

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,
Gibson Island, Maryland, 25th Sunday after Pentecost, November 11, 2018.**

Today is another of those Sundays that deserve a special name. So, let's call today "When all is said and done Sunday."

This title assumes that life deals a mixed hand. Not all aces, and not all deuces. We encounter some of both, with all the intervening cards as well. Lows and highs. Confusion and Clarity. Tears and smiles. Failure and Success. War and Peace. And with everything between these extremes.

The mix of these highs and lows varies from person to person. What does not vary is an assortment of some kind. We all experience a mixed bag. And we all wonder what it means? Not what does each ingredient mean, but what the mix means.

We know people who seemingly have it made, yet are not happy. And we know people who clearly have little, yet are exuberant. What these different people have in common is a mix of blessings.

And what they also have in common is a desire and a need to put the mix in some kind of context. In other words, "when all is said and done" they reach some conclusion about life and what it offers. Veterans Day is an appropriate time to remember those who concluded that engaging was better than looking the other way.

Reaching a conclusion is what you and I do in this setting. Some have reached a conclusion; others are considering a conclusion. That conclusion is evident in this morning's psalm (**Psalms 46**): "Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for this help! Whose help is in the Lord their God."

The New Testament version of this conclusion is "resurrection is stronger than crucifixion." Both cards are played, but one carries the day. Today's lessons confirm this "one is stronger" theme.

In the passage from First Kings (**I Kings 17:8-16**), Elijah is directed by God to visit a widow. God also speaks to the widow. "You provide a meal for Elijah." Both Elijah and the widow obey. We're not sure why Elijah insists on being fed first. Is it a slight towards the widow, or a man-first custom or an opportunity for God to provide? We are relieved when both the widow and son receive a share.

In other words, there's a good outcome, even if a bit confusing. Enter our theme of "when all is said and done." Faced with this whole exchange between the Lord and the two individuals, we reach a conclusion, namely that God must have known what He was doing, even if the two individuals, and, by extension, you and I, aren't sure. We come down on the side of God. "The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail."

In the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews (**Hebrews 9:24-28**), we are reminded that Jesus dealt with sin, not by removing sin, but by subjecting himself to it. Is this sense or non-sense? Well, "when all is said and done," we take a leap of faith, and come down on the side of sense. Good sense. Saving sense.

In the passage from Mark's gospel (**Mark 12:38-44**), we see a different application of "when all is said and done." We are duly impressed by the widow who "out of her poverty has put in everything she had." But we also respect those with much who willingly shared their abundance. Are we to honor only one of the parties? Or, are we to honor both, with special recognition to the widow? Well, "when all is said and done," maybe we need to learn from both.

Is this the easy way out of this dilemma? Well, it is a "way out," but I don't think it's an easy way out. We could leave it up in the air, but to what end? The "up in the air" option simply isn't very satisfying. There's a part of us, a deep part of us, that wants to, needs to, pick a side. Is there a loving God or not? And, is Jesus a manifestation of this loving God or not? And, are we happier, stronger, and more loving ourselves if we answer these questions of faith with a "Yes"?

Again, you and I are here because we have decided that we want to learn more, study more, pray more, support one another more, share more. "When all is said and done," we have, for the time being, opted for the "more." Not "more" in general, but "more" in particular.

Is Jesus the One? A "yes" response doesn't answer all of our questions. But it does provide a pretty interesting and often exciting context for our curiosity. And my guess is that we feel at home when we come down on the side of Jesus, even in the face of many unknowns. We're not here by chance. We're here by curiosity, being transformed perhaps over time into conviction.

Our collect this morning notes that “Jesus came into the world so that he might destroy the works of the devil.” Well, one of the Devil’s strategies is to confuse, to postpone, to keep us up in the air, when it comes to Jesus.

The works of Jesus, on the other hand, invite a decision. “Take your time, but don’t stay up in the air. Follow me!”

When Jesus said this to the fishermen, they dropped their nets. When Jesus says this to you and me, what do we do? What is our version of “dropping nets”? It’s a pretty interesting question, with as many answers perhaps as there are people up in the air.

A decision can take time. Look at Jesus himself. He died at age 33. He dropped his net, as it were, at age 30. From an early age, he had been wondering about who he was and what he was supposed to do. But it wasn’t until he showed up at the River Jordan and sought the baptism of John that Jesus was convinced that he simply couldn’t stay up in the air any longer. That’s not what God was asking Him to do. He had to make a very tough call, and he did. It would cost him his life.

But – and this is at the heart of our Faith - God would honor his decision with a victory on Easter morn.

So, yes, we have an “up in the air” companion in Jesus. He was in that situation for most of his life. But, just as Jesus didn’t remain in a quandary, so you and I have the opportunity to move beyond “maybe” to at least “probably” and eventually perhaps to “beyond a doubt.”

This movement could happen in a single moment, a powerful epiphany, if you will. But, more likely, it will be a journey, an exploration. And, on this journey, on this exploration, there is, I am convinced, a high probability of profound spiritual growth. Yes, there will be doubts, but “when all is said and done,” saying yes to Christ is a very satisfying way to address all that life offers.

We don’t avoid reality; we put reality in a context of faith. The very same faith that men and women express when they wear the uniform. And the very same faith that Jesus himself expressed on the Cross: “When all is said and done, into your hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit.” Amen.