



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Fourth Sunday After Trinity, June 27th, 2010

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

Kermit the Frog claims it isn't easy to be green. May be he's right. Frogs are not particularly attractive – except to other frogs, of course. But the fact of the matter is that, compared with us, Kermit's got very little to complain about. It's an awful lot easier being green than being a Christian in the public square.

Kermit might feel that the world's against him, but he doesn't have people trying to ban him from the public airwaves. Lawyers aren't battling to keep him out of the public schools. Courts haven't banned the display of Kermit's picture in public spaces or ordered the removal of inscriptions of his thoughts from court buildings and the like. And nor are they likely to. To do so would be an infringement of the free speech of both Kermit and his creators.

On the other hand, nobody in authority really seems put out when a Christian's right to free speech is infringed. There's not much in the way of protest, other than from Christians, when municipal councils ban the display of crèches at Christmas time. You don't read about the American Civil Liberties Union fighting for the right of Christian students to pray publicly in their schools. Come to think of it, the ACLU can usually be found eagerly engaged in the fight to suppress those rights.

Even in areas of public life where one might imagine Christians would be welcome we encounter antipathy. Military chaplains are forbidden to wear the cross in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East that our troops are called upon to defend. The Air Force Academy complains that evangelical Christians are simply a bit too evangelical. Military chaplains are

ordered to refrain from mentioning the Name of Jesus in public prayers.

You don't hear the same complaints about atheists proselytizing their religion or the real absence – even though their presence is ever apparent in public. Nor do you hear complaints about the spread of Islam. Indeed, our schools and other educational institutions go out of their way to teach students just how benign that religion really is. What's more, our politicians constantly remind us that – 9/11 notwithstanding – Islam is really a religion of peace.

Nor is the government attempting to ban the Wicca from the military or even from our educational institutions, even though members of the Wicca – whether or not they're aware of it – practice a form of witchcraft invented by the disciple of an infamous Satanist named Alistair Crowley. Indeed, judges have upheld the rights of the adherents of an outfit called the Church of Satan to practice their faith in the United States military.

What's more, you never hear atheism or any of the other anti-Christian religious faiths being ridiculed, sneered at or held up to contempt. That, after all, would be hate speech. It is not hate speech, of course, when Christianity is demeaned and ridiculed. That's the exercise of free speech, and, besides, everybody knows that, to quote the Washington Post, you are “poor, ill-educated and easy to command.”

Now it might seem quite paradoxical that, here in America, religious faiths with far less than savory track records enjoy public protection and general approbation, but Christianity, the faith

from which all of our rights and freedoms stem, is treated as unwholesome and contemptible.

I've made these observations about the antipathy displayed by so many influential members of our society to the Christian faith not to whine about it, but to remind you that Jesus warned us that this is a normal state of affairs. Indeed, in the reading from the 10th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel appointed for Morning Prayer, Jesus warns his apostles that if people curse and bad mouth him, how much more can they be expected to curse and bad mouth his followers.

The passage is part of St. Matthew's account of Jesus sending his Apostles out on their major preaching tour, having first armed them with the power to perform miracles and heal all manner of sickness and disease. The twelve were clearly thrilled with the trust he reposed in them and the powers they had been granted. Jesus, however, told them not to let their new powers go to their heads.

"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," he told them, ". . . But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the gentiles . . ."

"The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against the parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all me for my sake . . ."

Thus, the antipathy so routinely shown towards the Christian faith today should in no way surprise us. It has always been there. And the reason for it is not in the least bit complicated: If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you can no longer call yourself your own master. You are obliged to acknowledge his authority. You are obliged to accept that his way of doing things is the right way, and that other ways of doing things – however superficially attractive they might be – are wrong.

In other words, being a follower of Jesus Christ stands in direct opposition to our basic human instinct to do what is right in our own eyes – to be as gods deciding for ourselves what is good and what is evil. If we are Christians, we cannot follow gods shaped in our own image. Instead we are obliged to submit to the will of the all powerful God who created us and whose

thoughts and ways are so different from our own. We don't always do so, of course. But when we don't, we know, all too painfully, that we have done wrong and that we need to beg his forgiveness.

This is a concept that runs entirely contrary to the spirit of our age. We live in a society that is wedded to the notion of "social engineering." In its most benign form, it involves efforts to eradicate what is deemed socially destructive behavior by means of propaganda, "education" and legislation, while at its most malignant it seeks the wholesale reordering of society – as in the late, unlamented Soviet Union and the inappropriately named People's Republic of China.

Christian societies have also tried similar experiments – in colonial Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, for example. All proved to be dismal failures. Far from creating universal human happiness, they greatly increased the sum of human misery. And these utopians failed for the same reason that the unbelieving utopians fail: They sought – albeit unwittingly – to supplant God's scheme of creation with one of their own devising. Christianity, thus, is as a barrier to the social engineers of every age and culture – and it stands as a monument to their failures.

It is never very comfortable to be out of step with society, as Jews and Christians have discovered during the past three and a half millennia. But if in this instance there is a lesson to be learned from the past, it is this: If we try to fight back using our adversaries' tactics, we are unlikely to succeed. The Jews tried it at the time of Jeremiah, for example, and were carried away captive to Babylon.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says leave things up to him: "Be ye merciful even as your Father also is merciful. Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you."

Jesus' strategy subdued the brutal coercion of Rome's social engineers and utterly transformed the Roman Empire. And, if we are prepared to do things his way, his strategy will prove just as effective in our society today. *AMEN.*