

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 525, stanzas 1-2

The Church's One Foundation

Opening Sentence: The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Confession

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
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 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.*

Absolution

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Invitation to Venite and Psalm

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.

The Venite - seated

*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 133 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Acts 4:32-35 - see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – I John 1:1-2:2 - see lesson insert

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

Hymn 561, stanzas 1-2

Stand up, stand up, for Jesus

The Gospel - John 20:19-31 - see lesson insert

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

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

The Apostles' Creed - standing

*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.*

The Lord's Prayer - seated

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be 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.*

Suffrages - seated

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.

Collects for Sundays, the Second Sunday of Easter, and Ministry

O God, who makes us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Grant us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the days to come may be spent in your favor, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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 and America

*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.*

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.*

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 537, stanzas 1 and 3

Christ for the world we sing!

Dismissal

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

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2021.

When we gather each Sunday, we have a different set of readings, but these different readings always come from the same categories. There is a Collect. There is a lesson from the Old Testament, and sometimes, like today, from the Acts of the Apostles. Then there is a lesson from the Epistles, and a lesson from the Gospels.

Do you have a favorite category? And, if so, what is it, and why is that? For me, it's a close call by category. The Collect sets the stage. The Old Testament prepares the way. The Gospels fulfill the preparation. And the Epistles carry that fulfillment forward. All four categories have a role to play in the whole enterprise. All are critical components of the Whole. But if I had to pick a favorite category, it would be the Epistles.

Why is that? Because it is about you and me, as individual believers, and as a congregation of believers. The Collect, Old Testament, and Gospel categories are largely about others. And, so is the category of Epistles, but not exclusively. And the exclusion is what I want to address today.

In today's Epistle (**I John 1:1-2:2**), for example, there are two pronouns featured: "we" and "I." In this First Epistle of John, we don't find the pronoun "they."

The most prominent pronoun in the Gospel (**John 20:19-31**) is "they." "He breathed on **them** and said to **them**." Jesus is the speaker. Jesus is the focus of the lesson. We are the recipients.

In the passage from Acts (**Acts 4:32-35**), the focus is the "whole group." "**They** – the apostles - laid it – the proceeds - at the apostles' feet." Yes, the "proceeds" were "distributed to each as any had need," but the emphasis here is the group, not the individual. "Everything they owned was held in common."

In the Epistle, however, the featured pronouns are "we," as in "we declare," and "I," as in "I am writing these things." This is not to take anything away from God, from Jesus, and from the apostles. Rather, it is simply to underscore the centrality, on a personal basis, of welcoming Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise and what you and I do with this fulfillment.

The key here is to focus on the category titles. Collect: think introduction. Gospel: think reception. Old Testament/Acts: think what others did in response. But Epistles? Think what we do with what we have received. “We declare to you.” “My little children, I am writing these things to you.”

A pretty interesting exercise for you and me is to write an “Epistle.” To whom would we send it? And, more to the point, what would it say?

What is it that you and I, either as individuals or as a congregation, want to say to others? What drives us to the point of wanting to share our response to Jesus with others? What is it that we want to proclaim? What is our joy, our relief, our hope, our conviction, our promise? Why are we so excited that we want to write anything at all?

There are times when things happen in our lives that we can’t wait to share with others. Letters of admission to the schools we really, really wanted. New friends with the potential to be life-long friends. Confirmation of a welcome diagnosis. Yes, when we are the recipients of good news, we want to share that good news.

Verse 1 of today’s Psalm (**Psalm 133**): “Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity.” Wouldn’t we love for that to happen? And, if so, wouldn’t we want to share the “good and pleasant news” with others? Of course, we would. We might even write a long letter, or its other name: an epistle.

Sometimes, we get so worked up about some development, that we just have to share anger or disappointment. Whatever the content – good news or bad news – we are conveying something deeply personal. That’s the nature of the Epistle category. These documents are “deeply personal.”

And, as such, they are really interesting. They grab our attention. As we listen, as we read, we can feel the excitement or, as case might be, the pain. But we are moved. And often we are moved to respond in our own way. “Deeply personal” in response to “deeply personal.” We are not removed from whatever is going on. We are drawn in. We are engaged. And, perhaps, our life is changed forever. Epistles are powerful because they are personal.

In today’s passage from First John, we have “we declare” and “I am writing.” Who is the “we” and who is the “I”? We can’t know for sure. What we do know, from other sources, is that there was indeed a disciple of Jesus named John who

admired Jesus and who was admired by Jesus. The two were close, so anything that John would have said or written would be critical pieces of information as we, twenty centuries later, try to get close to the Lord.

John was an eye-witness, so his testimony is powerful. His two epistles, if indeed this John was the author of both, are huge for us. We want to know more, and, in these writings, we do learn more. And the “more” reinforces information from other sources.

Our excitement about Jesus grows, maybe even to the point that we want to become a source as well. Maybe we even write an epistle to a friend or group of friends or an enemy or a group of enemies. The Risen Christ **as content** is powerful. And, as followers of this Risen Christ – that’s why we gather – we have an obligation to share. Maybe this sharing is not in the form of a written document. Maybe it’s in the way we live our lives. Maybe it’s in who we are and what we project to the world, in general ways like being kind to others, or in specific ways like writing letters.

Is there an Epistle that we have been carrying but haven’t sent? Is there a sense of being forgiven that we haven’t expressed? Is there a thanksgiving experience that we haven’t shared? Has our doubt ever been countered by a simple touch, as was true for Thomas? Is there a “My Lord and my God” moment that we have keeping to ourselves?

One of the neat features of our worship – and it has been so for centuries – is that we communicate our faith in a variety of ways. Even in the world of written expression, we have Collects and Psalms and Lessons from the Old and New Testaments and beautiful hymns, and, yes, Epistles – perhaps the most personal category of all. Maybe Collect-writing or Psalm-writing or Lesson-writing or Hymn-writing, isn’t your favorite method of sharing. But maybe heartfelt letters, capturing what the Risen Christ means to you, maybe these Epistles, can help change lives for the better.

You never know. We shouldn’t shortchange ourselves as sources of hope. I am quite certain that the disciple John, whom Jesus loved, didn’t have you and me in mind when he shared his thanks. But we’re here, studying his letter. Maybe we, like John, have a thank you letter – maybe even a really long one – that would benefit another generation. More power to all who are grateful for the Risen Christ. And that, by our presence, would include you and me. Amen.

Lessons for 2nd Sunday of Easter – April 11, 2021

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Accts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Psalm 133

Oh, how good and pleasant it is,
when brethren live together in unity!
It is like fine oil upon the head
that runs down upon the beard,
Upon the beard of Aaron,
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
It is like the dew of Hermon
that falls upon the hills of Zion.
For there the Lord has ordained the blessing:
life for evermore.

Epistle: I John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Gospel: John 20:9-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where they disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Hymns for Second Sunday of Easter – April 11, 2021

Hymn 225, stanzas 1-2

The Church's One Foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the word:
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endured.

Hymn 561, stanzas 1-2

Stand up, stand up for Jesus

Stand up, stand up, for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross;
lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss:
from victory unto victory his army shall he lead,
till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up, for Jesus; the trumpet call obey;
forth to the mighty conflict in this his glorious day:
ye that are his now serve him against unnumbered foes;
let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose.

Hymn 537, stanzas 1 and 3

Christ for the world we sing!

Christ for the world we sing!
The world to Christ we bring with loving zeal;
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,
sin-sick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.

Christ for the world we sing!
The world to Christ we bring with one accord;
with us the work to share, with us reproach to dare,
with us the cross to bear, for Christ our Lord.