

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 9th Sunday after Pentecost, August 7, 2022.

Welcome to Assurance Sunday. Not insurance, but assurance. Not a promise to cover loss should loss occur – insurance - but a promise never to be out of God’s love, no matter what – assurance.

We often use these terms interchangeably, but they are different. “I assure you that if you get in an accident, I will cover the cost of repairs.” We don’t say “I insure you that if you get in an accident, I will cover the cost of repairs.” We say rather “I assure you.”

“I assure you” carries the sense of “no matter what.” “I insure you” carries the sense of “if that, then this.” Assurance is unconditional. Insurance is conditional.

Assurance is “I give you my word.” An interesting phrase in itself. Capitalize “word” and we get the Word of God. We receive Jesus. Christ is the Lord’s assurance of God’s Love.

We can treat this as a word game. Or we can fall on our knees and say, “Thank you, Lord. With this assurance, I can lead my life more fully. I can be the person I know I should be. I can be more happy, more confident, more assured. Thank you, Lord.”

No document to keep in a safe. No quarterly payments to make. No laminated card to show an officer. Rather, an inner sense that God has my back. No conditional promise. It’s simply the way God has structured things. You – you, an individual, and you, a society – are loved. Period. No discussion. Now, say “Thank you,” by doing a better job as a human being.

The challenge here is whether we can be forthright with our “Thank you.” Are we sure about God’s assurance? Divine assurance doesn’t mean much if we don’t accept that assurance and pass it on. God’s assurance is designed not just to comfort us as individuals, but to make a difference in the lives of others and of the whole creation.

And how do we do that? How does little old me, how does little old you – with all due respect - deepen the faith of others? What are we doing with the Divine assurance that we feel? Surely we are doing something in addition to feeling better ourselves.

Our final hymn today is “Watchman, tell us of the night” One of the phrases is “See, it – a beaming star - bursts o’er all the earth.” The Good News, spread abroad. And we are not just recipients; we are the spreaders.

Now, God doesn’t have to rely on us. But, if becoming a human being –which God did in the Incarnation - is any indication, God wants us on His team. Christmas is not just an invitation – “Come, if you please.” It is an expectation. It’s what God wants.

And it’s more than what God wants. It’s a promise. In its own way, it is assurance. “I love you no matter what!” Not insurance, as in “I will love you if” No, I love you, period!”

The insurance that you and I are used to – house, automobiles, travel, life – are expressed in lengthy documents, where “I”s are dotted, and “T”s are crossed. Abraham’s comprehensive policy was shorter. From Genesis: “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

Actually, there was a “T” crossed. Jesus did so when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, knowing that crucifixion was a possibility. For another day, though.

For this day in the Season of Pentecost, we don’t get ready to die. We get ready to live. Or at least live with greater confidence. We have God’s Assurance, after all. It doesn’t get better than this, unless we choose to ignore or belittle or push back.

And even then – even if we react with unbelief – God’s decision, God’s offer of new life, God’s assurance, if you will, stands. That is God’s prerogative. As Creator, God has that choice. And, what you and I believe in this place, is that God has made a choice. And that choice is positive. And that choice is there for the receiving, and remember, the sharing.

And, when we choose to receive God's unconditional love, "our heart rejoices," to borrow a phrase from today's Psalm (**Psalm 33:21**).

And, as today's lesson from Hebrews (**Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**) reminds us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It's one of the great verses of Scripture, and a frequent phrase when one begins Bible study. It's a reminder that you and I have a critical role in the whole enterprise we know as life and death. God can assure us of everlasting love a thousand times over, but God leaves work for us to do. We have to accept that love.

That acceptance is in part what we do on Sunday mornings. We gather to hear again God's Promise, God's Assurance, that we are loved no matter what! Not insurance, which is grounded on a condition, but a promise that whatever our response we are loved. Period. Or, as our lesson from Genesis (**Genesis 15:5**) puts it: "So shall your descendants be."

Today's gospel (**Luke 12:32-40**) reminds us to be ready, to be alert. Readiness is a huge part of the Christian Faith. If we are not ready, if we choose to ignore God's love, we don't negate that love. We simply put it on hold. God's love is always there. We can be assured of that presence. God's love is not conditional. It is our response to that love that makes a difference.

As individuals and as a congregation, we are decision-makers. God has made His decision. Have we made ours? Well, we are on our way, aren't we? We are here together, working hard, not to create God's Love, but to receive it and give thanks for it. And to remember that the "it" is in fact a carpenter from Nazareth, who is central to the world's greatest Assurance Policy ever!

Amen.

