle, the First Letter of John. You don't get the noun without the verb. And what's the use of the verb without the noun?

Love in a vacuum is not what Jesus is all about. Nor is it what we are all about. The Love of God is what we aspire to, and what God intends. He tosses. We catch. And we in turn share the Love of Christ with others, with the hope that our audience is strengthened for comparable service.

Of course, sometimes the process breaks down. Either we don't catch the ball, and, if we do catch the ball, we don't lateral it to others. We keep it to ourselves. And how does that selfishness hurt? Well, it hurts both parties, doesn't it.

I apologize for all the sports analogies. We all have our favorite frameworks. But they all point in the same direction. God loves us, with an expectation – really a

commandment – to love others. And the positive beat goes on. That’s how things are meant to work. That’s what the Creator had in mind.

And when the creature turned a deaf ear, the Creator tried a different approach. You and I gather in this setting to say “Thank you, Lord, for this different approach. And we promise to share this approach with others, both with those we love and with those we don’t understand.”

“We can qualify things in that way because ultimately You, Lord, are in charge of the whole enterprise. You know verbs and nouns. They are part of Your Creation. You use them with us in a loving manner, and we use them with others in a loving manner. We receive and then we share. That’s how things are meant to work. We understand that.”

“Just givers or just takers? Just one or the other? No thank you. Not just one or the other. But both. We need a generous Giver – that would be you Lord - and we need grateful recipients – that would be us right here, wearing our “noun” hat, and, thanks to Jesus, our “verb” hat as well.

In other words, Lord, we’re all decked-out, just as you hoped. Help us to look in the mirror and be proud, and then share the Source – capital S Source - of that pride. That would be you, Lord, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What a gift, both to receive – a noun - and to share – a verb.

Many of us, if not all of us, learned the elements of grammar from Strunk and White. Remember that text? It’s probably still on your book shelf, and you probably still refer to it. And what is also probably on your book shelf is the Bible. And what do the two books have in common? Verbs and nouns. Love God and Love neighbor.

Amen.

Morning Prayer – Easter 5 – April 28, 2024

Hymn 559 – Lead us, heavenly Father

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Savior, breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us; thou didst feel its keenest woe;
yet unfearing, persevering, to thy passion thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy;
love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

BCP - Page 76 –Easter Greeting

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,
But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive in our sins and
cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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.

BCP – 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 – Acts 8:26-40

Psalm 22:24-30

My praise is of him in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him;

“May your heart live for ever!”

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,

and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

For kingship belongs to the Lord;

He rules over the nations.

To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;

and all who go down to the dust fall before him.

My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him.

they shall be known as the Lord’s for ever.

They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn

the saving deeds that he has done.

Second Reading – 1 John 4:7-21

Hymn 436, stanzas 1-3 – *Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates*

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates; behold the King of glory waits!

The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.

O bless the land, the city blest, where Christ the ruler is confessed

O happy hearts and happy homes to whom this King of triumph comes!

Fling wide the portals of your heart; make it a temple, set apart

from earthly use for heaven’s employ, adorned with prayers and love and joy.

Gospel – John 15:1-8

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 Fifth Sunday of Easter

O God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, ever and ever. *Amen.*

BCP – page 816 – Prayer for Mission

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy son our Savior. *Amen.*

BCP – page 817 – Prayer for the Parish

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; 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 may 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 652, stanzas 1-3 – Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find
in deeper reverence praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord, lest us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!*

Dismissal

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

Easter 5 Lessons – April 28, 2024

Collect: O God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Acts 8:26-40

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip he began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said "Look here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

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

Psalm 22:24-30

My praise is of him in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him;

“May your heart live for ever!”

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,

and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

For kingship belongs to the Lord;

he rules over the nations.

To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust fall before him.

My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him;

they shall be known as the Lord’s for ever.

They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn

the saving deeds that he has done.

Second Reading: I John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love "God" and hate their brother or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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

Gospel: John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

The Gospel of the Lord. *Praise be to you, O Christ.*