



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Tenth Sunday After Trinity, August 8th, 2010

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

Hindsight is always 20/20 -- a fact which frequently makes it difficult for us to fully understand history when we read it. All too often we end up shaking our heads when we read about particularly calamitous events and say to ourselves: "How could those silly people have failed to see what was coming?"

It amazes us, for example, that the South failed to understand that gallantry and élan alone could not offset the industrial might of the North. We are shocked that those who appeased Hitler and Mussolini failed to recognize that their failure to confront the dictators at the outset made the Second World War inevitable.

The same goes for Holy Scripture. While scripture is holy, it is also a record of historical events. And George Santayana's observation: "Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" is as true of the sacred as it is of the secular.

Indeed, the consequences of our failures to learn from sacred history are even more serious than the consequences of our failures to learn from secular history. After all, the consequences of failures to learn from the secular last only a few generations. But our failures to learn from sacred history have consequences that are eternal.

An example of this is found in today's communion Gospel – St. Luke's account of Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. "The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee

in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee . . . because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

It was a prophecy the fulfillment of which began some 33 years later when, in the First Jewish War, the Roman legions, commanded by the General (later Emperor) Vespasian, laid siege to Jerusalem. It reached its gruesome conclusion three years later when the Romans stormed the holy city, putting its surviving inhabitants to the sword and razing to the ground every building, the temple included.

There is nothing obscure about this prophecy, nothing cryptic. Jesus' words are plain and unambiguous. Nor is it a prophecy made in secret to a tiny coterie of followers. It was made openly, in a crowd, and aimed specifically at a bunch of influential Pharisees alarmed at the unruly mob that raucously welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday.

The crowd was hailing Jesus the long awaited Messiah, shouting: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." The Pharisees were both appalled by the blasphemy and terrified of the reaction of the Roman authorities. They begged Jesus to order the people to shut up. But Jesus replied: "I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Nothing could prevent prophecy from being fulfilled.

A puzzling aspect of the affair is that the Pharisees

undoubtedly recognized Jesus' qualifications as the Messiah. He had been born into the right family, in the right place and at the right time. He had fulfilled all the familiar prophecies concerning the Messiah; hundreds of them, ranging from the miracles he was expected to perform, down to the manner of his arrival in Jerusalem. Yet when the chips were down, they apparently lacked faith in God's ability to fulfill his promises.

If God's track record on the prophecy front had been a tad spotty, they might have had an excuse for skepticism. But scriptural history testifies that God fulfills his promises to the letter. Some fifteen hundred years earlier he had led the children of Israel out of captivity in Egypt and enabled them to conquer the Promised Land. Just 500 years or so before Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, God fulfilled his promise to bring the Jews back to the land of Judah after 70 years captivity in Babylon.

It is against this background that Jesus made his grim prophecy of the destruction of the holy city. And he made it clear that the reason the city would be destroyed was not because its inhabitants had had hailed him as Messiah, but because they had not: "They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the hour of thy visitation."

After uttering these words, Jesus went immediately into the temple where he cast out the corrupt money changers and traders in sacrificial animals - fulfilling yet another Messianic prophecy. The Pharisees, meanwhile, took off for a meeting with the chief priests to figure out what to do.

"What shall we do?" they asked, according to St. John, "This man does so many miracles that if we leave him alone, everyone will believe in him. And if that's the case the Romans will come and destroy the nation and deprive of our status and our jobs. Caiaphas, the chief priest, came up with the answer: "It is a matter of expedience for one man to die to save our whole nation from destruction."

In saying so, he, himself, both uttered a prophecy and set the people of Jerusalem on course to fulfill a prophecy. Caiaphas unwittingly prophesied that Jesus' death would accomplish mankind's salvation. In doing so, he set in motion fulfillment of the grim prophesy contained in the 22nd Psalm that the Messiah would suffer a grisly death at the

hands of the people he had come to save.

Caiaphas' mistake was to assume that he lived in a modern age – an age in which God had long ceased to intervene in the lives of his people. Because God had not in recent memory performed any spectacular acts such as dividing the Red Sea or destroying the walls of Jericho, Caiaphas assumed he'd given up the practice.

In fact, Caiaphas reasoned – as so many people today seem to reason – that his times were simply too sophisticated for the ancient God of Israel, whose notions of appropriate behavior were so out of step with modern fashion. He assumed that if God were still interested in intervening in human affairs he would do so through the good offices of subtle minded men, like himself.

Actually, every generation born has operated on these curious assumptions. Adam and Even ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge because they thought God was past it and that they could do his job better than he can. So did the children of Israel in the wilderness when they forced Aaron to make them the Golden Calf. So did the people in the days of the Judges, and at the time of the First Captivity and the Second Captivity. And so *ad infinitum*.

The depressing thing about these events of divine intervention is that most of them have been foretold by prophets and enshrined in Holy Scripture. What's more, even though they have taken place during eras of intense scriptural scholarship, most of those scholars have failed to recognize what was going on, until it was far too late.

The moral of the story it is important to remember the scripture lessons don't just apply to times past, but times present and future as well. It is also wrong to assume that God has abandoned interest in mankind's affairs simply because he hasn't intervened in them lately. Most important of all, it is vital grasp the fact that God doesn't need our advice, consent and executive action to do his work. Indeed, the words "Thy will be done" imply submission, not consent. *AMEN*.

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