

Worship Service
Second Sunday of Lent – February 28, 2021
St. Christopher-by-the-Sea
Gibson Island, Maryland

Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 143, stanzas 1-3

The glory of these forty days

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 Second Sunday of Lent

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and ever hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 – see lesson insert

Psalm 22:22-30 – see lesson insert

Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25 – see lesson insert

Hymn 660, stanzas 1-3

O Master let me walk with thee

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38 – 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 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 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 509, stanzas 1-3

Spirit divine, attend our prayers

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, Second Sunday of Lent, February 28, 2021.

During this Season of Lent, we are considering the concept of Covenant.

A covenant is an agreement. In some cases, it is an agreement among equals. The Biblical covenant, however, is not an agreement among equals. God establishes. We respond. And we respond in a manner prescribed by God.

But that doesn't mean that we don't have some say in the response. Quite the contrary. Oh yes, God has set the rules, but, in an incredibly generous act, God has given us the freedom to obey the rules or not, and to live with the consequences.

Recently I have been struggling with changing e-mail passwords as I move belatedly from an active employee to a retired employee. This kind of change involves a number of authentications, including confirming that I am who I am, and not a robot.

Essentially this is what you and I do in response to God's covenant. God establishes. We respond freely. We confirm that we are not a robot, but a free person.

Yes, God sets the rules, but we don't have to obey these rules. This is the nature of the Biblical covenant. At least this is part of the covenant. The other part is that, despite breaking the covenant from time to time, we are free to ask for and receive another opportunity to fulfill God's expectations. We are not robots. We have freedom, including the freedom, to be at God's side or to wander off.

Our Collect this morning sets the tone. "O God, whose glory it is to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with **penitent hearts and steadfast faith** to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son."

We know that we can "go astray." But we also know – indeed, it's why we're here – that, in Jesus, we have a "get out of self-imposed jail" card, which we can

play with God's permission. This "get out of self-imposed jail" card takes the form of a "penitent heart and steadfast faith."

The challenge of course is to maintain a penitent heart and steadfast faith. That's not easy to do, given the free-will that goes with being human. To err really is human. But it's a whole lot easier to obey if we have God on our side. Think of all the road blocks that God could establish to discourage penitent hearts and steadfast faith. But God does just the opposite. God provides a map, a set of instructions.

And this map and these instructions are updated. For Christians, the fulfillment of the promise of a Messiah was an update. And that capital U Update is still in effect, which accounts for our presence here this morning. We have a name for continuing updates, namely the work of the Holy Spirit.

You and I can be updates as well, which is quite exciting. Of course, this assumes continuous training and practice. This Season of Lent is such a time. We invite updates. We make promises about updates. And, God willing, we pursue those promises. And what form does that pursuit take? A "penitent heart and steadfast faith."

The Biblical covenant is really an Update covenant. God says, "Not only will I send my Son to rescue you, I will make sure that this rescue is available to all persons for all time. This is not a minor alteration. This is fulfillment of a promise. And it is a standing promise, available to you, just as it was available to your parents, and just as it will be available to your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren."

From today's Psalm (**Psalm 22:22-30**): "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."

And from Paul's Letter to the Romans (**Romans 4:13-25**): "These words were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also." We are an active part of a Saved community, with the responsibility and privilege to update this Saved community through our "penitent hearts and steadfast faith."

And, lest we forget, this task, this privilege of updating, is not a one-time event. It's a way of living. It's a way of understanding, not only our own shortcomings, but those of others. It's not one and done. It's always and forever. With lots of surprises along the way.

From Genesis (**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**), "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham." So, don't assume that there is a retirement age, mandatory or otherwise. Rather, keep God's promise front and center: "I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring throughout their generations."

You and I might have a life-span, but God does not. In fact, God saves some of His toughest assignments for folks who think that they are spared of new assignments. You know the axiom "If you want to have something done right, do it yourself." Well, God doesn't always live by this axiom. God likes company. God likes to share the work. God likes updates. God likes you and me.

Only one Savior, but lots of assistants, with a clear job description. From today's Gospel (**Mark 8:31-38**): "Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'"

If we were employees of a large utility company, and there was a big storm coming, we would know, from the experience of others and our own experience, that we should cancel vacation plans, grab our safety equipment, report for duty, and be prepared to update.

Likewise, we know the strategy for fulfilling our role in the Covenant that God has established. A "penitent heart and steadfast faith" is our responsibility. It's how we are meant to respond to God's love. It's our little "u" update to God's capital "U" update.

Something to think about, which is precisely what the Season of Lent is all about.

Amen.

Lessons for 2nd Sunday of Lent – February 28, 2021

Collect: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” ... God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of people shall come from her.”

Psalm 22:22-30

Praise the Lord, you that fear him;

stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob’s line, give glory.

For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them;

but when they cry to him he hears them.

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: Romans 4:13-25

The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the Law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) – in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38

Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But, turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Hymns for 2nd Sunday of Lent – February 28, 2021

Hymn 143, stanzas 1-3

The glory of these forty days

The glory of these forty days we celebrate with songs of praise;
for Christ, through whom all things were made, himself has fasted and has prayed.

Alone and fasting Moses saw the loving God who gave the law;
And to Elijah, fasting, came the steeds and chariots of flame.

So Daniel trained his mystic sight, delivered from the lions' might;
and John, the Bridegroom's friend, became the herald of Messiah's name.

Hymn 660, stanzas 1-3

O Master, let me walk with thee

O Master let me walk with thee in lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear the strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move by some clear, winning word of love;
teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with thee in closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong in trust that triumphs over wrong.

Hymn 509, stanzas 1-3

Spirit divine, attend our prayers

Spirit divine, attend our prayers, and make this house thy home;
descend with all thy gracious powers, O come, great Spirit, come!

Come as the light; to us reveal our emptiness and woe,
and lead us in those paths of life whereon the righteous go.

Come as the fire, and purge our hearts like sacrificial flame;
let our whole soul an offering be to our Redeemer's Name.