

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Third Sunday of Lent, March 7, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 279, stanzas 1-3

For thy dear saints

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 19 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – Exodus 20:1-17 - see lesson insert

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

Second Reading – I Corinthians 1:18-25 - see lesson insert

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

Hymn 685, stanzas 1-3

Rock of Ages

The Gospel - John 2:13-22 - 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 Third Sunday of Lent, and God's Creation

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 know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of our creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *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 54, one stanza, sung twice

'Tis the gift to be simple

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, 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 7, 2021.

Here we are at the 3rd Sunday of Lent 2021. Our subject matter this Lent is Covenant, specifically the Agreement that God establishes with you and me. Remember: God establishes, and we respond, hopefully with a penitent heart and steadfast faith. In other words, we agree to the terms of the Covenant.

We're here because we acknowledge that God is the One to set the terms of our relationship with Him. We reject the temptation to think that we are in charge of this relationship. No, God is in charge. He establishes. We respond.

So, now that we are clear about who is in charge, let's look this Sunday at how God exercises His "I'm in charge" role. And, what we see is quite interesting and hopeful.

Oh yes, God lays down the Law (**Exodus 20:1-17**) – you shall do this and you shall do that and you shall have no other gods. But God also puts some expectations in the positive. For example, God tells us "not to do any work on the Sabbath," but also commands us to "remember the Sabbath." God commands us "not to bear false witness," but also commands us to "honor our father and mother."

It's a combination of "do's" and "don'ts." And, to God's credit, both the "do's" and the "don'ts" are clearly stated. From **Psalms 119**: "The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes."

The Psalm also reminds us that "in keeping them – the commandments – there is great reward."

So, God has provided both clarity about what to do and what not to do, and satisfaction if we choose to heed the clarity. In other words, the clarity of the Agreement, the Covenant, is a gift in itself. We can't ever say, "What? I didn't know that's what you meant. I didn't know you expected me to do that or not do that."

There are lots of fuzzy things in the world, but the Commandments of the Lord are not one of them. We know what we are supposed to do and what we are not supposed to do. God has provided clarity. And God has even underscored that

clarity in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We have all the information we need to be responsible and content citizens in God's Kingdom.

Yet too often a "penitent heart" and "steadfast faith" elude us. Or, so it seems. There are shortcomings that we don't take credit for. And there are things about God that we don't like. We are not sorry, and we are grumpy. What a combination! Why does God put up with us anyway? Who wants a grumpy creature who doesn't admit his or her shortcomings?

Remarkably, the answer here is God wants us. The same God who has every reason to be angry with us instead invites us to acknowledge our shortcomings – a penitent heart – and return with confidence to a right relationship – steadfast faith.

"Wait just a minute" many say. This doesn't sound right. It doesn't sound possible. Wishful thinking – yes. But right thinking? "We don't think so."

Well, we're not the first to be skeptical. St. Paul deals with skepticism in today's passage from First Corinthians (**I Corinthians 1:18-25**). "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." Do you mean that a "penitent heart" and "steadfast faith" are powerful enough to counter all that's wrong with the Creation? Do you seriously believe this, Brother Paul?

Yes, "those who are perishing," we seriously believe exactly that. Remember that it is not our penitence and faith that make the difference. We don't turn things around on our own. God does that in cooperation with us. Our part of this relationship is to accept what God does on our behalf, especially in Jesus.

In today's Gospel (**John 2:13-22**), Jesus gets so mad with those misusing the Temple that he turns their money-changing tables upside down. He corrects behavior, and offers in its place a proper understanding of the Power of the Lord.

The point of this episode is that skepticism about God is nothing new, nor is skepticism the final word. Faced with a Temple full of skeptics, Jesus responds, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

One might say that we have here an example of Jesus raising hell in the Temple. Up and out with those money-changing tables.

God's Covenant with you and me is straight forward. Expectations are clear. And the consequences of both meeting those expectations and not meeting those expectations are clear as well. Here are things God wants us to do. And here are things that sometimes we don't want to do.

And here are the consequences for obedience and disobedience. It's pretty simple, at least in principle. Not simple in practice, but why should it be simple? That wouldn't be God-worthy, nor us-worthy. We are capable of a penitent heart and steadfast faith. We have the tools to obey. Jesus died and rose again to underscore those tools. A right heart and faith are well within our grasp.

God goes on. And lest you forget, I'm going to remind you every year during a Season called Lent that I have high expectations for you, including a level of forgiveness and fresh starts that no other way of life offers. It's an offer that you shouldn't refuse. You can make mistakes, but you can't go wrong. I'm there to pick you up and lead you back to the proper path.

This very positive conviction is expressed in all sorts of ways, including a song by Blake Shelton that I recently ran across while looking into the origins of the phrase "raising hell." The song title is "Jesus got a tight grip." Here's one of the verses:

'Cause Jesus got a tight grip on my soul
 And he ain't letting go, he ain't letting go
The Devil reaches out but he can't grab hold
 'Cause Jesus got a tight grip on my soul
 And he ain't letting go he ain't letting go
Might have a little rust on my halo
 But when I'm gone I know where I'll go
 'Cause Jesus got a tight grip on my soul.

Well, if Blake Shelton isn't enough for one day, we will sing at the conclusion of today's service the Shaker song: "'Tis the gift to be simple." With the final phrase: "... will be our delight till by turning, turning, we come round right."

Which is what the Season of Lent is all about: "Coming round right."

Amen

Lessons for Third Sunday of Lent – March 7, 2021

Collect: Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

God spoke all these words to Moses on Mount Sinai: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the firmament shows his handiwork.

One day tells its tale to another,
and one night imparts knowledge to another.

Although they have no words or language,
and their voices are not heard,

Their sound has gone out into all lands,
and their message to the ends of the world.

In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun;
*It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a
champion to run its course.*

It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of
it again;
Nothing is hidden from its burning heart.

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent;

The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

By them also is your servant enlightened,
and in keeping them there is great reward;

Who can tell how often he offends?
cleanse me from my secret faults.

Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion
over me;
then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your
sight,
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Gospel: John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Hymns for the 3rd Sunday of Lent – March 7, 2021

Hymn 279, stanzas 1-3

For thy dear saints

For thy dear saints, O Lord, who strove in thee to live,
who followed thee, obeyed, adored, our grateful hymn receive.

They all in life and death, with thee their Lord in view,
learned from thy Holy Spirit's breath to suffer and to do.

Thine earthly members fit to join thy saints above,
in one communion every knit, one fellowship of love.

Hymn 685, stanzas 1-3

Rock of Ages

Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood from thy wounded side that flowed,
be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Should my tears for ever flow, should my zeal no languor know,
All for sin could not atone: thou must save, and thou alone;
in my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyelids close in death,
when I rise to worlds unknown and behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Hymn 54 (sung twice)

'Tis the gift to be simple

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained
to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
to turn, turn, will be our delight
till be turning, turning we come round right.