

**Worship Service**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 2, 2021**  
**St. Christopher-by-the-Sea**  
**Gibson Island, Maryland**

**Introduction** – The Rev. Charles Rowins

**Hymn 544, stanzas 1-2**

*Jesus shall reign*

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 Fifth Sunday of Easter**

The Lord be with you.

*And also with you.*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**First Reading:** Acts 8:26-40 – see lesson insert

**Psalm 22:24-30** – see lesson insert

**Second Reading:** I John 4:7-21 – see lesson insert

**Hymn 474, stanzas 1-2**

*When I survey the wondrous cross*

**Gospel:** John 15:1-8 – 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***

*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 657, stanzas 1-2**

*Love divine, all loves excelling*

## **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 Easter, May 2, 2021.**

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” **(John 15:1-8)**

Jesus, the One we call Lord, the One to whom we have pledged allegiance, is a straight shooter. He is crystal clear about how he feels about things and people, including you and me as individuals and as a congregation.

He has high expectations. Not because he has assigned these expectations, but because we have promised to meet these expectations. From **Psalm 22**: “I will perform my vows.” Every time we recite the Apostles Creed or offer the Lord’s Prayer, we sign on the dotted line. No one forges our signature. We enter into the agreement. We make the promise. And, week after week, we renew our commitment.

And every now and then, situations arise where we have the opportunity to fulfill our pledge to Christ. We see one of those situations in today’s lesson from Acts **(Acts 8:26-40)**. Philip is summoned by a court official who is riding in a chariot. The Holy Spirit tells Philip to respond, which he does. He goes over to the chariot, climbs in, and learns that the official needs help understanding a passage of scripture. Philip not only clarifies the passage, but baptizes the official. Philip then continues proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to others in the region.

Philip had signed on to help. The Holy Spirit took him up on his offer. And a good deed was done.

Things like this happen to you and me. They might happen anyway, but they definitely happen in response to you and me promising to help our Lord. It’s not Jesus calling our bluff. We are the ones following through on our promise. We know what we should do. And, every now and then, an “I need your help” situation presents itself, as it did for Philip. The ball is now in our court. We asked for it. We got it.

There is a phrase for these moments: “Come to Jesus.” The Urban Dictionary describes the phrase this way: “a moment of realization; an aha moment; a life-changing moment.” Sounds like an “epiphany,” doesn’t it?

At any rate, the ball is in our court. We said that we would handle it. And now we have it. Is this our worst nightmare or a wish fulfilled?

For you and me, the answer is “wish fulfilled.” It’s the opportunity we signed up for. Our gospel today is clear: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

An opportunity to serve the Lord, to glorify the Lord. It’s in helping others that we say to God, “Thank you.”

It’s a win-win situation. We help someone. That’s a win for the “someone.” And, in helping, we glorify God. And that’s a win for God. And, guess what, there’s yet another win. We win. We feel better. We feel on track. We feel that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. Win-win-win. It doesn’t get much better than that.

Now, there are plenty of people who have decided that two “wins” is enough. We help others, which is good for them and we feel good about it. Win-win. The third win – good for God – is for many too fuzzy, too this, too that. Let’s just go for two, not three.

We know those people. We might have been those people. We might be those people right now. There is simply too much bad news that proclaiming the Good News seems inappropriate. Where is God anyway during a Pandemic? Has God forgotten about us? Is God punishing the whole world? Or, is there no God? Win-win-win? No way, we’ll stick with win-win, thank you very much.

It’s a choice, isn’t it? Life is full of them. And, for many of these choices, including religious faith, we want to say “Yes, I believe,” but the realities of daily living, including Pandemics, make that positive assertion really hard. Intellectual honesty suggests that we stick with just two wins, not three.

But, wait just a minute. Who is defining “intellectual honesty”? For you and me and millions of people over thousands of years, “intellectual honesty” is a broad

term, not a narrow one. Surely there is room in the definition for the Creator of the Universe. And if that Creator chooses to remain involved in the Creation, including the generation of a first century carpenter and our generation, who are we to say that only two “wins” are acceptable, not “three.”

I’ll take my chances with three. Win - Win - Win.

Without that third “Win,” Jesus wouldn’t have risen from the dead, Philip the disciple wouldn’t have believed, the court official in the chariot wouldn’t have asked to be baptized, and you and I twenty centuries later wouldn’t be in this place. But we’re here, believing and sharing and praising God.

This conviction of win – win – win makes me wonder about the word win-dow. Where does that word come from? It literally means “what you see through.” A window therefore is an enabler. Think of the phrase “window of opportunity.”

For us, Jesus is a window. Without Jesus, we would be overwhelmed by God. We would be blinded. Our eyes would be insufficient to comprehend the Glory. From today’s Epistle (**I John 4:7-21**): “No one has ever seen God.” But, “If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Jesus allows us to get up close and personal with God. Jesus is God’s way of getting close and personal with us. And when we realize that gift and accept it, we want to share that insight with others. This sharing is the third member of the WIN trifecta.

Now, when you think of the word “trifecta,” what comes to mind? It’s gambling, isn’t it? The race track. The casino. The lottery. Really long odds of winning, but with a huge payoff.

What’s the equivalent in religion? It’s believing, isn’t it. “I believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” That assertion is a gamble on our part, in that it might be just wishful thinking. But it sure doesn’t feel that way, does it?

We see God the Father in action. The Creation is all around us. And we know God the Son. Look how the Good News has spread to us over centuries and through us we hope to more centuries. And – the point for today – we can know God the Holy Spirit.

And just how do we know God the Holy Spirit? By doing the Lord's work. By glorifying God. By sharing the Good News. By helping our neighbor. By responding to that court official, interpreting for him Holy Scripture, and baptizing him in the Lord's Name. There are many ways by which we can help others. And they all feel good. Win – Win – Win.

For you and me in this place, the equivalent of scratching a winning lottery ticket is receiving a thin wafer of bread and a sip of wine, and then sharing that experience, that Good News, that touch, with someone else.

Amen.

## Lessons for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – May 2, 2021

**Collect:** Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **First Reading: Acts 8:26-40**

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open his mouth.  
In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

## Psalm 22

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 souls 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: I John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he is us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

Those who said, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brother and sisters also.

**Gospel: John 15:1-8**

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

## Hymns for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – May 2, 2021

### Hymn 544, stanzas 1-2

*Jesus shall reign*

Jesus shall reign where-e'er the sun doth his successive journeys run;  
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moon shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made, and praises throng to crown his head;  
his Name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice.

### Hymn 474, stanzas 1-2

*When I survey the wondrous cross*

When I survey the wondrous cross  
where the young Prince of Glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
save in the cross of Christ, my God:  
all the vain things that charm me most  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

### Hymn 657, stanzas 1-2

*Love divine, all loves excelling*

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.