



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Laetare Sunday, Lent IV, March 30th, 2014

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

We human beings often mistakenly assume God's agenda is exactly the same as our own agendas. We imagine because we are committed to what we perceive as a good cause God, naturally, shares our commitment. This has caused considerable upset over the centuries. Wars are fought with aggressor and aggressed-against claiming God as their own special ally. Churches are turned upside down and inside out to advance earthly political agendas claimed to be endorsed by God.

There is nothing new about this. It has been going since the days of Adam and Eve. And, in fact, you need look no further than the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ to find numerous instances of this sort of presumptuousness. Take the passage from St. John's Gospel appointed for today's Morning Office (6:27-40).

It is the account of an event that took place immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, the subject of the Communion Gospel. The crowd had recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Indeed, John tells us (6:14): "Then those men when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world . . ." But Jesus had to slip away secretly after the miracle because the crowd was preparing to take him by force to proclaim him king.

The vast horde, however, was not so easily diverted. They figured he would head for Capernaum on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee where Simon Peter and his partners James and John operated their fishing fleet. They were on the eastern shore where the miracle had taken place, so they commandeered a fleet of fishing boats to ferry them to Capernaum's small port on the other side, hoping to head Jesus off, hail him as the Anointed One and accompany him on his mission.

When Jesus gave the crowd the slip, the apostles had to make shift for themselves. John tells us that when evening came, the Twelve disconsolately boarded their own vessel and set sail for Capernaum without him. But no sooner had they pushed off, than a violent storm arose and drove them out to the middle of the lake.

As they battled the waves, they saw Jesus walking to them across the water. Jesus calmed the storm, calmed the terrified apostles and they pressed on to Capernaum, where the crowd caught up with him the next day, preaching at the city synagogue.

The crowd was amazed that Jesus had arrived before them and asked him: "Rabbi, when did you come here." Jesus ignored the question. Instead, he replied: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the

miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and are filled."

He was trying to explain to them that they hadn't considered the real significance of the miracle they seen him perform. It was an act of creation that could only have been performed by God, but they'd only been interested in the food. They had not paused considered the implications of how it was made.

They should have been dumfounded and awestruck at coming face to face with their Creator. That would have been be a rational reaction for human beings when confronted with the raw power that not only brought the Universe into being but whose thoughts and intent hold it together.

But far from being awe-struck and swearing obedience to his every command, these folks concluded he was there to carry out their wishes and fulfill their dearest desires. Instead of asking him what his plans were, they tried to make him fall in line with their plans – by crowning him king. Jesus explained that human earthly ambitions – “the meat which perisheth” – were utterly irrelevant.

What mattered were God's plans for them. If they wanted eternal life (“the meat that endureth for ever”) they would seek to do his will. It was only at this point they asked him the \$64,000 question: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus replied: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Their response proves they missed the point completely: “And what are you going to do for us?” they asked him, “What are you going to do to prove to us you are the one God sent?” That’s a fine question to ask a guy who has just fed best part of 15,000 people on the equivalent of a couple of baguettes and two cans of tuna.

It is a conceit of cutting edge theologians that Jesus never proclaimed himself to be the Messiah or the Divine Son of God. This is wholly false. Jesus proclaimed himself as such many times. In fact he quite categorically

proclaimed himself as such in the passage form St. John's Gospel that immediately precedes today's communion gospel reading.

In the Fifth Chapter of St. John's Gospel – from verse 19 to verse 47 at the end of the chapter – Jesus relentlessly and at length proclaims his divinity and his filial relationship with God the Father. Here's a sample: "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And these [scriptures] are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive honor from men. But I know you that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name and you do not receive me . . ."

Jesus told the crowd at the Capernaum synagogue that they had a totally false conception of the mission the Messiah has been sent to undertake. He pointed out God hadn't sent the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom, but to give everybody who believed on him a very much more precious gift – the gift of everlasting life. But this was not the message the crowd wanted to hear. They wanted conquest. They wanted earthly glory.

They were locked in a battle of wills – a battle between the human will and God's will. The crowd at Capernaum wanted God to affirm their notions of what was good for the world. When the Messiah, they themselves had hailed, told them God had different ideas, they refused to acknowledge his divine authority. Instead, they abandoned him and went off to find a new Messiah – a messiah who would do their bidding.

John tells us that after this clash of wills at Capernaum, many of Jesus' followers "went back, and walked no more with him." In other words, they abandoned him. And, in doing so, they followed in the footsteps of Adam and Eve and committed the oldest sins of all – the sin of imagining that we know better than God. *AMEN.*

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