



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Seventh Sunday After Trinity, July 22nd, 2012

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

From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?

Frequently we think of the wilderness somewhat romantically, as a place remote and pristine, as a paradise of quiet solitude and natural beauty, unspoiled and unsullied by the human tyranny of post-industrial, technocratic society, like state and national parks. We consider the wilderness a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of our day-to-day existence. Such thoughts suggest that in getting back in touch with nature, in the simplicity of its cleansing freshness and rugged beauty, we can recover something of the natural dignity of our humanity.

The paradox is that we feel that by getting away from our human communities we somehow will restore our humanity. Then there is the further paradox of trying to escape to natural wilderness areas, which are in truth merely human and social constructs subject to change with the political and economic times.

Many years ago I went hiking and camping at Rocky Gap State Park in the mountains of Western Maryland. It was

autumn and the park was pretty much deserted except for me and a rather curious skunk, who decided to share the warmth of my campfire. On noticing my companion I became somewhat anxious, but decided to avoid confrontation. Luckily the skunk kindly reciprocated and toddled off into the darkness after a few uncomfortable minutes.

A few years later, I read that it had been suggested to the State of Maryland that the enjoyment of these 3,400 acres of scenic beauty should not be limited to scruffy hikers and campers but that a resort should be added to the site, with a golf course, a nice lodge, and two restaurants. Now I notice that its allure has been enhanced by the addition of casino gambling to its rustic charm. Ah, wilderness...

Scripture proclaims the wonders of the wilderness as a setting for God's glory in nature, the wilderness as the creation of God revealing his glory. "God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good."

But the Scriptures also show the wilderness as the place of wildness and alienation. This, however, arises from

within sinful man. The creation becomes a wilderness because of our rebellion against God and his order. The wilderness is not simply a physical place; barren, remote, isolated and wild. It is also a spiritual place within us. We make the created order s wilderness by our sin and presumption.

Psalm 107 reflects this: “They went astray in the wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them So they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, And he delivered them from their distress. He led them forth by the right way, That they might go to the city where they dwelt”

The aspect of the wilderness as remote and barren physical location and the wilderness as the spiritual consequence of human sin are presented in today’s Epistle and Gospel. The Scriptures give us a view of God’s provision for us even in the wilderness of our disobedience. He provided the Law and Manna for the spiritual and physical needs of his wandering and wayward people. Even in our wilderness we are constantly reminded of the care and compassion of our God.

The Epistle reminds us that our alienation from God means not only that our earthly lives are empty and useless, but spiritually we are dead in ourselves, dead in sin, by our rejection of the living God the only reality that there is. But Paul assures us that we have “been made free from sin” by the free gift of God in Jesus Christ. By Faith we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection.

The Gospel relates the story of the feeding of the four thousand in the

wilderness. First, feeding them by teaching; filling hungry souls with the knowledge and love of God; secondly, showing God’s creative power by seeing to their bodily needs. Jesus redeems the wilderness within each of us, making that wilderness a place of compassion and mercy. *Amen*