



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, June 23rd, 2013 – Trinity IV

The passage lesson for the sermon for this morning comes from the Gospel of St. Luke:

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

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

We had our three-year-old and four-year-old grandchildren in the house this week and, as you would expect, they got to tussling. The three-year-old, who is a little girl, threw her brother into a table of some sort, and, of course, the inevitable happened. Something precious to Carolyn tumbled off and broke. Even at three years old, this precious little girl knew exactly what she had to do: “It was his fault. He did it. It’s Cameron’s fault.”

That’s human nature. That’s the way we’ve been since the Garden of Eden, neglecting our own responsibility and our own sinfulness in favor of blaming others, in favor of pointing out and measuring all those people around us. We do come by it naturally.

Remember Adam in the Garden of Eden, after he had taken a bite of the apple and was confronted by God, what did he say? “She made me eat it. And, by the way, You gave her to me.” So it was God’s fault. Then He turned to Eve, and what did she say? “The devil made me do it.” By then, I’m sure God was as fed up as I was with my two little three- and four-year olds and just anxious to hear someone say, “I’m sorry. I did it. Forgive me.”

I wonder, what would our march towards holiness be if Adam had only said that? Would they have been punished the way they were? I think the reason that the reason they were punished in that way was because they would not, could not accept the responsibility for their sin. Consequently, they couldn’t be

forgiven so easily, and they couldn't so easily pass through to grace.

And it has been that way forever in the Bible, David decided he would have Bathsheba to his wife and had Uriah the Hittite, her husband, sent into battle and killed so that he could have her. He was confronted by Nathan the Prophet. Nathan came and told him about a man who had everything and yet stole a sheep from his neighbor so that he could entertain his friends. David was full of indignation, and he stormed about how he would punish that man and how he would make his house a heap of ashes. And Nathan said, "Oh, by the way, it's you. You're the one who did this when you took that woman to be your wife and you had her husband killed." Easy to deflect; hard to accept.

And even in the New Testament, Peter -- even after the Resurrection -- standing around after fishing, eating with Jesus, and being told, "Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep," responded to Jesus how? By saying, "But what about John? What about him?" It's our nature. It's what we do. But we can't give in to that. We have to fight that hypocrisy.

When I talk to people that are un-churched, the one thing that comes back again and again, especially among young people and especially among teenagers whose hypocrisy meter flutters with great precision, they say, "I can't go to that church or your church because the people there are hypocrites." That doesn't speak about this group but it's the way young people think about church. That's a really hard thing because when there is hypocrisy, the work of the Holy Ghost is prevented. With hypocrisy, with that blaming, comes an inability to admit our faults and our sinfulness. With that blaming comes an inability to be ashamed of the harm that we do with our sinfulness. With that

blaming, that finger pointing, and that hypocrisy is the prevention of grace that comes from forgiveness and reconciliation.

So how do we fix that? One way to fix it is to come together to worship like this. I have lots of friends that say, "I don't come to church. I sit on my rock by my stream in the woods on a mountain, and I commune directly with God one on one." And God bless them, that's a beautiful way to pray, but that doesn't replace what we do here because the antidote for the hypocrisy, finger pointing, and the unwillingness to take blame is a community of love -- a community that comes together, that holds each other to a high standard and, more important, makes themselves vulnerable so that when someone says, "My fault, I'm sorry," there is a receptive ear and a forgiving heart to receive that admission and to bring that forgiveness. That's what we have to pray about.

We do a very good job. This is a very lovely parish. This is a wonderful, open, giving parish, and yet we all can still pray to be more receptive, more willing to say, "My fault" first. More willing to be vulnerable and let someone be vulnerable with us and admit their fault in the hope, in the realistic hope, that they'll be loved and that they will be forgiven. And if we do that, if we can continue to grow in that grace, then we will be reflecting the Gospel out to those kids who are afraid to come into a church where the hypocrites are, because there won't be any hypocrisy in us, and this will be a place where they can come and be vulnerable, and they can receive forgiveness. *Amen*