



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Second Sunday After Trinity, June 13th, 2010

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

Christianity today has one thing in common with the Rodney Dangerfield. Like the late funny man, it doesn't get much respect. For Dangerfield, of course, the lack of respect was part of his comic *shtick*. But for Christianity, it is something quite different. For Christianity, it's a gross injustice. For Christianity has been the primary driving force for human spiritual and social progress for two millennia.

That's a pretty big claim, isn't it? Not something folks learn in school! Yet by any dispassionate analysis, the assertion is quite incontrovertible. Jesus' commandment for us to prove our love for God by loving our fellow men has, over the centuries, radically transformed what used to be called Christendom – what is today loosely known as “the West.” And in transforming the West, it has transformed the world.

Christ's message of love – his declaration that all human beings, no matter their station in life are equally beloved in the eyes of their creator – radically re-ordered the Roman Empire. Christ's Great Commission – his command that his followers should preach the Gospel to all nations – converted invading hordes from barbarian enemies to Christian allies.

The light of Christianity led the West out of the Dark Ages. Through the prism of the Christian faith Thomas Aquinas refined the thought of the pagan Aristotle – forging it into a vital intellectual tool for exploring God, his creation and our humanity. It was Christ's emphasis on the worth of the individual that gave the new, humanistic cast to ancient wisdom that brought about the Renaissance.

The Christian “West” is the only society the world has known in which, as a matter of conscience and moral obligation, people have striven to improve the lot of their fellow men – not merely neighbors and fellow nationals, but alien peoples, living thousands of miles away. It is the only society that has ever existed in which people felt a divine obligation to put their lives at risk to help people from entirely different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

To be sure, progress, from time to time, has been setback by stumbling, errors and wickedness. But the discipline of self-examination, confession and amendment of life have enabled us to recognize and repent our faults, and to strive to make them right. And proof of the faith's success in promoting human welfare can be seen in the fact the Christian concepts of democratic governance are being enthusiastically adopted by non-Christian societies all over the world.

In view of the enormous benefits Christianity has conferred on mankind, it comes as something of a shock to enter the two words “hate Christians” on one's Internet search engines and discover literally millions upon millions web sites devoted to promoting hatred of Christianity.

Nor is there anything new about this. Over 200 years ago, the French philosopher, Voltaire, wrote: “Religion [by which he meant Christianity] is the chief cause of all the sorrows of humanity. Everywhere it has only served to drive men to evil, and plunge them in brutal miseries . . . it makes for history an immense tableau of human follies.”

The influential 19th century American thinker Benjamin Franklin Underwood similarly declared: “Christianity appears an unmitigated evil; a superstition which although it had its origin in innocent ignorance and credulity, has been the greatest obstacle to human progress that mankind has had to encounter.”

Yet St. John, in today’s Communion Epistle, says we shouldn’t find this altogether surprising. “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hate you,” he says. Then he explains that the very reason that the world hates the Christian faith is because of the obligation Jesus imposes on us not merely to love our fellow Christians, but to love our non-Christian neighbors, even those who hate us.

Hating a faith because it imposes on its adherents an obligation to love their fellow men sounds a bit weird – at least until one realizes that the obligation to love one’s neighbor is a far from popular notion, particularly in an age such as ours. Not least, the obligation to love our neighbor inhibits our ability to play God.

John Dewey, father of modern American education, was quite open about it. He launched the effort to drive Christianity out of our schools, saying: “The objection to supernaturalism [*by this he meant Christianity*] is that it stands in the way of an effective realization of the sweep and depth of the implications of natural human relations. It stands in the way of using the means that are in our power to make radical changes in these relations.”

Dr. Dewey had a utopian vision of totally reordering American society on socialist lines. But people, by their very nature, do not cheerfully submit to radical change and Dewey realized that the changes he sought could only be imposed by coercion and subterfuge – methods entirely contrary to the notion of loving one’s neighbor. Thus, from Dewey’s perspective, Christianity had to go.

Social engineers like Dewey exercise a tremendous influence in government today. And they are aided and abetted by a large number of folks who want to play God on a smaller stage. Many, if not most of them, would be appalled at the notion of a total reordering of society. Rather, their ambition is to shed their obligations to their fellow men in more modest spheres.

Some have abandoned traditional sexual morality. Some want to live by the letter of the law rather than its spirit – businessmen who use legal trickery to cheat their employees, customers and shareholders; plaintiffs and attorneys who seek to enrich themselves by filing deceitful and frivolous lawsuits. Some embrace the notion that their personal ambitions are so important that it doesn’t matter how they achieve them – that ends justify means.

But the obligation to love your neighbor is completely at odds with the notion of uncommitted sex. You can’t love your neighbors and toy with their affections. And it doesn’t matter if toying is mutual because it reduces human beings to the level of playthings.

Similarly, the obligation to love your neighbor is totally at odds with the notion that frivolous and deceitful lawsuits are an acceptable way to accumulate wealth. Nor does it countenance living by the law of the jungle at work and Christ’s law at home. Christianity, like pregnancy, is a case of all or nothing. You can’t love some neighbors and while at the same time, exploiting others.

Our Christian obligation to love our neighbors stands directly at odds with our oldest human failing – our fundamental desire to make up our own rules. It is the original sin that got Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden. They wanted God’s job. They wanted, as Genesis puts it, to be as Gods, deciding for themselves what is good and what is evil – just as so many folks want to do today..

“Marvel not, bretheren, that the world hate thee. The world has always hated thee.” But, remember, Christ has overcome world. And just as he overcame ignorance and barbarity during the First Millennium, so he will overcome the barbarians of present Dark Age

Christendom’s darkest hours have always come when Christians blandly assumed that they knew the mind of God. By contrast, its most spectacular triumphs have taken place when Christians embraced Jesus’ Summary of Law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with the soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.” *AMEN.*