

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
First Sunday of Lent, February 21, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 142, stanzas 1-3

Lord, who throughout these forty days

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 25:1-9 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Genesis 9:8-17- see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – I Peter 3:18-22 - see lesson insert

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

Hymn 508, stanzas 1-3

Breathe on me, Breath of God

The Gospel - Mark 1:9-15 - 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 First Sunday of Lent, and Faith

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, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Dear Lord, we praise you for the gift of Faith, and pray that you will help us deepen our faith during this Season of Lent. We pray too that we may employ our faith to better serve you and our neighbors. We know that reaching out in love and friendship can be a challenge, especially to those with whom we disagree. But we also know that you will supplement our efforts with your love, which is unmatched in all Creation. In Jesus' Name, we pray. *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

Special thanks to John and Sky 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 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 408, stanzas 1-3

Sing praise to God who reigns above

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, First Sunday of Lent, February 21, 2021.

During this Season of Lent I would like us to review the concept of covenant. This concept is central to today's lessons and to the lessons of the remaining Sundays in Lent. Which suggests that the concept of covenant is central to our Faith, which is exactly right, and therefore an appropriate subject, not just for today, but for the whole Season of Lent.

A covenant is an agreement between individuals or between groups of individuals. In today's lesson from Genesis (**Genesis 9:8-17**), the parties are God on the one hand and Noah and his descendants on the other hand. But note that the spirit of this covenant is not "Let's make a covenant." No, the spirit of this covenant is "I will make a covenant for us."

The "I" in this covenant is God. The "us" in this covenant are Noah and his descendants, including you and me. Not an agreement among equals, but a clear statement from God about how things are and will be. In other words, we don't have a say in what the covenant lays out. Our part in the covenant is either to agree to its terms or go our own way.

If this sounds one-sided, that's because it is, at least in its establishment. We don't tell God how things will be. God tells us. God sets the terms. And God does so through people like Noah and Jesus and maybe even people like you and me.

That's right, "people like you and me." We are vessels of God's love and expectations. We accept the terms of the Covenant, and then share those terms, and that whole experience of living by those terms, with others. Our training for that assignment is on-going. That's what church is about. That's what Lent is about. We gather to be reminded of the Covenant and our part in it.

And we do so willingly. We do so because we find over time that the terms of the Covenant make sense. When we agree to these terms and live by them, we feel that we are doing what we are meant to do.

Today's Psalm (**Psalm 25:1-9**) is a beautiful statement of how we feel about entering into the Covenant and living by it. Pick any verse. Here's verse 1: "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you; let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me." And verse 5: "Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting."

This sense of being in accord with God is something which we have all felt at one time or another. We probably wouldn't be here this morning if we have never had some kind of reinforcement experience. The Genesis passage cites God's "bow in the clouds." In today's Gospel (**Mark 1:9-15**), Jesus, as he is baptized, sees "the Spirit descending like a dove" and hears a voice from heaven saying "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Speaking for myself, I haven't experienced quite this level of confirmation, but I have experienced and am experiencing a deep sense of community, grounded in people who look beyond themselves for a sense of purpose, a sense of forgiveness, and a sense of empowerment. From the First Letter of Peter (**I Peter 3:18-22**): "Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you/us to God."

If these are the terms of God's Covenant, why wouldn't we want to acknowledge them and give thanks and do a better job of upholding our end of the Covenant? What's not to like?

Well, I'm speaking to the choir, aren't I? This sense of forgiveness, of not only a second chance but of multiple chances, is what binds us, is what draws us to worship, and then drives us to share our Faith in all sorts of ways, enough ways to go around.

Now, a word of caution. So far, we've been talking about our response to the Covenant, as if the Covenant doesn't apply if we don't sign on. Well, our decision not to respond doesn't nullify the Covenant. It only nullifies our participation in that Covenant. And, even then, we remain under the terms of the Covenant.

This is not a 50-50 relationship. God is not dependent on us. We might think that we are independent from God. And, yes, it is true that we can even maintain that God doesn't exist, much less establish the "rules." But we do so, at some risk. And, you and I, as participants in the Covenant, would say not at "some risk," but at "great risk."

Well, what is the "great risk"? A lot of people say "So what?" Well, here is the "what." Here is the "risk." Very simply, we miss out, through our own decision, on the Joy of being forgiven. God offers. We have a choice. Accept the offer, give thanks for the offer, live our lives as if the offer is absolutely true. Or decline the offer. The transaction is pretty straightforward. It is a quality of life issue. You and choose to accept the offer of God's continuous love, and to do our best to uphold our end of the Covenant that God has established.

We can decline the offer, as many people do. Or we can accept the offer, as we are doing right this minute. And, in accepting the offer, we agree to the terms of the offer. We say “Yes, I accept.”

- I accept that I am a child of God.
- And I accept that, as a child of God, I have responsibilities to myself, my family, my community, my country, those I agree with and those I don't agree with, and most important, to my God and His Son Jesus.
- And I promise, as a “thank you,” to fulfill those responsibilities to the best of my abilities.
- And, as I fall off this horse, I promise to get back on and work harder.

The “risk” again is that, in declining God's offer of Forgiveness in Christ, I miss out on it. Not because of God, but because of me. Why would I choose to do that?

Now, there are many people, friends and family, leaders in their respective fields, who conclude that this whole transaction between God and People through Jesus is Nonsense. Okay. It's a free world. But it is not the world that you and I believe in and pattern our lives after. Rather, acceptance of God's love, with thanksgiving for that love, is the world we live in and from which we operate.

And we know that to maintain this operation we need reminders. And one of the most important reminders is the Season of Lent, with its message that God has established a Covenant for our benefit. It is not imposed. It is offered. God will keep His end of this agreement. Our joy is in keeping our end.

One way to remember all of this is to think Jiffy Lube or wherever your car is maintained. On a regular basis, we get a check-up. Identify where things are okay, and where some adjustment is appropriate, if not necessary. Nobody makes us schedule an appointment. We choose to make the appointment, because it makes sense. We drive the car. We know where the challenges are. We have the power to bring things up to speed, but some are beyond us. But we know who does have that power. That's why we have this Season. Maintenance.

Amen.

Lessons for 1st Sunday of Lent – February 21, 2021

Collect: Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants, after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds. I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Psalm 25:1-9

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you;
let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
Let none who look to you be put to shame;
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.

Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love;

for they are from everlasting.

Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;

*remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness,
O Lord.*

Gracious and upright is the Lord;

therefore he teaches sinners in his way;

He guides the humble in doing right

and teaches his way to the lowly.

All the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness

to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Second Reading: I Peter 3:18-22

Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Jonah during the building of the ark in which a few that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Hymns for 1st Sunday of Lent – February 21, 2021

Hymn 142, stanzas 1-3 Lord, who throughout these forty days

Lord, who throughout these forty days for us didst fast and pray,
teach us with thee to mourn our sins, and close by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst contend and didst the victory win,
O give us strength in thee to fight, in thee to conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger, bear and thirst, so teach us, gracious Lord,
to die to self, and chiefly live by thy most holy Word.

Hymn 508, stanzas 1-3 Breath on me, Breath of God

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will, to do or to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Hymn 408, stanzas 1-3 Sing praise to God who reigns above

Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
the God of power, the God of love, the God of our salvation;
with healing balm my soul he fills, and every faithless murmur stills:
to God all praise and glory.

What God almighty power hath made, his gracious mercy keepeth;
by morning glow or evening shade his watchful eye n'er sleepeth.
Within the kingdom of his might, lo! all is just and all is right:
to God all praise and glory.

Let all who name Christ's holy Name give God all praise and glory;
let all who know his power proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
Cast each false idol from its throne, the Lord is God, and he alone:
to God all praise and glory.