



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Passion Sunday, March 25th, 2012

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

Listening to the Gospel lesson appointed for today -- St. John 8:46-59 -- is a bit like turning on the television in the middle of a soap opera you haven't watched in very long time. The cast of characters is quite familiar. The tone of the dialogue is exactly what one would expect. But it's difficult to figure out what the characters are talking about because you weren't in on the beginning of the discussion.

We don't know exactly when this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees took place. Some experts believe it was at about the midpoint in Jesus' earthly ministry. Others think it took place earlier in the week of the crucifixion. But when ever it was, the gospels make it clear that from from the very beginning of his ministry, he was dogged by lawyers from Jerusalem's Inside the Beltway crowd -- Pharisees and Saducees -- were gathering evidence to indict him on charges of sacrilege or blasphemy.

Today's Gospel recounts an exchange which took place soon after a particularly egregious attempt to frame Him. The Pharisees had confronted him with a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery, demanding that he pronounce sentence upon her.

The penalty for adulterers was death by stoning and the Law of Moses contained no alternatives. It contained no provisions for suspended sentences, or community service or probation for first

offenders. Judges who declined to impose the death sentence were deemed guilty of condoning adultery; an offense also punishable by death.

We all know what happened, of course: Jesus didn't try to wriggle out of passing sentence. Indeed, he tacitly affirmed the justice of the death penalty. But he made it impossible for any of the woman's accusers to carry it out: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." It was -- and still is -- a challenge that is blasphemy to accept. After all, only God is without sin.

The Pharisees were furious and their response might well be translated as: "Who the heck do you think you are?" Very much to their surprise, Jesus proceeded to tell them exactly who he is -- and in absolutely explicit terms: "I am the light of the world," he began, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life .."

By this time, the Pharisee attorneys were chewing carpet and the results of the hot and heavy cross examination that followed did little to lower their blood pressure. During the course of it, Jesus proclaimed his divinity no less than six times.

If you hear anyone claim that nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus declare himself to be God, refer them to verses 12-58 of the eighth chapter of St. John's gospel. He asserts his divinity on plenty of other occasions, to be sure, but these verses