



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21057

The Sunday Next Before Advent, November 21st, 2010

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

One of the most remarkable things about human beings is our extraordinary ability to fool ourselves. We swallow the most unbelievable propositions with amazing alacrity. For example, large numbers of people have persuaded themselves there is no absolute truth; that ethics change with situations; and that we can sin without consequences. As a result, we have politics without principles, business without integrity; and marriage without commitment.

It seems that our capacity to grasp any straw, swallow any silliness, dance any Tom Fool's jig is virtually infinite. And what makes our predisposition towards gullibility all the more odd is that we fail to learn from history. We repeat our mistakes time and time and time again.

Nowhere is this predisposition towards gullibility more evident than in the realm of religion. We cheerfully abandon tried and trusted beliefs and casually embrace, on the very slightest acquaintance, the most radical of innovations. Compare, for example, traditional Christian beliefs about sin with cutting edge theological musings on the subject.

For best part of 2,000 years, Christians believed that they would have to answer to God for the way in which they lived their lives. They believed that there was a day coming on which the Last Judgment would take place. That's what Advent season – which begins next Sunday – is all about.

Moreover, they believed this because of man's natural, in-born predisposition to rebel against God (original sin) nobody – not even saints – could avoid God's condemnation by relying on their own merits. People also believed that the only way to escape the condemnation they so justly deserved was through the merits and death of Jesus Christ, who had sacrificed his life to pay the price of the sins they had committed

Furthermore, they believed that only way for us to benefit from Christ's sacrifice was to repent their sins, acknowledge they could be saved solely by his grace, and show their acceptance of him as their risen Lord and Savior by making a serious effort to live our lives as he, himself, lived during his earthly ministry.

They believed this because they read it in the Bible – a book that is very far from obscure or ambiguous about the subject. Indeed, mankind's sinfulness and God's judgment is a theme that is reiterated throughout the Scripture. You can hardly turn a page without encountering instances of sin and its consequences.

As King Solomon wrote in the Book of Ecclesiastes (11:9): "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart; and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

Today's notion that truth and morality are infinitely variable is utterly incompatible with the doctrine of judgment. If the way one lives one's personal life is simply a life style option the whole notion of personal sin goes completely out of the window. Indeed, activities once considered highly sinful are now regarded by many people who consider themselves Christian simply as valid life-style choices – options to be exercised or not on the basis of what' feel right for you and me.

Similarly, the focus of church attendance has changed. No longer do folks attend church to worship their creator in fulfillment of an obligation imposed by the Third Commandment "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Today many people go to church to "affirm" their belief in God

and to "celebrate" the relationship with he, she or it. In other words, for them worship has ceased to be God centered and has, instead, become man-centered.

There is a reasonably easy way of checking whether such modern notions are right, or whether folks might be wiser to return to the ideas that governed the Christian Church for the first 1900 years of its existence: to examine where the new ideas originates. Did they come from the Bible? Or are they a product of the human rationalization process

Clearly, the traditional notions of mankind's inherent sinfulness and God's role as our judge come from The Bible. It teaches that there are, indeed, such things as absolute truth and absolute morality. You won't, for example, find a word in the Bible that indicates adultery is an option to be exercised if you and your spouse feel like it.

Nor does the Bible encourage appeals to victimhood. The plea: "Society is to blame" might go down in the courtroom today, but is won't wash in front of God's judgment seat. The Bible teaches that all sin is personal – that society doesn't commit sins, individuals do.

The proof of the pudding, of course, is in the eating. We've been running society according to non-Christian principles for best part of 50 years, but it is impossible to contend that over that period things have gotten better. The truth is that things have gotten immeasurably worse.

When it comes to judging the effectiveness of traditional Christian principles, there is a record that stretches back almost 2,000 years. And when we look closely, we see that those societies that did their best to live according to God's holy word tended to prosper, while those that did not tended to fare badly.

Nowhere is this clearer than here in the United States of America. It doesn't matter what the historical revisionists say, the United States was, indeed, founded upon Christian principles. The Constitution is an entirely Christian document. And for much of that time we have tried to live according to its principles – and never has no other nation has ever

enjoyed such success.

America prospered to such an extraordinary degree that people from all over the world flooded here by the million. They came not just to get rich quick or to escape persecution. They could have gone anywhere in the world to do that: Africa, South America, Australia and Europe. They came here to enjoy the benefits, advantages and privileges that the Christian principles upon which it was governed conferred upon every one who lived here – even non-Christians.

If the Bible is correct in its teaching, there is nothing accidental about this. God didn't lay down his law to make life difficult for us – to make us jump through hoops. He gave us his law because we live much more happy and fulfilled lives if we obey it. And when human beings lead happy and fulfilled lives prosperity tends to follow. When we lead unhappy and unfulfilled lives, the reverse tends to be true.

It is instructive that genuine happiness and fulfillment began to elude us at the very time the nation began abandoning the principles of the Founding Fathers. The Bible warns us about this. It is precisely what happened in the case of the Children of Israel. Things never went bad for them when they were obeying God's Law – only when they turned their backs on it.

That, by the way is the bad news. Now the good news: Nothing could be simpler than putting things right. All it takes is getting down on your knees and saying: "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness . . ."

God never rejects a repentant sinner. He is always ready to wipe the slate clean. All we have to do is ask. Trouble is cutting edge religious philosophers have fooled too many people into thinking God's generous gifts are their's by right. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.