



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 23rd, 2012

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

When I was a mischievous schoolboy, our geography master, a former lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy, was a dab hand with a piece of chalk. I'm not talking about his writing technique at the black board. He could stand with his back to us, and turn and hurl a nub end of chalk with unerring accuracy from the front of the classroom to the back, striking the target "blam" on the side of his head. And it was always the side of the head because the boy in question was talking in class. Gosh, did that bit of chalk hurt.

No doubt in this limp wristed age of ours, Mr. Wakeham would be hauled before the courts as a child abuser. But to the boys in his geography class, he stood second only to God. We worshipped the ground he walked on. And we speculated about how he acquired his skill.

How did he learn to be so uncannily accurate? He didn't practice as far as we could see – unless he spent the evening pitching chalk ends at his wife and children? In the end we decided it was a skill that developed naturally during his service as the gunnery officer on a destroyer during the Second World War.

We could, however, never figure out how he manage to see us talking when his back was to us and when we taking such care to be quiet, Radar was obviously a bit too bulky for him to use. Besides, it was military technology covered by the Official Secrets Act.

Some of the more superstitious among us believed he might be a secret practitioner of the Dark Arts. Most of us, however, couldn't picture him sacrificing black cockerels on the school chapel's altar, and cast about for more plausible

explanations for his uncanny ability to see out of the back of his head. Some of the more conscientiously Christian among us called to mind the opening collect at Holy Communion: "Almighty God unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."

Could it be Mr. Wakeham, being a serious sort of Christian, had been granted a modest degree of divine power? The secularists, however, wrote it off simply as one of life's unfathomable mysteries.

I finally discovered Mr. Wakeham's secret long after I left school when I bumped into him in a pub in the small English village to which he'd retired. "How on earth could you tell what we were up to when your back was towards us?" I asked.

He roared with laughter. "I could see a reflection of whole classroom in the corners of my spectacles," he said, "A quick glance and I could see what you were all up to. It was just a matter of turning and throwing." But what was the secret of his uncanny accuracy? "Darts," he explained. "I was always very good at darts. I still am. In fact I'm Captain of the pub darts team."

This was the rational – albeit prosaic – explanation for Mr. Wakeham's omniscience. There is a similarly rational explanation for God's omniscience – an omniscience so graphically expressed in the opening collect of the Eucharist. God – the Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that therein is – doesn't need to rely on a reflection in a pair of glasses. He is all-powerful, all knowing, all seeing, all wise, etc., etc. He's every superlative you can think of. Not only is he instantly able to read our minds, he knows exactly what we are going to do before we have even thought of it.

Ever practical, human beings ask: “Where does he get the time?” Well, as the Creator, he invented time. But he’s eternal, of course, and this means he has all the time in the world to continually explore every human mind he has ever been created.

It is quite terrifying to think that every idle thought and fleeting fancy we have ever had has been instantly exposed to the searing light of our Creator’s mind. And it is especially horrifying to think that even our noblest thoughts are tainted with at least a modest degree of prideful self regard, while our nastiest thoughts are, in fact, even uglier than we can bring ourselves to admit.

Jesus’ divine omniscience and its concomitant quality of omnipotence are on full display in the incident recorded in today’s Gospel -- St. Luke’s account the raising of a young man from the dead in the small town of Nain, not far from his home village of Nazareth. The description of the raising of the widow’s son is terse and to the point – a mere six verses and all business. St. Luke records the facts, ma’am, and nothing but the facts.

It was a miracle of a type that Jesus had performed many times in the past and would perform many times in the future. Nevertheless it was for those who witnessed – and for us, alive today, have the wit to recognize it – an absolutely astounding event.

Jesus performed the miracles in a strikingly off-hand fashion. He didn’t use an elaborate ritual. In fact, he didn’t use any ritual at all. When, for instance, the great prophets Elijah and Elisha raised children from the dead, they offered up long and earnest prayers and supplications.

Not Jesus. He didn’t even mutter the briefest of prayers. He simply walked up to the corpse and said, quite casually: “Okay, kid, get up.” Similarly, at the graveyard in Bethany, he simply strolled up to Lazarus’ tomb, and hollered: “Lazarus, come out.”

Both the raising of the widow’s son at Nain and the raising of Lazarus at Bethany must have shocked the onlookers -- and not just because of what he had done, but because of the way in which he did it.

Raising people from the dead was one of the signs by which Jews expected to identify the Messiah. Yet he didn’t perform the miracles in the way they expected the Messiah to perform them. He showed no piety when he performed them – and certainly no humility. He simply strolled up

and ordered the person back to life as if he was acting entirely on his own account.

Jesus behavior was, in fact, a practical demonstration of divine omnipotence. Both The Book of Genesis and the Gospel According to St. John hail Jesus as the creator – the Logos, the holy Word – that brings all things into being. There was no need for Jesus to pray to anyone. It was he who made the executive decision. It was he who carried out the executive act. Surely it would have been rather silly for him to pray to himself.

The miracle at the small town of Nain also was also graphic illustration of the meaning of omniscience. When one meditates on this miracle it is apparent, that unlike many of Jesus’ miracles, nobody begged him to perform it. The young man’s widowed mother and the other mourners were too absorbed in their grief to notice Jesus’ arrival in the village. Perhaps they were unaware of who he was – although that’s unlikely as he seemed to have been followed by quite a crowd of people.

But Jesus clearly understood the woman’s need without being asked and took immediate action. “Don’t weep,” he told her and walked up to her son’s body.

This modest miracle is one of the most reassuring events in the Gospel. It is unlikely either the widow or her son were particularly saintly. They were just ordinary folks like us – prey to the same selfish and ignoble thoughts; just as prone to failing to show to love their neighbors.

Yet Jesus – the Holy Word, the Logos, the great Creator of the universe – looked into their hearts and paid no heed to all the ugly, secret thoughts and passions that has every human being harbors. All he took notice of was the hurt and the need. And, without being asked, he addressed that hurt and need.

That miracle at Nain is our assurance that he will do the same for us. He knows our hurts and our needs long before we do. He won’t necessarily raise us from the dead. But then if we believe what the Bible tells us about the life to come – a life described as the larger life, a life of perfect happiness – he wouldn’t be doing us any favors if he did so. *AMEN.*

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