

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Last Sunday of Pentecost, November 20, 2022.

Today is the last Sunday in this church year. It features the Crucifixion, an unhappy and undeserved ending to Jesus. And it takes place on a mountain top known as the Skull.

It's a place of death. And it is designed to discourage people like Jesus from upsetting the applecart. Well, that didn't work with Jesus. He really upset the applecart, and continues to do so, centuries later. Here we are.

But, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's focus just on the crucifixion and in particular on the three people who were crucified that day.

There is Jesus, a carpenter and preacher, and two thieves. Note that the second thief accepts his fate. "We have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing."

Jesus is impressed with this distinction and says, "Truly I tell you, second thief, today you will be with me in Paradise." We're not told what Jesus said to the first thief.

But, let's assume that Jesus felt the same way about the first thief. After all, the love of Jesus was and is broad and deep. It encompasses all. The distinction is not in who is covered by the love of Jesus, but by those who accept that love and share that love.

This distinction is often converted to those who are saved and those who are not. Let's be clear. We are all saved in Christ. We don't have a choice in that. That is God's call, not ours. Our choice rather is to accept that salvation or ignore it.

Or, perhaps, we even throw it back at the Lord. We do that sometimes, don't we? "I don't want to be saved. At least by you, Jesus. I'm taking a different route. Or no route at all. I'm confused."

Isn't it interesting that when we react with this level of indignation and/or confusion, we quietly add, "But don't shut the door. I might change my mind."

There's a spectrum, isn't there? Firm belief on one end and shaky belief on the other end. You and I are somewhere on this spectrum. And we move about, don't we? Sometimes we are drawn to Jesus as Savior, and other times we are just confused about who this person is. Not confused in the extreme, as in total doubt – we are here after all – but just not convinced.

A temporary condition perhaps. But that's okay. Conviction is a really high bar. Curiosity is a high bar too, but a little short of conviction.

Think of high-jump competition or pole-vault competition. Between practice and competition, there are lots of different heights and lots of different misses. And sometimes, maybe often, we clear the bar. Not because we're so great, but, in the case of religion, because the Lord is patient.

All of us, I suspect, in our role as parents or godparents or grandparents or teachers or neighbors or public servants, have lowered the bar just a bit so that a child and/or an adult will experience some success.

From today's Psalm: "Though its waters rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble at its tumult. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold."

And from today's passage from Jeremiah: "I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply."

The passage from Colossians uses this phrase: "the fullness of God is pleased to dwell."

The point of all these passages is that God is involved, God is active, God is interested, God is available to assist, sometimes in overwhelming fashion and other times with just a touch, a nod, a thought, a promise.

Staying with track and field, notice how often winners of running events in particular point to the sky when they hit the tape. It's instinctive. It's "Thank you, Lord," not for making me faster than the others, but for being there with me

through all the practices and all the false starts and all the second place finishes and maybe even last place finishes.

This is what you and I do when we worship together and address God. We say we're sorry. We say thank you. We say we'll try harder. We say don't stop loving us and all the others who aren't present. In our words and actions and hopes and dreams, we point to the sky and say "Thank you, Lord."

Our final hymn today is "Love divine, all loves excelling." It's a great hymn. It's a hopeful hymn. And it's a thankful hymn. It ends with a kind of Trinity: "wonder, love, and praise." The theological partner is "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer."

Whatever the weight that we're feeling right now, whatever the fears, whatever the shortcomings, whatever the uncertainties, we can be hopeful that God is with us.

Think second thief in today's gospel. He acknowledges that he has been condemned justly and that crucifixion is what he deserves. In a way, we are that thief. We have fallen short of our own good intentions, never mind God's expectations.

But the second thief didn't stop there, and neither do we. Like the thief, we say simply, "Remember me please when I knock on your door." And what we hear, what we feel, what we sense, and what we in turn share, are the words of the Lord: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Is it any wonder why you and I in this place say "Thank you, Lord."

Amen.

Service of Morning Prayer
Last Sunday of Pentecost – November 20, 2022

Hymn 525 – stanzas 1-3 - The Church's one foundation

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the word:
from, heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed;
yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

BCP - Page 40 - Greeting

I was glad when they said unto me, "We will go into the house of the Lord."

BCP – Pages 41 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his Holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

BCP – Pages 41-42 – Confession and Absolution

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have 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 we 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.*

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.*

BCP – Page 42 - Gloria

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.

BCP – Pages 44-45 – Venite

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 46

First Reading – Jeremiah 23:1-6

Second Reading – Colossians 1:11-20

Hymn 408 – Praise to God

Sing praise to God who reigns above, the god of all creation,
the God of power, the God of love, the God of our salvation;
with healing balm my soul he fills, and every faithless murmur stills;
to God all praise and glory.

What God's almighty power hath made, his gracious mercy keepeth;
by morning glow or evening shade his watchful eye ne'er sleepeth.
Within the kingdom of his might, lo! all is just and all is right:
to God all praise and glory.

Let all who name Christ's holy Name give God all praise and glory;
let all who know his power proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
Cast each false idol from its throne, the Lord is good, and he alone:
to God all praise and glory.

Gospel – Luke 23:33-43

Sermon – The Reverend Charles Rowins

BCP – page 358 - The Apostles' Creed

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.*

BCP – page 54 – the Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.

BCP – page 55 – Suffrages A

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.

Collect for Last Sunday after Pentecost

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in our well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

BCP Collect for Sundays

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

BCP p. 832 - Prayer for Self-Dedication

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly thine, utterly dedicated unto thee; and then use us, we pray thee, as thou wilt, and always to thy glory and the welfare of thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

BCP – pages 58-59 - 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

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long my our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – 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.*

BCP – page 59 – 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 657 – 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.

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

