



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Feast of St. Bartholomew, August 25th, 2013

Being the 13th Sunday After Trinity

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

Today we are celebrating the Feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle and in the Gospel appointed for today Jesus instructs his disciples and, of course, us on the subject of Christian leadership. And what a different concept of leadership it is.

For Christian leaders there is no such concept as “the Boss.” Far from strutting about and issuing orders, Jesus tells us that people who aspire to be Christian leaders must act as slaves to their congregations. This doesn’t mean that rank and file Christians are free to treat their leaders like dirt. They are just as much bound by the obligation to love their leaders as they love themselves as they are to love any other neighbors.

However, Jesus’ command that Christian leaders are to consider themselves as to be everybody’s slave deprives them of many of the management tools routinely used in business. There can, for example, be no stern orders issued from above, no draconian punishments for transgressors – nothing that is taken for granted in the secular world. Basically, the only management tool available to Christian leaders is leadership by example.

Happily another Gospel reading appointed for today – the 13th Sunday After Trinity – gives us a practical insight into the responsibilities of Christian leadership. It is, of course, the Parable

of the Good Samaritan. The imagery in Christ’s parables is so powerful that even today, when the Bible is increasingly banned from the public square, our opinion makers cannot resist Jesus’ metaphors.

Everybody wants to be a hero, so it’s unsurprising that everybody tends to identify themselves with the hero of the story: The Good Samaritan. Where is the glory in being the priest who passed by on the other side, or the Levite, who took a peek and went on his way? Certainly nobody wants to think themselves as one of the thieves or the guy lying, beaten up, in the gutter.

Good try, but no cigar! The Good Samaritan is the shining examples of the Christian leader.. The rest of the cast – the priest, the Levite, the thieves, the innkeeper who helps the Good Samaritan only because he is rewarded for it, and, last but very far from least, the guy lying, beaten up, in the gutter – represents us the rank and file Christians..

In fact it is the guy in the gutter who most aptly symbolizes the average Christian. After all, we set off on life’s journey with the best of intentions but are invariably surprised by unexpected trials and temptations that we often quite incapable of handling on our own. Indeed, we are frequently unaware we have fallen into sin until we are in desperate need of the Good Samaritan to bail us out.

To understand this parable properly, one needs to know a tad about the crime scene in First Century Judea. Doubtless, all of you are familiar with the frightening verse in the Twenty Third Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me . . .”

When King David wrote this great psalm, he was at his lowest ebb. He and his small band of followers were hunted men, hiding in the wilderness from King Saul and his crack troops. Not a day passed by without a betrayal or a narrow escape from Saul’s warriors. Death stalked them daily on every hand.

The metaphor David chose to portray his constant state of terror at this time wasn’t a figment of his imagination. It was based on terrifying reality. It was the stretch of highway that linked Jericho with Jerusalem. The wild hills flanking it were haunts of brigands and outlaws. Travelers who ventured onto the road took their lives in their hands, earning it the grisly sobriquet: “The Valley of the Shadow of Death.” And the security situation had not improved since David’s day.

There was only one way to travel this road in relative safety – in a heavily armed convoy. This was not an official secret. The Roman Army and Herod’s Forces ran daily convoys not just for official government purposes, but also to keep the wheels of commerce turning. They provided escorts for the small businessmen and private citizens who needed to travel the road. The wealthy organized their own convoys and welcomed other citizens traveling with them to bolster their numbers.

In short, the guy in the gutter had to be an utter dunce. Nobody in his right mind would be so foolhardy as to set off alone from Jericho to Jerusalem unaccompanied by a heavily armed escort. It is, thus, fair to assume he was an absolute blithering idiot – a chap who got exactly what he asked for.

This does not mean to say that the thieves who fell upon him were blameless. They were not. They committed a horrendous sin. But the man in the gutter made things easy for them. Similarly, his foolish behavior does excuse the priest and the Levite but his stupidity made it easier for them to ignore him.

His behavior, however, should not be surprising. He is, in fact, a character you are all quite familiar with. He is the Prodigal Son. You can tell this by the casual way he set off in face of terrible danger. And the manner of his departure tells us a lot about the way in which we fall into sin.

He certainly must have been aware he was taking a risk. All his friends must have warned him to wait for a convoy. No doubt, the soldiers in Jericho also told him he would be wise to wait. Instead of listening to them, he’d gone macho and saying, in effect: “Do you think I can’t look after myself. Do you think I can’t handle it?”

All of us, at the outset, fondly imagine we can handle the temptations life throws in our way without any outside help. We embark on our lives’ courses in the same foolhardy fashion as the guy who ended up in gutter on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

The highway from Jericho to Jerusalem symbolizes our road we travel on our journey through life. It is our guarantee that when things go badly for us, when our castles in the air come crashing down around us, we can always rely on the Good Samaritan to come to our aid. We can rely on the fact that he will comfort us, bind up our spiritual wounds and carry us to the inn he has built to shelter and sustain us on our earthy journey: His Holy Church. And it’s here, within these walls, we can recover the strength to carry us through. *AMEN.*

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