

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland. 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, October 28, 2018.

Our final hymn today is a new one for most of us. It is a favorite of John's, however, and he is certain that we will like it. And, after listening to a recording of it, I am certain too.

We have been waiting to introduce this hymn until there was a good fit with the lessons. Today is that day. From Mark's gospel (**Mark 10:46-52**): "Jesus said to the blind beggar, 'Go, your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way."

The beggar, now with sight restored, gets up and follows Jesus. The man is deeply grateful for what Jesus has done for him. You can hear him singing, "Then, Lord, shall I fully know – Not till then – how much I owe." This is the refrain of our new hymn.

This sense of gratitude is the key element in our faith, and is present, either for a particular loving act that we attribute to God, or for a lifetime of loving acts that we attribute to God. We might not be able to pinpoint when this gratitude began. It might have hit us like a flash, such as rescue from danger, or in a collection of flickers, a growing sense that there is a God and this God is on our side.

Whatever the nature of this gratitude, it is deep and we are grateful and we want to say thank you. "Then, Lord, shall I fully know – Not till then – how much I owe."

This morning's psalm (**Psalms 126**) reflects this spirit. "Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses of the Negev. Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves."

Our new hymn and these lessons reflect the two great forces of human existence: joy and sorrow, good times and bad times, grateful times and angry times, hopeful times and I give up times, resurrection and crucifixion. Whatever our background, whatever our circumstances, we experience both of these forces.

And, at some point, we make a decision for ourselves, and, we hope, for those we love. We name one of these forces as more powerful than the other, and carry on

with this belief. Is crucifixion more powerful than resurrection, or is resurrection more powerful than crucifixion?

Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 31:7-9**) answers this question in our first lesson today: “With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back. I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble.” Pain? By all means? Relief? Yes.

And what makes this conclusion really powerful is where this relief comes from and how this relief is achieved. Jesus, son of a carpenter, is crucified. A death as ugly as ugly can be. But in the coolness of the tomb, God raises him to new life.

True? Or false? That’s the question for all of us. Weeping or joy? Which is stronger? Which endures? In which do we place our hope?

You and I are here either because we have opted for resurrection, or at least we are considering this option. We don’t deny crucifixion. We don’t deny pain. We don’t deny sin. We accept all of that. We know it too well. We are responsible for some of it. But we don’t put our trust in this negative force. We opt for the positive force. Good beats Evil. That’s the bottom line. It’s one heck of a battle, but One will win, and that’s the One you and I worship.

Today’s lesson from Hebrews (**Hebrews 7:23-28**) contrasts Jesus as “high priest” with “lesser priests.” This is a pretty uncomfortable message for lesser priests, particularly those “who are prevented by death from continuing in office.” Not so Jesus, however. “He holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.” And because “he continues forever, he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him.”

Jesus saves. That’s our hope. That’s our belief. That’s our trust. That’s our conclusion, in some cases, after a lifetime of searching. The choice between weeping and joy is the hallmark of the human being. The choice for joy is the hallmark of those who sing “Then Lord, shall I fully know – Not till then – how much I owe.”

Clearly, though, there are many who do not choose Jesus as the source of great joy. Well, if not Jesus, who, what? Yes, there are other impressive historical

figures, but do we feel we owe them allegiance, as expressed in this hymn? I don't think so.

Look at the language of the hymn.

When this passing world is done, when has sunk yon glaring sun
When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty not my own
When the praise of Heav'n I hear, loud as thunders to the ear
Chosen not for good in me, wakened up from wrath to flee

This is not praise of an impressive historical figure – a great warrior or official or inventor or artist – it is praise of the One in charge of everything, including our fate.

Great warriors and officials and inventors and artists do great deeds, but they do not SAVE. How often do people worship Dwight Eisenhower or Queen Elizabeth or Thomas Edison or Andrew Wyeth? It is not talent that we worship. It is not talent that we look to for forgiveness. It is not talent that we look to for salvation.

No, the One we look to for Salvation is God, including and especially, God in human flesh, Jesus of Nazareth.

The blind beggar in today's gospel sat on the roadside day after day. During those weeks and months and years, all sorts of important people passed by. But it wasn't until Jesus approached that the beggar cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" People told him to keep quiet, but he cried again, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The blind beggar knew something that the others did not.

You and I are like the blind beggar. We know something too. There are all sorts of people who pass us by who could help us in a variety of ways. But, there is only One on whom we can count to "grant us mercy" and be confident that this indeed not only can happen, but has happened. "Then, Lord, shall I fully know – Not till then – how much I owe."

Thank you, John, for the hymn suggestion. And, thank you, God, for your undeserved love in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn – When this Passing World is Done

When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ on high,
Looking o'er life's history;
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see thee as thou art,
Love thee with un-sinning heart;
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

When the praise of heaven I hear,
Loud as thunder to the ear,
Loud as many waters noise,
Sweet as harps melodious voice;
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified;
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By thy love, how much I owe.