



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013 – Easter I**

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:  
*“Peace be unto you: As the Father hath sent me, so I send you.”*

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

I've had the privilege and the good luck a few times in my life to have an operation on a knee that confined my leg in a cast. At the end of the eight or nine or twelve weeks, or whatever it was, I'd always find that the leg had healed to the point where it was comfortable when the cast was taken off, and yet the knee didn't work. It had no pain, yet, without some pain, without physical therapy breaking down the scar tissue, restoring the range of motion, and regaining function, the knee did not work. In fact, that knee actually became the focal point of my life. Preserving its lack of pain became the most important thing to me, when what it needed more than anything else was pain. It was only through the pain that I would get back the range and function, so that my knee would then recede from being the focal point of my being to being a graceful joint that operated under the proper order and direction of my mind and of my heart.

We are afraid of pain, and as the saying goes, fear of pain makes us cowards. Actual pain is just something we deal

with, live with, work through. But fear of pain makes us afraid -- makes us paralyzed.

Jesus says, “My peace I give to you. Peace be unto you.” When he's talking about peace at this moment, he doesn't mean peace that is the opposite of war. In fact, if you think about it, the Apostles to whom he is speaking are getting ready to go to war. They are finally be equipped with The Holy Spirit's guidance to oppose death and the devil. So he's not telling them they can have peace as freedom from strife, as freedom from the battle. This peace that he's giving them must be something else entirely.

The peace that he's giving them is freedom from fear, freedom from fear of pain, freedom from fear of death. He holds out His wounds to them. “Yes, it hurt,” and He extends his wounded heart that was the absolute proof of his death. “Yes, I died, but I am here with you now, through that death -- through that death I am with you and cannot be taken away, and I can comfort you. I can console you.

I can strengthen you. I can make you what you were originally created to be -- creatures of God's eternal love. But I can only bring you there through the pain."

It was such a beautiful event last night, honoring Annie at Rosa's house. I was standing in the kitchen for a good long time, and my back started to hurt a little bit, but I couldn't complain because Brice's back was a lot worse than mine. Because I was having a wonderful time, I was surrounded by loving people, I didn't mind the pain, and I said to myself, "Wow, this is really a revelation and an embodiment of the sermon I'm going to preach tomorrow. I can just sit here tonight and enjoy this epiphany." Then we went home to Rita's house, and she was talking to Carolyn about how at some point one of their husband's might be in a wheelchair and how much we'll have to adjust our lives if that happens. And then a second epiphany hit me. How really beautiful that was, when the pride of the self-sufficiency goes away, we become vulnerable and we lean on each other to get through our lives. That pain is really beautiful. That pain is a blossoming of new level of love. So I went to bed thinking, "Wow! Now I know the meaning of my sermon" -- until about 3:00 in the morning when I woke up and thought, "NO! I still don't have it right. NO!" Because it's not how we work together, interdependent and supportive, that leads to love, that kind being together is love, and that's what we're meant to BE. We are born creatures of love, and we are born to die because we cannot be the creatures that we were made to be until we get our full range of motion -- spiritual motion -- into that stiff and balky joint of

our soul. We cannot be the creature we were meant to be until we break the scar tissue that holds us to the material things of this life, that keep us from embracing the people that we love, and making ourselves vulnerable to be embraced by them.

We can't be the people we were meant to be until we die. Dying is not an accident of time that happens at the end of our journey here on earth. Dying is what we are being prepared for every day of our lives. Everybody that we love is someone that we want to carry to the other side, and those on the other side carry us through with them. And if we don't die, then we can't change. Our change isn't a simple transformation. It's an actual transcendence because we don't get these crumbly, raggedy old bodies back. We get resurrected bodies like Jesus' body, which He promised us; bodies that can dance, bodies that can sing, bodies that laugh, bodies that cry with ecstasy because we are surrounded by the people that we love. Finally, we can love them not with our own frail, failing weakness but with the love of Christ that is unfailing, that is ecstatic.

Peace be unto you. Yes, there's pain ahead, and yes, there's death ahead -- thank God -- because that's the promise: that we are going to be what we are on the other side of that door, and we need not be afraid. *Amen.*