



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Easter Day, Sunday, April 24th, 2011

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The philosopher George Santayana was noted for his acerbic wit. For example, when, at the turn of the last century, he resigned from the faculty of Harvard, he declared: "I'm tired of teaching at trade school." Santayana, however, is probably best known for his saying: "Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Well, whatever you might think about Santayana's opinion of Harvard, it's hard to fault his observation about history. The human record is replete with the examples of national leaders who failed to learn from history – with disastrous consequences. And Jesus Christ's crucifixion was one of them.

No other event in the history of the human race has been telegraphed to those who would live through it as accurately or as completely as the coming of the Savior of the World. T

he Old Testament contains more than 300 detailed prophecies telling the coming generations precisely how to recognize the Messiah. (If you'd like to see just how precise the details are, take a look at the description of the crucifixion in Psalm 22.) In addition to such exceedingly precise prophecies, there are a host of lesser

prophecies – some 700 in all – that lend support to the major ones.

The main participants in the drama – Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes, the chief priests and elders, the apostles and disciples, down to the ordinary citizens of the holy city of Jerusalem – were entirely familiar with all of them. Never has a people been more literate.

All of them could speak at least two languages: Aramaic and Hebrew. Most of them were fluent in three tongues: Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek. Many of them also spoke Latin, the language of their Roman occupiers. And all of them, as a matter of religious duty, were Bible scholars, who, theoretically at least, were eagerly awaiting Jesus' arrival.

Yet when the chips were down – despite the fact that the prophecies were fulfilled to the letter before their very eyes – they failed to recognize the Son of God when they met him face to face. And this should be a truly sobering thought for us all for they were very much better scriptural scholars than we are.

All of them had perfectly credible excuses for their failure, of course. The scribes and Pharisees rejected him because he simply

wasn't pious enough. They knew God's Messiah would absolutely punctilious in observing the rules of his religion.

Ordinary folk believed he was going raise an army and conquer the world. When he declined to do so, Jerusalem's John Q. Public refused to accept that God knows what he is doing and the people turned their backs on him. His disciples thought he was having a poor spell and needed geeing along to start the rebellion. Judas tried to force his hand by engineering a confrontation with the authorities.

The national leaders – Sadducees like the chief priests and elders – were terrified that, despite all evidence to the contrary, he really was preparing a rebellion. They knew it would be doomed because an untrained rabble was no match for Rome's well disciplined veterans. As Caiaphas, the chief priest, observed, it was simply a matter of expedience that one man should die to save the nation from destruction.

I've often wondered if it ever occurred to the folks standing at the foot of the cross – the chief priests and elders, the scribes and Pharisees, the disciples and the folks in the crowd – that every word they were saying, and everything they were doing, had been directly foretold centuries before in Holy Scripture. Even the dialogue at the foot of the cross had been precisely scripted hundreds of years before.

But they couldn't have recognized what was going on. If they had done so, Jesus' resurrection, the event we are celebrating today, would not have come as such a shock. Yet shock it was. Even the disciples were amazed. This is really surprising because Jesus had warned them on many occasions he would be arrested, tortured and crucified, and that on the third day he would rise

again. And what on earth did they think he meant when he urged them to take up their crosses and follow him?

The explanation, of course, is that they believed God would act as they would have acted. They would never have sacrificed a child of theirs to save sinners – people they despised. They believed sinners needed punishment, not salvation. And they believed the Messiah would be an instrument of God's wrath to punish those who had strayed from the paths of righteousness.

They didn't recognize themselves as sinners no less in need of God's forgiveness than the people they despised. But there's nothing unusual about that. It's part of the human condition. Other people's sins are much more interesting than our own. After all, we don't really commit sins. We just have little weaknesses.

Mercifully, God doesn't hold our hypocrisy against us. He sent his only begotten Son to redeem not only all those serious sinners, but all of those folks who merely suffer from little weaknesses – people like Caiaphas, Annas and Judas, as well as scribes and Pharisees like me and you.

So God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The empty tomb is our assurance of a new beginning. It is the physical affirmation that all the wrongs we have done, all the evils we have committed, will be wiped from the slate. All we have to do is repent our wrong doings and accept God's forgiveness and his gift of everlasting life. If anybody offers you a better deal than that take it. *AMEN*.