

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, January 31, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 498, stanzas 1 and 2

Beneath the cross of Jesus

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 111 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Deuteronomy 18:15-20 - see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – I Corinthians 8:1-13- see lesson insert

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

Hymn 551, stanzas 1-3

Rise up, ye saints of God!

The Gospel - Mark 1:21-28 - 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 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, and Trust

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 and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Dear Lord, enlighten the eyes of our heart that we might see you, and notice how you are at work in and through our lives. Give us wisdom to see where and how we can help you as you forgive and heal and challenge. Remind us that our reluctance to engage is no match for your willingness to be at our side, offering encouragement and promise. Increase our trust in you and in one another, in the Name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. *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

*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 535, stanzas 1 and 2

Ye servants of God

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, 4th Sunday of Epiphany, January 31, 2021.

I like puzzles. Jigsaw puzzles. Crossword puzzles. Puzzles of all sorts that invite us to solve them, and, if not to solve them, at least to engage them and make some progress. In fact, I think my fondness for puzzles is one of the reasons I respond to Jesus. And I'll bet that you and I share this characteristic.

Jesus really is a puzzle. Fully God and fully man? How's that for a start? At a minimum this possibility is intriguing. And at a maximum this possibility is really intriguing. I'm here because I am intrigued by Jesus. And I think you are here for the same reason.

To know Jesus a little is to want to know him a lot. And we are not alone in this desire. We are part of community of believers, a community of people who from very different backgrounds and cultures are convinced that getting to know this one individual is a way to enter a relationship with the Creator of the Universe. Who wouldn't want to do this if given the opportunity?

Well, we have this opportunity, and so does everyone who hears about Jesus. Which takes me to this morning's gospel (**Mark 1:21-28**). Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. His audience are Jews waiting for the Messiah. One of those in the audience is a man with "an unclean spirit." This is another name for someone who is struggling, and in the struggle, makes others uncomfortable.

Well, as is this man's habit, he interrupts the teaching of Jesus. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus rebukes the evil spirit, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, "convulsing and with a loud voice," obeys Jesus.

The audience is shocked. "What is this? A new teaching – with authority!" Could this Jesus himself be the Messiah that the audience has been waiting for? Perhaps. "At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee."

How would you and I have responded had we been in that synagogue on that day? Well, at a minimum, we would want to see more, learn more, test more. Jesus just confronted the Devil residing in this individual and won the contest of wills. At a minimum, Jesus is a puzzle. The question is whether he is God's appointed puzzle, and maybe even God himself living amongst us?

Remember our passage from Deuteronomy (**Deuteronomy 18:15-20**): Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet." Is Jesus the fulfillment of the promise Moses made? Perhaps Jesus is that fulfillment. But can we know for sure? That's the puzzle, isn't it?

Yes, we are left without knowing for sure. But is that such a bad thing? Our lesson today from First Corinthians (I Corinthians 8:1-13) offers an interesting take on this. First, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." And second, "Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him."

What is St. Paul saying here? Well, perhaps "certainty" about the deepest questions we can ask isn't what we should be looking for. Maybe knowledge, in the sense of being absolutely sure, is overrated, if even possible. Because once we think we know it all, there's no reason to continue searching. We feel "puffed up," but not loved.

If I have to choose between "certainty" and "love," I'll take "love," thank you very much. Besides, what we might regard as "certain" might not be certain at all. Paul describes it this way: "Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him."

The short version is "Don't be a know-it-all, because you are not a know-it-all and will not be a "know-it-all." Stated another way to the Corinthians: "Food will not bring us closer to God." There is more to be revealed, to be known. And it is in that being known by God – not in knowing God, but in being known by God - that real joy is to be experienced. Jesus is the Father's gift to the Creation. And it is, in accepting that gift, that undeserved love, that we find true happiness. It's how things are meant to be.

God reaches out. We respond. That's the key to the puzzle of life. If we respond to anything or anyone other than God, we will be frustrated. The puzzle will not be solved. And no amount of brilliance or speculation on our part can overcome that frustration. We simply don't have that capacity.

The capacity we do have is to receive God's love in Christ with deep thanksgiving. Here's how this morning's Collect addresses this issue: "Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace."

It sounds almost too good to be true. God dies on a cross for us and then defeats the cross. You and I can't do that, but God can do that, and it is our conviction that God has done that.

So, here we are, gathering week by week, special event by special event, to acknowledge the Love of God in Christ Jesus. Puzzle solved? Yes, the puzzle is solved. But we can't let up. Why? Because we forget. That's why.

We need to be reminded. You and I share many things, but one of the most critical is to acknowledge continually our shortcomings in terms of conviction about this whole Mystery we know as Life and Death.

We need one another. When some of us are down, others are up, reminding us that the key to the Puzzle of Life and Death is that Death is not the end of the Story. Life is. The Good News.

And, those reminders don't always come from those we expect. Sometimes they come from those we least expect. Like the individual who questioned Jesus during a worship service

The message here is to be open to the many avenues by which God approaches us and sustains us and challenges us. When it comes to God, the sign in the window is always "Open." From today's Psalm (**Psalm 111**): "He makes his marvelous works to be remembered."

Well, God's initiative is half the equation. The other half is to accept the invitation and enter. When we do that, life and death are never quite the same. Puzzle? What puzzle? Amen.

Lessons for Fourth Sunday of Epiphany – January 31, 2021

Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth": Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: 'If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or even again see this great fire, I will die.' Then the Lord replied to me: 'They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak – that prophet shall die.'"

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

Psalm 111

Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

Great are the deeds of the Lord!

they are studied by all who delight in them.

His work is full of majesty and splendor,

and his righteousness endures for ever.

He makes his marvelous works to be remembered;

the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

He gives food to those who fear him;

he is ever mindful of his covenant.

He has shown his people the power of his works

in giving them the lands of the nations.

The works of his hands are faithfulness and justice;
all his commandments are sure.

They stand fast for ever and ever,
because they are done in truth and equity.

He sent redemption to his people; he commanded his covenant for ever;
holy and awesome is his Name.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
*those who act accordingly have a good understanding; his praise endures
for ever.*

Second Reading: I Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him. Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrifice to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

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

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went into Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching – with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. **The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.***

Hymns for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 31, 2021

Hymn 498, stanzas 1-2

Beneath the cross of Jesus

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land,
a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noon-tide heat and the burden of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see
the very dying form of one who suffered there for me;
and from my smitten heart with tears two wonders I confess:
the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

Hymn 551, stanzas 1-3

Rise up, ye saints of God

Rise up, ye saints of God! Have done with lesser things,
give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of kings.

Rise up, ye saints of God! His kingdom tarries long:
Lord, bring the day of truth and love and end the night of wrong.

Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where his feet have trod;
and quickened by the Spirit's power, rise up, ye saints of God!

Hymn 535, stanzas 1-2

Ye servants of God

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad his wonderful Name;
the Name all victorious of Jesus extol:
his kingdom is glorious; he rules over all.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
And still he is nigh: his presence we have.
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.