



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, April 28th, 2013 – Easter IV

The passage for today is from the 16th Chapter of the Gospel of St. John:
 “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

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

There are a couple of curiosities in the readings today both this one and the one from St. James that raise questions that always stump me. One of the questions is, why does Jesus have to go before the Holy Ghost can come? The other one posed in Epistle by St. James is, why is it that we have to be firstfruits? What is it that we have that we can give to a God who is almighty, all powerful, all knowing? What does He want with our gifts? How could He need them? The answer to the question about Jesus and the Holy Ghost really lies in the answer to the second question, which is the question of firstfruits, so we need to tackle that question first.

Maybe the way we can understand and explain it best will come from a little incident that I recall about 20 years ago when our son was five years old. It

was a day like this, a beautiful spring day, with pollen thick on all the cars, and we sent him outside to play. He decided he would use his playtime to go and pick flowers for his mother. He picked some goldenrod and every other kind of pollen-generating weed that you can imagine, and he put the bouquet in his little hands. Of course, he was allergic, so he came to the back door with his little nose running like a faucet, and when we opened the door, his mother's nose began to run, and my nose began to run, and we were all sitting there fighting our allergies as she wrapped him up in her arms and thanked him for the beautiful gift of his flowers. I thought, wow, what could be better than that?

What was better than that was what happened next. She took that little gaggle of weeds, put it in a beautiful

vase, and put it on the kitchen table. As we all gathered for our lunch, she told the rest of us how grateful she was to have received the beautiful flowers from Remi. In essence, she glorified his gift, and her love returned for his love given, radiated a lesson of how gracious God can be. How He takes what is not perfect, glorifies it, and then returns it.

When you think about Jesus as firstfruits, it's very much the story that lived out in Remi in the back yard and those weeds. Jesus gathers up all of our lives -- our brokenness, our sinfulness, our sadness -- pulls it all together and brings it to his Father and offers it up along with His perfect life and His perfect will. And the Father accepts His gift and glorifies Him, and the love that is between the two of them, that surrounds that gift, radiates back to us in the spirit of the Holy Ghost.

The reason that Christ must go before the Holy Ghost can come is that He must be the gift that is given in His human nature and His person that then is returned to us in the spiritual nature of the Holy Spirit who can inhabit us in the temple of our lives. The Holy Ghost works this same miracle again in us. He gets us to be firstfruits. He asks us to gather up our unhappiness, our sadness, our brokenness, our sinfulness and offer them up to God, as imperfect as they are, as unappealing to God as we can imagine they might be. He still

wants that gift that He can bless and return. The return of those gifts is the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the peace that passes all understanding, the sure knowledge that despite the unworthiness of our gifts, we are loved, and we have a place and a home to return to. It is in living through that comfort and that peace that the rest of the world gets to know God. That is how we live the Gospel and become effective witnesses. It is by being firstfruits ourselves, imitating Jesus, that the Holy Ghost is radiated into the world, so that the whole world can know the love of Jesus. *Amen*