

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 5th Sunday of Easter, May 19, 2019.

In this morning's Collect, we are given an assignment, namely "to know Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life." The suggestion is that, if we pursue this assignment, if we get to know Jesus more fully, we might well experience "eternal life."

Well, let's say that we want to do this. We're up for it. We've tried all sorts of techniques for achieving a more satisfying life, but nothing seems to have worked yet. So, let's give Jesus a try. In particular, let's explore Jesus as way, as truth, as life. If the Collect is correct, this exploration will prove really satisfying.

As a starting point, we are given four lessons to ponder: one from the Acts of the Apostles (**Acts 11:1-18**), one from the Book of Psalms (**Psalm 148**), one from the Book of Revelation (**Revelation 21:1-6**), and one from the Gospel of John (**John 13:31-35**).

Well, if we were hoping that these lessons would serve as a kind of road map and schedule, we are probably disappointed.

The passage from Acts is all over the place. We're not sure what to make of it. Peter refers to the content as a "trance." He has a vision with four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. He moves between cities and encounters first three men and then six brothers and then the Holy Spirit and then both Jews and Gentiles. A dream? A nightmare? A treasure map?

The insert suggests a refrain following this lesson. "Sing to the Lord a new song." Well, we're not sure if even the Lord would understand. But, moving on.

Psalm 126. Everybody is praising the Lord. It sounds like a great party. Exactly what we are looking for. But it doesn't tell us how to get there. Where are the instructions? Do we need an invitation? Is there an RSVP? Can we bring a guest? If we're not quite ready to shout "Hallelujah," can we still come?

More questions than answers. Maybe the Revelation passage will help. Well, yes and no. Yes, it all sounds great. "He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death

will be no more.” Wow. What an ending. Alpha and Omega , all wrapped up in a loving God.

But wait, this loving God tells us to “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Are we ready for that assignment? Do we know enough? Are we sure of what we are proclaiming? Does God really want us to take this on?

Maybe our fourth lesson will reassure us. So, here we are at the Last Supper. Jesus takes the occasion to tell us that he will be with us only a little longer. But we need help. And now he is going to leave us? “Where I am going, you cannot come.” What are we to do now? Well, he goes on. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

Well, finally, some direction. But can we really do what Jesus wants us to do, expects to do, commands us to do? Maybe if he was there by our side. But he’s leaving now. He has more confidence in us than we have in ourselves. What does he know that we don’t know? Who’s going to help us to love one another? Who’s going to forgive us when we don’t achieve this goal? Who’s going to say, “It’s okay. Try it again. You won’t be alone. Soon the Holy Spirit will be with you to guide you.”

This is exhausting. I thought knowing Jesus as the way, the truth and the life would be simpler than this. But apparently not. We will have to work hard at all this, especially in his absence. Welcoming the Holy Spirit will be interesting, but are we up to that? Do we still want that? Is “Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life” still our driving force?

Well, I think it just might be. We’re here after all. We are grateful for the new life of Easter. We are energized to follow the Master. We do love one another and we are prepared to support one another in this very demanding business of sharing the Good News. We know we cannot do this on our own.

Besides, Lord, that’s why you came to us in the first place, isn’t it? That’s why you chose the Hebrew people as proclaimers for your very existence and your purpose for the whole Created Order. That’s why you elected Mary to bear your Son, to be Incarnate, to give his life as a sacrifice for the whole world and to be raised as a sign of Victory. You haven’t left us alone. You are still with us. Maybe we can do what you want us to do.

Remember the trance from the Acts passage and the question that Peter raised at the end of that passage: “Who was I that I could hinder God?” The answer to that question for Peter, and for you and me, is “I don’t have the power to hinder God.” If God wants to save the world, and wants you and me to participate in that mission, God will find a way to get the job done. We might disqualify ourselves by claiming inability, but that won’t stop God. The issue for us is whether we will drop out or participate in what God has already decided to do.

“Who was I that I could hinder God?” Just raising that possibility is an ego trip for you and me. As if we could prevent God from saving the Creation. Stopping God isn’t going to happen. God wants desperately for you and me to participate in the Victory of Life over Death, of Good over Evil. But God won’t demand our participation. God won’t punish us if we don’t feel up to the task. No, we will punish ourselves. Not to worry, though. God will weep for us, and keep trying to energize us. The Good News for us is that the option to participate is always available.

This is the vision from the Revelation passage. “It is done! I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

Again, the words of today’s Collect: “Grant us so perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leadeth to eternal life.” The way, the truth and the life. This is really is a recipe. And God wants us to follow the recipe. Lots of ingredients, but none more important than the Son of God. Our response to Jesus is our RSVP. We can say no to God. We can say maybe another time. Or we can say, “Here I am, send me. Here we are, send us.”

It’s a lot more fun and a lot more satisfying on many levels joining the party than declining. You and I are at various stages of saying yes. These stages aren’t static. We move from one to the other many times in the course of a single life. But isn’t it true that we are at our happiest when we feel in tune with, in touch with, in sync with the Carpenter from Nazareth. He is not only a really interesting figure, but perhaps, just perhaps, the Savior of the World. Why would we turn down that invitation? Why indeed? Amen.