

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

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 565, stanzas 1-3

He who would valiant be

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 51:1-13 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Jeremiah 31:31-34- see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – Hebrews 5:5-10 - see lesson insert

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

Hymn 708, stanzas 1-2

Savior, like a shepherd lead us

The Gospel - John 12:20-33 - 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 of Lent, and Tough Decisions

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, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Heavenly Father, give us patience in decision-making. Fill us with divine strength that we may always follow your lead. Help us to take the path you are showing us even if it seems long. Lord, calm our hearts as we move ahead in your Name. Remind us that you are with us always as a partner who knows sacrifice first hand. *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 516, stanzas 1 and 3

Come down, O Love divine

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, 5th Sunday of Lent, March 21, 2021.

It's appropriate on this 5th Sunday of Lent, the last Sunday before Palm Sunday and the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, that we look at how we approach really tough decisions.

The tough decision for Jesus was whether to fulfill the Covenant that God the Father had made with God the Son. Or perhaps to back-off of that Covenant. The lesson from Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**) begins with these words: "The days are surely coming." No turning back. It's either go or no go for Jesus.

The Covenant with Jesus was an upgrade, as it were, from the Covenant that God had made with the ancestors of Jesus. The ancestors hadn't handled their part of the Covenant as God expected. "It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke."

No, this upgraded Covenant was not group-focused. It was individual-focused. This time, God was not engaged with generations. God was engaged with His own Son. This was personal for God and for his Son. No place to hide. In other words, a decision was necessary.

Jesus knew that to fulfill this upgraded Covenant would probably mean his death. Next week, when we address Palm Sunday and the days that follow, we will relive a dramatic sequence of events. A huge welcome, promises made by followers, promises not kept, betrayal, arrest, trial, sentence, crucifixion. The choice for Jesus was clear. Do what God wanted him to do, or turn his back on God. Fulfill the very personal Covenant or say to God, "I can't do it."

Today's passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (**Hebrews 5:5-10**) contains this verse. "... and having been made perfect, he (Jesus) became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Jesus understood that he was "designated" for certain death and perhaps for new life. But it was the "death" that had to weigh on Jesus. Was he up to this? He wanted to fulfill the wishes of his Father, but could he? Or, more to the point for today, would he?

Which brings us to the tough decisions that we have to make in the course of our personal and professional lives. The Season of Lent and Holy Week are not just about Jesus. These events are about us. Yes, Lent and Holy Week and Easter exist for you and me. To quote Jeremiah: “The days are surely coming.” It’s the 5th Sunday of Lent. Palm Sunday is in sight. And we are about to get caught up in a powerful sequence of events. Are we ready?

In today’s gospel lesson (**John 12:20-33**), Philip and Andrew relay to Jesus a request for a meeting. People were curious about Jesus and wanted to know more. We are not told whether a meeting with the Greeks took place. Instead, we are told that Jesus made it clear to Philip and Andrew that he, Jesus, would need to “lose” his life for their sake, and by extension, for our sake. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” This was the Covenant that God the Father had with God the Son. The Son would die and then be raised. Again, not for his own sake, but for the whole world.

How did Jesus handle this tough decision? “Now my soul is troubled.” But Jesus said more. “And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

Think of the tough decisions that you have made. At some point, as you mulled over options, you chose the most difficult, less selfish, path. You probably said to yourself, “Suck it up, Charlie. Get on with it. Do what you have to do. Do what God would want you to do. Trust that your decision will be used by God to help others.” Today’s Collect puts it this way: “Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found.”

Of course, this would be the best outcome, wouldn’t it? But tough decisions are rarely this clear-cut. And chances are that for every unselfish decision, there would be a selfish one. Welcome to daily living. Welcome to needing continually to come before our God and seek the Lord’s guidance. That’s why our worship always offers confession and forgiveness. Not just one or the other or neither. But both. We need both.

And both dimensions are what we have in Covenants, our focus during this Season of Lent. From Jeremiah: "But his is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," says the Lord; "for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

When you and I enter into serious agreements with one another, we "dot the i's and cross the t's," don't we? Well, this is what God does for us when we agree to a Covenant. Think of the i's and the t's as confession and forgiveness. Not one or the other, but both, and in combination. They are a team.

Would we dare ask God for forgiveness without acknowledging what it is for which we need forgiveness? Or would we even dare acknowledge what it is for which we need forgiveness without some assurance of that forgiveness? Confession isn't offered in the abstract. Nor is forgiveness offered in the abstract.

Soap and water go together. They are at their most effective when used in combination. And not just effective, but joyful. From today's Psalm (**Psalm 51:1-13**), verse 8: "Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed."

Confession and forgiveness. Elements in the Covenant that God had with Jesus, and that God has with you and me through Jesus. But always in combination. A team approach, if you will.

Some very tough days ahead for Jesus. Next Sunday he will enter Jerusalem. At that point, he will know some things that the crowd won't know. And the week that follows will test everybody. But go through it we must. Jesus had to face it. We have to face it. But he was never alone. Nor are we. A team approach, and, thanks be to God, we are part of that team.

Amen.

Lessons for the 5th Sunday of Lent – March 21, 2021

Collect: Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

“The days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,” says the Lord. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” says the Lord; “for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.”

Psalm 51:1-13

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight.

And so you are justified when you speak
and upright in your judgment.

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth,
a sinner from my mother's womb.
For behold, you look for truth deep within me,
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.
Make me hear of joy and gladness
that the body you have broken may rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again
and sustain me with you bountiful Spirit.

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:5-10

Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. As he says also in another place. "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel: John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up; from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Hymns for 5th Sunday of Lent – March 21, 2021

Hymn 565, stanzas 1-3

He who would valiant be

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
let him in constancy follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him round with dismal stories,
do but themselves confound, his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might, though he with giants fight;
he will make good his right to be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, thou dost defend us with thy Spirit,
we know we at the end shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away; I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day to be a pilgrim.

Hymn 708, stanzas 1-2

Savior, like a shepherd lead us

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; much we need thy tender care;
In thy pleasant pastures feed us; for our use they folds prepare,
Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

Early let us seek thy favor, early let us learn thy will;
do thou, Lord, our only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us: love us still.

Hymn 516, stanzas 1 and 3

Come down, O Love divine

Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace, till Love create a place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.