

Worship Service
7th Sunday after Pentecost – July 11, 2021
St. Christopher-by-the-Sea
Gibson Island, Maryland

Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 620, stanzas 1-2

Jerusalem, my happy home

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 7th Sunday after Pentecost

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Amos 7:7-15 – see lesson insert

Psalm 85:8-13 – see lesson insert

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14 – see lesson insert

Hymn 637, stanzas 1-2

How firm a foundation

Gospel: Mark 6:14-29 – 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 671, stanzas 1-3

Amazing Grace

Dismissal

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

Lessons for Pentecost 7 – July 11, 2021

Collect: O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Amos 7:7-15

This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said, “See I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’” And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

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

Psalm 85:8-13

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying,

For he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him.

Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,

that his glory may swell in our land.

Mercy and truth have met together;

righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring up from the earth,

and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

The Lord will indeed grant prosperity,

and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness shall go before him,

and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Epistle: Ephesians 1:3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on the earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

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

Gospel: Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."

And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mothers, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

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

Hymns for 7th Sunday after Pentecost – July 11, 2021

Hymn 620, stanzas 1-2

Jerusalem, my happy home

Jerusalem, my happy home, when shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see?

Thy saints are crowned with glory great; they see God face to face;
they triumph still, they still rejoice in that most happy place.

Hymn 637, stanzas 1-2

How firm a foundation

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in the excellent word!
What more can he say that to you he hath said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed!
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strength thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

Hymn 671, stanzas 1-3

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 7th Sunday after Pentecost, July 11, 2021.

Well, these lessons are cheery, aren't they? How did they make it into the collection of lessons that we study each week? What editor thought a lesson about beheading was a good idea for a Sunday morning? Is the purpose of a weekly set of lessons to disturb us or comfort us?

We come for comfort, don't we? We can listen to the nightly news or read the daily paper to disturb us. Please Church, spare us the gruesome details. Assure us that Good defeats Evil, not submits to Evil.

Think about it, though. Would we be attracted to a tradition that offered only the best of humanity? I don't think so. We would be suspicious. We would claim false advertising. We would argue that our lives are far more complicated than doing the right things all the time. We know better.

Yes, sometimes our children ask us to do things for them that we know are wrong. The children might not know that they are wrong, but we know. We've been there. And sometimes we ask our children to do things for us that we know are wrong. Can you say "college admission scandal"?

Sometimes scripture can be awkward, even painful. But, isn't honest confronting of awkwardness and pain one of the reasons we respond to Scripture? At some level, we appreciate the honesty of Scripture. Thank God, someone is not only asking the tough questions, but dealing with them.

Enter a whole bunch of Biblical characters who stepped up to do the right thing. And enter one in particular who sacrificed his own life so that you and I, centuries later, could deal with the challenges that confront us and our children.

Our custom is to read the Epistle before the Gospel. Today, though, let's reverse the order. Let's consider the beheading of John the Baptist first (**Mark 6:27**), and then hear these words from St. Paul. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" In other words, a blessing strong enough to counter profound ugliness.

At the end of Paul's lesson (**Ephesians 1:14**), there is a "pledge," a "promise," an "assurance." "This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory."

"Inheritance toward redemption." God has decided to point us in the right direction. "Toward redemption." What a pledge, what a promise, what an attitude to bring to daily living. We're on the right track. "Toward redemption."

This is God's choice, not ours. If it was up to us – that is, if our record of obedience was the chief factor in redemption – we would be in trouble. But God didn't, doesn't, leave it up to us. God steps in and takes charge. In a whole bunch of ways, God redirects us. "Not that way, but this way."

Can we feel God grabbing our shoulders and turning us in a more positive direction? Yes, sometimes we have that sensation. That's why we're here today. That's why we gather. We remember with thanksgiving God's pledge to point us in the right direction.

From today's Psalm: "I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him."

Sometimes, though, that "turning" in the right direction is a challenge. It's not as if we are blind-folded. We know what we're doing. We know where we're headed. And we know that we need some help. Maybe not 180 degrees. Maybe only a 10 degree turn. Maybe we're heading in the right direction, but we could be headed in an even more positive direction.

We're all different in the degree of correction needed. But we're all the same in that some degree of correction is necessary if we are to experience a right relationship with our Creator. That "right relationship" is captured beautifully in today's Psalm (**Psalm 85:10**): "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

That is the "pledge," the "promise," the "assurance" that is at the center of our faith.

The prophet Amos describes it in a different manner (**Amos 7:8**). Enter the image of the “plumb line.”

“See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by.”

God doesn’t grab us by the shoulders and position us and tell us not to move ever again. No, God “sets a plumb line” and pledges, promises, assures us that the more we can align ourselves with this “plumb line,” the more satisfying our life will be, and, through us, the more satisfying life will be for others.

But, there’s nothing automatic about aligning ourselves with the plumb line set by God. We see this tension in today’s Gospel.

Herod knows something is not right (**Mark 6:16**). And his fear has to do with the reports about Jesus gaining respect among the people. “Who is this Jesus anyway?” Herod asks. “Could he be John the Baptist who has been raised from the dead” This possibility frightens Herod, because Herod knows that he, Herod, had John the Baptist killed as a gift to his daughter. Is Jesus a form of revenge?

Well, as we know, Herod and Jesus will meet in person. For Herod, Jesus is a bad dream, and the bad dream is just beginning. You don’t want to mess with the Son of God. Herod is a slower learner.

We can be slow learners too. We can be conscious of the plumb line that God sets, and exercise our free will to ignore the plumb line. For Amos, ignorance was an option. He could have returned to his role as herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees, but chose instead to “prophesy to his people Israel.”

Good for Amos. And good for you and me anytime we have the option of aligning ourselves with God’s plumb line or ignoring the plumb line, and chose to align. It’s never easy, but it is what our Lord desires. And, in our best moments, it is what we desire, because we know from experience that, when it comes to God, alignment is far better than misalignment. We also know from experience that if we ask God for help, we just might well feel our shoulders move in a right direction. *Amen.*

