



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Easter Day, being Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012

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

I-Pads, the Internet, email, genetic engineering and the miracles of biotechnology make it difficult to picture life as it was before the invention of the automobile. Things in daily use a century ago, steam engines, whale oil lamps, and the cotton gin, seem hopelessly antique.

And if it is hard for us in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to imagine life a hundred years ago, it is even more difficult to envisage what life must have been like in Jesus' time. Yet, funnily enough, life back then wasn't so different from life here today. In fact, the average citizen of the Roman Empire wouldn't have much trouble adjusting to life in the 21st century America.

They had central heating, hot and cold running water; banks, insurance companies and stock markets; police departments, fire departments and bureaus of public health; They also has pork barrel politics, lobbyists and, of course, wily politicians.

The defense budget was mind-boggling; the imperial budget was out of control. To service the enormous national debt, the government created a tax collection system so draconian and efficient it makes the Internal Revenue service look like philanthropic institution. In short, life back then was much the same as it is today.

One difference is how Jesus was perceived back then. His contemporaries, you see, saw him not

as a religious leader but more as a politician – a nationalist leader who would end the Roman occupation of Judea and bring about self-government. The wildly cheering crowd that hailed him as the Messiah on Palm Sunday expected him to lead a revolt that would drive the Romans. And his campaign managers – the disciples were – ecstatic.

For them, his entry into Jerusalem represented the successful culmination of a three-year campaign to install him as the undisputed political and religious leader of the Jewish people. That was the role they and everybody else expected the Messiah to play.

Jesus had been a very tough candidate to manage. He balked at building coalitions. He stubbornly declined to schmooze the right people – the folks with money, power and influence, sacred and secular. In fact, he went out of his way to alienate them – by making them the butts of his humor and calling them rude names.

But, as things turned out, he didn't need the help of the moneymen; spin doctors, and opinion makers. Jesus had won over the people with words, miracles and the sheer force of his personality. The wildly cheering crowds lining the streets of Jerusalem vindicated his strategy.

Jesus had the people in the palm of his hand. He only needed to give the word and political power

would be in his grasp. And, thanks to the coat tails effect, it would be in the grasp of his associates as well. Indeed, his triumph was so certain the disciples were jockeying for the top government jobs. James and John had tackily enlisted their mother to lobby on their behalf.

But Jesus refused to grasp the reins of leadership. Instead of acting resolutely, he frittered away the final week of his earthly life needling opponents and making extravagant claims. His failure to act cost him his life.

In a stunning political reverse, Jerusalem's religious and political elite arrested him in the dead of night, hauled him before the Roman governor and demanded that he condemn him to the most humiliating form of capital punishment in the criminal code. In case the governor was reluctant to comply with their demands, they had a lynch mob on hand to bay for Jesus' blood.

The sentence was carried out immediately. Most of the disciples fled. By nightfall, the man, who days earlier seemed destined to rule, was dead – his body dumped in a borrowed tomb, denied the dignity of a proper burial because of the inflexible application of Mosaic Law; an inflexibility he had vigorously denounced.

Jesus' disciples were utterly amazed to find his tomb empty on that first Easter morning. Yet they had no excuse for surprise. Jesus had told them exactly what to expect not once but many times – that he would be crucified, but would rise from the dead in three days.

They, however, had been far too caught up in their own agendas to pay heed to Jesus' agenda. Whenever Jesus tried to raise the subject of the sufferings that lay ahead, they misconstrued him, or reinterpreted his words to reflect their own hopes, plans and aspirations.

It wasn't that they didn't believe him to be the divine Son of God. Each one of them fully endorsed St. Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ; the Son of the living God." Yet they failed to grasp that if God tells you he is going to do something, you can bet the farm on it?

The disciples, of course, are by no means alone in their unwillingness to believe in God's ability to act like God. We're no different. Intellectually, we accept that the rational explanation for our universe is an intelligent creator, but we balk at the idea that this wondrous being can do things we can't do. Illogically, we assume God is confined by the laws he has laid down for us.

Even the greatest among us share this curious failing, and by no means solely the apostles. Abram and Sarai, for instance, refused to believe God when he promised them a son in their old age. They laughed at him. But God had the last laugh.

He gave them the son he promised, and added a laugh – a "ha" – to their names: Abram became Abra-ha-m; Sarai became Sar-hah. But they were so happy they named their son, Isaac, meaning "God made me laugh."

We can take great comfort in the fact that God has a keen sense of humor. He would certainly have laughed at the shocked looks on Peter and John's faces when they discovered the tomb was empty.

And if God could find something to laugh at in the foolishness of Abraham and Sarah and Peter and John, he'll surely be able to find something funny about ours.

Even so, God's promise made to us in Jesus' resurrection is in deadly earnest. Truth to tell, it is the most vitally important event in human history.

St. John's declaration "So God loved the world he gave his only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" is no mere trite formula. .

It is a cast-iron guarantee, not just that our lives will have meaning, but that we will live forever. When this life is past, we can look forward to lives more real, more solid, more vibrant than anything we can presently imagine. And while this is certainly no laughing matter, it is definitely something to smile about. *AMEN*