

Worship Service
13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 22, 2021
St. Christopher-by-the-Sea
Gibson Island, Maryland

Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 559, stanzas 1-2

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

Minister: Blessed by God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

People: *And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.*

Minister: 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.*

Song of Praise

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.*

Collect for 13th Sunday after Pentecost

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18 – see lesson insert

Psalm 34:15-22 – see lesson insert

Second Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20 – see lesson insert

Hymn 552, stanzas 1-2

Fight the good fight

Gospel: John 6:56-69– see lesson insert

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

The Nicene Creed

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

Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church;
That we all may be one.

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you;
That your Name may be glorified by all people.

We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons;
That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world;
That there may be justice and peace on the earth.

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;
That our works may find favor in your sight.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;
That they may be delivered from their distress.

Give to the departed eternal rest;
Let light perpetual shine upon them.

We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;
May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

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Lord, hear the prayers of your people; and what we have asked faithfully, grant that we may obtain effectually, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Confession

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.

Absolution

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.*

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 has 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.*

Hymn 390, stanzas 1 and 4

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Dismissal

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

Hymns for 13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 22, 2021

Hymn 559, stanzas 1-2

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.

Hymn 552, stanzas 1-2

Fight the good fight

Fight the good fight with all thy might,
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right,
lay hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies, Christ is the path and Christ the prize.

Hymn 390, stanzas 1 and 4

Praise to the Lord

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation:
join the great throng, psaltery, organ, and song, sounding in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again; gladly for ever adore him.

Lessons for 13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 22, 2021

Collect: Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the people, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

Psalm 34:15-22

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.

The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them
and delivers them from all their troubles.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.
Many are the troubles of the righteous,
but the Lord will deliver him out of them all.
He will keep safe all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.
Evil shall slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
The Lord ransoms the life of his servants,
and none will be punished who trust in him.

Second Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic power of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare boldly, as I must speak.

Gospel: John 6:56-69

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which our ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life, But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.!

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 13th Sunday after Pentecost, August 22, 2021.

Are you ready for another named Sunday? I don't mean just Pentecost 13. No, I mean "Take your best shot" Sunday.

This is the advice that Jesus gives to Peter in today's gospel lesson (**John 6:56-69**). And it comes as the disciples are torn between sticking with Jesus or seeking some other path. Remember this verse: "When the disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'"

Jesus knows that what he is offering the disciples includes a confrontation with the authorities. This is a tough ask. Are they up to the challenge? Will they stick by Jesus when the authorities come down hard on him? Do Peter and the others understand that they are part of something much bigger than themselves.

What drives Jesus is not necessarily what drives the disciples. Yes, they are following him – hence the name "disciple" – but are they prepared to die? Jesus is prepared. But are they? So, what does Jesus do to help them decide? He reviews their options and then says in effect "Take your best shot."

And isn't this advice exactly what the Risen Christ says to you and me? You are free people. You can live your life however you want. You are talented and thoughtful, and can apply those gifts in all sorts of ways. You can associate with whatever group you want. You're in charge of how you live out your life. I can only set the table. You have to decide what you want on your plate. "So, Peter, and the rest of you, take your best shot."

Like all tough decisions, we have second thoughts, and need the strength of others to sustain our direction. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (**Ephesians 6:10-20**) speaks to this need to persevere. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil."

This is a really powerful passage. Paul knows what people like you and me are up against. He has been there. He has wrestled, and now feels responsible for

bolstering the spirits of others. “Take the shield of faith take the helmet of salvation and give it your best shot.”

Paul is familiar with **Psalm 34**: “The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them from all their troubles.”

In today’s Old Testament lesson (**Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18**), Joshua reminds the people that they have a choice. “Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve.” The people respond, “No, no, we are willing to serve the Lord; just give us another chance.”

We’ve been there, haven’t we? “Serving the Lord” for most of us isn’t a one-time decision. We “take our best shot” multiple times, often in different directions. We grow into faith. We grow into steadfastness. We grow into faithfulness.

All of us will stray from God’s appointed path. This will disappoint God, but won’t stop God from offering a fresh start. Many of us will come back to the path that God offers, including the path of Jesus. We’re here right now. That “coming back” is a conscious decision on our part. Jesus says “Take your best shot.” And we do so. “You, Jesus, are our best shot.”

God smiles every time that happens. But it doesn’t always happen. Or at least it doesn’t always stick. Today’s passage from John’s gospel captures such a moment.

Jesus has just said “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father. Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Put yourselves in this conversation. “Do you also wish to go away? I’m offering you a path, but there are other paths that you can choose.” Another way of saying, “Take your best shot. Try another path. It’s a free world. Go for it.”

And, if truth be told, we probably have gone for it. We probably have had our doubts, and maybe will continue to have them. But, for the time being, we are saying to Jesus, "Lord, here I am. Send me."

And guess what. God smiles again.

My work at Johns Hopkins was with the Center for Talented Youth. We worked with very bright pre-college kids. One of the things that these students had in common was a desire to be challenged. The tougher the better. They were at their happiest when they were challenged appropriately. Not beyond their means, but within their means, given hard work. We had a name for that match. It was the Optimal Match.

For me, and I suspect for you, what we do on Sunday mornings is a kind of optimal match. Belief in Jesus is not a slam dunk. It is not easy. It tests us, sometimes to the point of not wanting to continue. But, again, we're here. We like the challenge, because there is something about this particular challenge that speaks to the deepest elements of who we are as free people. And we have responded, or are in the process of responding, to what the gospel describes as "spirit and life."

"Spirit and life." That's what we find here. That's what the Lord offers. That's why the Lord died for us, and rose for us. Yes, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" We agree with the disciples. But, bring it on. We want to learn more. We don't mind a challenge. Indeed, we prefer a challenge. And, besides, look at the teacher we have. Jesus of Nazareth? Are you kidding me? What a privilege. What a joy. And, yes, look at our classmates. It doesn't get any better than this.

Okay, so maybe I'm overstating things, except for the last part, of course. But you get the point. Religious faith is challenging. But not beyond our means. That's the whole point of Jesus. The Creator of the Universe becomes one of us. Incarnation. Among other things, It moves us to sing, as we will at the end of today's service

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him! All that hath life and breath come now with praises before him! Let the amen sound from his people again; gladly forever adore him. *Amen.*

