

Worship Service
Last Sunday of Epiphany – February 14, 2021
St. Christopher-by-the-Sea
Gibson Island, Maryland

Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 495, stanzas 1-2

Hail, thou once despised Jesus!

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 Last Sunday after Epiphany

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12 – see lesson insert

Psalm 50:1-6 – see lesson insert

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 – see lesson insert

Hymn 288, stanzas 1-2

Praise to God, immortal praise

Gospel: Mark 9:2-9 – 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*

Special thanks for Nancy and Henry for the altar flowers today.

*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 625, stanzas 1-2

Ye holy angels bright

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, Last Sunday of Epiphany, February 14, 2021.

Our lessons this morning are about transitioning, specifically about moving from one generation to another, and from one leader to another.

We have Elijah and Elisha (**2 Kings 2:1-12**). Two prophets whose job it is to keep leaders mindful of their responsibilities. Elijah is the elder, the mentor. Elisha is the younger, the eager student. Elijah is ready to turn over the prophetic role to Elisha, but Elisha is not ready to receive it. So, when Elijah tells Elisha to “stay here,” Elisha says, “No way. I’m coming with you.” This uncertainty goes on for awhile. But eventually Elijah pulls rank. “Enough. I must go. Tell me, therefore, what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.”

At this point, Elisha recognizes that it is futile to persuade Elijah to stay. So, Elisha does what the next generation often does: “Please let me inherit a double of your spirit.” Not your bank account, not your properties, but your spirit, your leadership, your wisdom, your mantle, your symbol of authority. And so it was. Elijah “ascended into heaven,” and when Elisha could no longer see his mentor, Elisha “grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.” Elisha would now wear the mantle of Elijah.

Centuries later, there is another transition experience (**Mark 9:2-9**). Forty days following the Resurrection, “Jesus led Peter and James and John to a high mountain apart, by themselves.” And he, Jesus, was transfigured before them. And two other heroes were with Jesus: Elijah and Moses. Peter, bless his heart, is stunned, and all he can think about is making the three heroes comfortable. When in doubt, be polite. Then there was a voice: “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

Listening to Jesus remains a key transition point for you and me. We don’t have the luxury of having the Lord himself in our midst, but, if we have listened and are listening and will listen to Jesus, we can be a force for Good. As St. Paul said to the Corinthians (**2 Corinthians 4:3-6**), we can “shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” We can inherit and wear the mantle. We can continue the ministry. We can be God’s presence in the world. We can be Elisha.

Now, the thought of accepting that mantle is overwhelming, which is often the case when there are transitions of power and leadership. I’m not sure which role is tougher: to initiate the transition or receive it, to pass on the mantle or accept it.” Truth be told, we try to avoid transitions. Like Elisha, we don’t want things to change. We are more comfortable following than leading. But that condition is temporary. We

move on. We change roles. We can be God's "loyal followers," those who "keep the covenant," as described in today's Psalm (**Psalm 50:1-6**).

At any given point in a family, there is generational awareness. Think of your children. They probably are scattered, but they are close in spirit. They share an identity. They are of the same generation. They have cousins. And they move from one generation to another as a group. Pretty soon, they are not grandkids, but parents themselves. Still grandkids to us, but, to one another, fellow parents. And their children represent a new generation. And so life moves on, transitioning from one generation to another.

This Island Community sees a lot of these transitions. You know this stuff first hand, as do we. And it's scary. Passing on a mantle is scary and receiving a mantle is scary. But there is one thing that softens the blow, that makes transitions easier, and that is the content of what is passed on and received.

What are we sharing with those who will follow? What is the nature of the mantle that we are passing on? What was it that Elisha wanted from Elijah? "Please let me inherit a double of your spirit."

Is there anything more beneficial to the next generation than a spirit of hope, of thanksgiving, of challenge, of foresight, of forgiveness? What you and I do in this setting, or wherever worship takes place, is not only a huge gift to the next generation, but perhaps, just perhaps, the gift like no other.

And that gift doesn't have to be this particular place, this particular tradition. But that gift does need to address all the things that our faith addresses, including and especially the propensity to misuse one of God's greatest gifts, freedom itself. There's another name for misusing freedom. And that would be Sin.

When we misuse our God-given freedom, we are not honoring what God intends for us, as individuals and as a nation. Rather, we are expected to address both Sin and Forgiveness. Honesty and hope. Shortcomings and new life. Two elements. Two dimensions. Double the Message, if you will. The Judeo-Christian Faith, which is bedrock of us, is not only a wonderful gift to pass on, but, in our view, it is the gift that our Creator commands us to pass on. Remember what Elisha requested of Elijah: "Double the spirit."

Which raises an interesting point. What is it exactly that the next generation has requested? Is it "double the spirit," as Elisha requested? Or is it double the technology, double the speed, double the pleasure, double this or double that? What

exactly is the next generation expecting? What do they want? What is the mantle they envision?

Well, what our generation needs to remember is that what we pass on – the mantle, if you will – is up to us. We can hope that there is an Elisha in our life who craves the double of our spirit. But, if there is not, would we simply fold up our tent, as it were, and let another agenda take hold? I would hope not. And, I'm pretty sure that God hopes not. Sin and Forgiveness, honesty and hope, are not negotiable.

We need to be proud of our mantle. We need to be confident in our faith. In today's Epistle, Paul observes, "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing." In other words, if we don't include in our mantle the conviction that the Risen Christ is worthy of the next generation, we shortchange that generation. We contribute to "perishing." And isn't "short changing" the last thing we would want to pass on? It is certainly the last thing that God expects of us.

A key ingredient in our mantle is the Good News of Jesus. The transfer of Faith is our responsibility and our joy. We don't transfer reluctantly. We do so proudly and with assurance. We do so as those who believe that in Christ we have been saved. Saved for what? Among other things, saved to share with those we love.

And, if those who come after us don't ask us to "double the spirit," we need to triple the spirit. That's how important to us our spiritual understanding is. Now, it is true that Elijah said to Elisha, "You have asked a hard thing." And that is certainly the case. Yet the tough understandings are often the most important. And isn't that exactly what God expects of us? Deal with the tough things. Jesus died on a Cross. Surely we can share the Good News that this same Jesus rose from the dead.

If all of this sounds like the wishful thinking of a Senior Citizen, so be it. If the shoe fits, wear it. If we have "double the spirit," share it. Lord knows, the world needs more spirit that is joyful, respectful, hopeful, thankful. And we have it, thanks to God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The One God, with many dimensions, enough dimensions to go around, to pass on to generations to come in ways that make sense to them, as well as to us.

What a privilege. What an opportunity. What an expectation. What a joy. What a gift. A gift to receive and then a gift to share. "Double the spirit."

Amen.

Lessons for Last Epiphany – February 14, 2021

Collect: O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-12

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you. So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent. Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take our master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were sanding by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Psalm 50:1-6

The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken;

he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,

God reveals himself in glory.

Our God will come and will not keep silence;

before him there is a consuming flame, and round about him a raging storm.

He calls the heavens and the earth from above

to witness the judgment of his people.

“Gather before me my loyal followers,

those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with sacrifice.”

Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause;

for God himself is judge.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Mark 9:2-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus. “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the son of Man had risen from the dead.

Hymns for Last Sunday of Epiphany – February 14, 2021

Hymn 495, stanzas 1-2

Hail, thou once despised Jesus!

Hail, thou once despised Jesus! Hail thou Galilean King!
Thou didst suffer to release us; thou didst free salvation bring.
Hail, thou universal Savior, bearer of our sins and shame!
By the merit we find favor: life is given through thy Name.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, all our sins on thee were laid:
By almighty love anointed, thou hast full atonement made.
All thy people are forgiven through the virtue of thy blood:
Opened is the gate of heaven, reconciled are we with God.

Hymn 288, stanzas 1-2

Praise to God, immortal praise

Praise to God, immortal praise, for the love that crowns our days;
bounteous source of every joy, let thy praise our tongues employ:
all to thee, our God, we owe, source whence all our blessings flow.

All the plenty summer pours; autumn's rich o'er-flowing stores;
flocks that whiten all the plain; yellow sheaves of ripened grain:
Lord, for these our souls shall raise grateful vows and solemn praise.

Hymn 625, stanzas 1-2

Ye holy angels bright

Ye holy angels bright, who wait at God's right hand,
or through the realms of light fly at your Lord's command,
assist our song, for else the theme too high doth seem for mortal tongue.

Ye blessed souls at rest, who ran this earthly race
and now, from sin released, behold the Savior's face,
God's praises sound, as in his sight with sweet delight ye do abound.