



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

The Third Sunday in Advent, December 12th, 2010

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

The theme of today's prayers and readings is judgment. St. Paul deals with it in the Communion Epistle. Jesus talks about it in the Gospel. And a lesson from the Book of Nahum appointed for Morning Prayer describes with bloodthirsty relish the effects of God's judgment on the world we inhabit: "He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers . . . The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea the world, and all that dwell therein."

There's no denying the fact that God is decidedly "judgmental" – one of the worst sins it's possible to commit these days. And this probably explains why God and his Church are so unpopular with the folks pompously known as our "cognitive elite" – the folks who make up the rules for the rest of us to follow.

They see no irony in the fact that they constantly pass judgment on the rest of us. But, then, they are so much brighter and better educated than the rest of us. And they utterly resent facing competition from God.

After all, he simply doesn't think like they do – not having been educated at one of America's better Universities. Come to think of it, God can't even boast a High School Diploma.

But, despite his lack of formal education, God has strong opinions about just about everything. He isn't just concerned about the face we present to the world, our public lives, so to speak. He also has opinions about the way we should behave in private, in our homes, in our bedrooms, and in our most intimate relationships. No matter what the Supreme Court may say, there is no right to privacy as far as God is concerned. He knows our most inconsequential and fleeting thoughts even before we think them.

But could it be that the politically correct elite are giving God a bum rap. For instance, they claim he fosters tyrannical sexual dominance by men and groveling subservience by women? But when you actually read the Bible it is hard to find many men who can reasonably be described as dominant. More often than not, they are weak, vacillating or otherwise embarrassingly flawed..

The patriarch Jacob is a sniveling, conniving coward. Moses turns out to be a gutless shirker who tries to wriggle out of going to Egypt. Gideon is reduced to a quaking mass of terror just thinking about the Midianites. Contrast this with the courage and sterling qualities of the women. The rocklike strength of Deborah,

the loyalty and persistence of Ruth, the courage of Esther, the faith and devotion of Mary, Martha and the Blessed Virgin. None of these women are in any way subservient -- indeed, quite the reverse.

But while it is tempting to write God off as hopelessly dumber than ourselves, it might be wise to explore why a God who claims he is good, loving and merciful is so darned judgmental. Could it, for example, be that God is judgmental for our benefit rather than his own -- that it is simply a manifestation of his goodness, mercy and loving kindness?

Consider, for example, what America would be like bereft of God's influence. There are definite downsides to the efforts of our legislatures and courts to expunge his influence from our culture. One particularly serious drawback springs to mind: Getting rid of God undermines the foundations upon which our individual rights and liberties are based.

The Declaration of Independence declares our Creator has endowed us, as individuals, with "unalienable" rights. To be unalienable, these individual rights necessarily must supersede those of society as a whole. Indeed, if "society," rather than God, were the source of our rights, those rights would no longer be unalienable. Because what human beings can give, human beings can just as easily take away.

To test this assertion, all we have to do is look outside our borders and evaluate the sort of individual rights endowed by secular societies. When "common good" becomes the criterion, the rights of the individual fare poorly.

The effects of this can be seen at their most benign in the European Community where government regulations dictate even the content of sausages. The most malevolent

effects of "the common good" can be seen in all their brutality and horror in places like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and China.

It would be wrong to assume belief in the intrinsic worth of the individual is a political concept as American motherhood and apple pie. It is not. It is God's idea. The individual is held in high esteem is because our Founding Fathers based our republic on Christian principles. They crafted a constitution that reflected God's values, not human ones.

All men, for instance, are created equal only in the sight of God. Take God out of the equation, and all individuals are most certainly not of equal value. Street people stand very much lower in the pecking order than their social workers. Billionaire tycoons are wielding far more influence than the folks who work for them. The Secretary of State is vastly more important than the secretary who types letters for the commercial counselor in the embassy in Ulan Bator.

The idea "Jack is as good as his master," is pure humbug. It's a notion that leads to only one place: George Orwell's farmyard, where the signs proclaimed: "All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others." If we abandon our Christian principles the animating force of society -- the logic that underpins our most cherished institutions -- will disappear. Universal suffrage works only if we believe all men are equal in the sight of God. For in purely human lights, "might makes right,"

In truth we should fall on our knees and give thanks that God is judgmental. The prospect of being judged by God's standards might make us feel a tad uncomfortable. But experience teaches that the alternative -- being judged by our own human standards -- is infinitely worse.

AMEN.