

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 7, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 665, stanzas 1 and 3

All my hope in God is founded

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 147:1-12, 21c – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Isaiah 40:21-31 - see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – I Corinthians 9:16-23 - see lesson insert

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

Hymn 553, stanzas 1-2

How wondrous and great are thy works

The Gospel - Mark 1:29-39 - 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 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, and Daily Opportunity

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.

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Dear Lord, help us to remember what a difference it makes when we make time with you a priority each and every day. Awaken us in body and spirit with a desire to meet with You and to hear You speak words of affirmation, assurance and wisdom, as we prepare to serve You, those we love, and those in need. 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 Neva and Murray 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 461, stanzas 1 and 2

Alleluia! sing to Jesus!

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, Fifth Sunday of Epiphany, February 7, 2021.

Like most of you I have routines, about all sorts of things, including work. I am retired from full-time work, but I do some part-time work, including writing sermons. And an important element in the sermon routine is reviewing the passages of Scripture that will be featured for a given Sunday.

Sometimes the review itself is routine. We have an insert with four lessons, including one of the Psalms. I read these lessons several times to see if something catches my attention. Well, something did as I prepared for this morning. And it wasn't a whole thought. It wasn't even a whole verse. It was a single word, with an unusual citation.

Look at today's Psalm. It's **Psalm 147**, or at least part of Psalm 147. In most editions of the Bible, Psalm 147 has 21 verses. Today's insert, however, only shows verses 1 through 12, plus a portion of verse 21. And that portion is the single word "Hallelujah!" with the citation 21c.

I was puzzled. What does the c stand for? Well, if you look in the Psalm section of the Prayer Book, you will see that verse 21 of Psalm 147 has three lines:

He has not done so to any other nation;
To them he has not revealed his judgments.
Hallelujah!

If you identify each of the three lines with a letter – a, b or c, the third line – Hallelujah! – gets the letter c.

Fair enough. The editors chose not only to exclude two lines of verse 21, but to exclude all of verses 13 through 20. The editors have their job. And we have our job, which is to try to make sense of what the editors did.

Fascinating, Father Rowins. What's your point? Well, guess how many points most preachers have. That's right. Three. Are you ready?

Point 1. The phrase “Hallelujah” with an exclamation mark means “Praise the Lord” with an exclamation mark. This phrase is central to the Judeo-Christian Faith. And it applies to every element of our lives. “It’s good to be alive. Hallelujah!” “The Lord has risen! Hallelujah!” “What a friend we have in Jesus. Hallelujah!” “I’m feeling much better! Hallelujah!”

Of course, sometimes we can overplay “Hallelujah!” And, instead of echoing the phrase, we are tempted to say, “Enough, already.” But, for the most part, “Hallelujah!” captures our Faith. We do feel good. We do feel that praising the Lord is appropriate to any and all circumstances. If we’re grateful, it’s certainly appropriate. And if we’re troubled, it’s a good reminder that help is available.

In today’s passage from First Corinthians (**I Corinthians 9:16-23**), Paul describes his approach to a variety of listeners. “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all. To the Jews I became as one under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law.” He tailored his approach to the situation, but never without a Hallelujah! dimension.

Point 2. Using “Hallelujah!” as bookends to any discussion or situation is a pretty interesting description of our Faith. It’s an appropriate response to the Creation – the Alpha - and it’s an appropriate response to the End of things – the Omega. God was there at the beginning. And he will be there at the end. And at every point in between. There is no age or situation where God is not present. “Always available” is God’s nature and strategy. And don’t we appreciate that!

And note in today’s Gospel (**Mark 1:29-39**) that, after leaving the synagogue, Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law. “That evening, at sundown ... he cured many who were sick with various diseases.” And then “in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place and prayed.” Jesus was a 24-7 kind of guy. Oh yes, he needed quiet time for himself, but never at the expense of those in need. When his disciples observed that “everyone is searching for you,” he answered “Let us go on to the neighboring towns ... because that is what I came out to do.” The bookends for Jesus amounted to more service – full service, if you will - not less.

Point 3. We cannot overstate the importance of “Hallelujah!” We’re not talking about a clever slogan or a situational strategy, as useful and/or as appropriate as

a slogan or strategy might be. Citing today's Collect, we're talking about an overriding issue with cosmic roots, namely being "set free from the bondage of our sins, and given the liberty of abundant life." There is only one way that this freedom, this gift, is going to be attained. And that is not through our perfection, but through God's acceptance of our imperfection. We are capable of many things, but we are also susceptible to many things, including and especially our sense of going it on our own. Pride is a wonderful thing, and we thank God for the gift of pride. But we are not God.

From the Isaiah passage (**Isaiah 40:21-31**): "To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, no one is missing."

We're dealing here with the Creator. Or, more to the point, the Creator is dealing with us. There is no substitute for that help, that forgiveness, that love. The Creator didn't have to save us, but, in His Only Begotten Son, that is exactly what the Creator has done.

Whether we recognize that gift or doubt that gift, or worse, take that gift for granted, is up to us. That is an incredible amount of freedom: to say yes to God or to say no thank you.

When we say yes to God, when we thank God for sharing Jesus, we exercise the freedom that God has given us, as God intended, as God hoped, as God promoted, and as God delivered in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Even "Hallelujah!" seems a weak response, given the enormity of the gift. But "Hallelujah!" is the best that we can do. So, let's shout it, by how we live, how we forgive, how we love, how we bounce back. We are meant to be "Hallelujah!" People. That's our place in the scheme of things. We have a starring role in this great enterprise. God is counting on us. Not to say "You know what, it sounds a little fuzzy to me," but to say "Thank you, Lord, for the trust, for the opportunity, for the privilege, and, yes, for the joy."

All of this captured in an editorial remark at the end of Psalm 147. Not just 21a. Not just 21b. But 21c. "Hallelujah!"

So, let's hear it for the 5th Sunday after the Epiphany, and for the author of Psalm 147, and for the thoughtfulness of the editors. They could have left out all of verse 21. They could have included just two of the three phrases in verse 21. But no, they wanted to make sure that they included the last of the three phrases: "Hallelujah!"

And good for you and me for echoing the conviction of the editors, and good for all those individuals who over the centuries have told and lived the "Hallelujah!" story. We wouldn't be here without them. Now it's our turn to think about those who follow. Are we Hallelujah People? If you all are any indication, the answer is a clear "Yes." And thank you for that.

Amen.

Lessons for Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 7, 2021

Collect: Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 40:21-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you now known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not get weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!

how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem;

he gathers the exiles of Israel.

He heals the broken-hearted

and binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars

and calls them all by their names.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power;

there is no limit to his wisdom.

The Lord lifts up the lowly,

but casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;

and make music to our God upon the harp.

He covers the heavens with clouds,

and prepares rain for the earth;

He makes grass to grow upon the mountains

and green plants to serve mankind.

He provides food for flocks and herds

and for the young ravens when they cry.

He is not impressed by the might of a horse;

he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;

But the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him,

in those who await his gracious favor.

Hallelujah!

Second Reading: I Corinthians 9:16-23

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I did not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

When Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you. He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Hymns for Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 7, 2021

Hymn 665, stanzas 1 and 3

All my hope on God is founded

All my hope on God is founded; he doth still my trust renew,
Me through change and chance he guideth, only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone calls my heart to be his own.

God's great goodness e'er endureth, deep his wisdom passing thought:
Splendor, light, and life attend him, beauty springeth out of nought.
Ever more from his store new-born worlds rise and adore.

Hymn 533, stanzas 1-2

How wondrous and great thy works

How wondrous and great thy works, God of praise!
How just, King of saints, and true are they ways!
O who shall not fear thee, and honor thy Name?
Thou only art holy, thou only supreme.

To nations of earth thy light shall be shown;
Their worship and vows shall come to thy throne:
Thy truth and thy judgments shall spread all abroad,
Till earth's every people confess thee their God.

Hymn 461, stanzas 1 and 2

Alleluia! sing to Jesus!

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;
Alleluia! his the triumph, his the victory alone;
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me;
Where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.