



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Quinquagesima Sunday
March 2, 2014

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

The passages selected for the sermon this morning are taken from both the Gospel and the Epistle;

In the gospel, Jesus tells the blind man, "thy faith has saved Thee." And in the Epistle St. Paul writes, "And now abideth Faith, hope and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity."

It would seem to be at least inconvenient, and at worst unwise, for the Church to pair these two readings in the lectionary. Here we have the great debate, that has separated Christianity into the Catholic and Protestant camps, laid bare before our eyes. Which is true, are we saved by faith alone, or are good works, charity, more important than faith?

If you remember back to when your children were younger, you will inevitably recall a certain regularly occurring confrontation. With a bedroom in disarray, and a big project due at school the next day, the child looks up to the parent and says, which is it that you want me to do, clean my room or get good grades. The answer of course is both. It is a false dilemma. From the child's perspective, these goals can be separated, prioritized, and opposed. As a parent, you explain that two activities aren't separate actions at all. They are individual expressions of the same expectation, that the child has responsibility and discipline and commitment to all their duties.

Your child wasn't alone in that particular rationalization. Every child used it. In fact, it is the learned response of all men. The tendency goes back

to the garden, and forward into our preparation for Lent, and for the life to come.

Faith, hope and charity are the Cardinal virtues. The fact that there are three virtues is instructive. We need to take the gifts that are given in threes and interpret them in the light of our knowledge about the essential three, the Three in One, the Holy Trinity. There is one God. There are three Persons in one God, each unique, and separate, related to the other in Love. They are equal in all things, and yet there is an order. The Father is first, the Son is sent by the Father, and does His will. The Holy Ghost is sent by the Father and the Son and proclaims the Truth about the Son. Three Persons, one God. All equal, and yet there is a procession and an Order. Our spiritual immaturity prevents us from perceiving how this can be true, and yet we know it to be the absolute Truth, because it has been revealed to us by God Himself.

Faith, hope and charity are one gift of grace. Three individual virtues, that affect our salvation uniquely, but a single procession of grace. Faith, hope and charity are the three virtues of one Salvation, as The Father the Son and the Holy Ghost are the three Persons of One God. Are we saved by faith alone? Yes. But we are neither the possessors of faith, nor are we possessed by faith until we are converted, changed and manifest the fruit of that faith.

Faith is begun in knowledge. The blind man had to come to Jesus in faith. He did not know that Jesus was the Messiah. His salvation, as is all of our

salvation, is conditioned on coming to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God made Man, as our Lord and Savior. He comes to Jesus in the desperation of his affliction, and makes his profession of faith, and it is his faith that makes him whole. Implicit in that act of faith is an act of hope. He not only proclaims Jesus as the Lord, he asks the Lord to relieve him of his personal burden. But the blind man's salvation is not fulfilled. He has come to know the Lord, he has been transformed by the Lord, but the question of whether the seed of faith will yield the fruit of charity remains. Will the blind man live that transformation? It is not a foregone conclusion. Our Lord cured 10 lepers in the same circumstance, only one came back to glorify Him and thank Him, the others were transformed and yet not saved.

This blind man is saved by his encounter with Jesus. We know that he is, because St. Luke tells us he changed his life. "He received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God." To glorify God is to love the Lord with all your heart and mind and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, our act of faith is complete when we have been converted to good works to glorify God. Faith is not salvation until it is manifest, until it is completed in charity.

It was faith that was counted to Abraham as righteousness. But the faith of Abraham was not just intellectual. The faith of Abraham was manifest in that he left His home and people and moved to the land the Lord promised him. Noah had faith that the Lord told him the Truth about the need for the Ark, but if he hadn't built it, he would have drowned. To know Jesus Christ is Lord is not the fullness of faith. Demons knew Jesus for who He was and what His mission was. They called Him by name when they encountered Him and begged to know why He afflicted them before the time was complete. But demons didn't hope for their salvation, and they didn't change their lives to glorify God for the gift of Salvation in His Son. Demons are damned. We will be damned too, if we merely intellectualize our faith, if we fail to hope that the gift of salvation can even extend to us, as grievous as our sins are. We are damned if the fruit of faith, the love of God above all things, and charitable love for our neighbor, given to the glory of God in gratitude for His love, is not manifested in us as the ultimate fruit of our faith.

There are three gifts of the Holy Spirit, conferred upon us at Confirmation, which are the individual responses to the singular procession of grace given to us as faith, hope and charity. They are

knowledge, understanding and Wisdom. By faith, we are given the knowledge of God's Name, His Nature and His plan for us. By understanding, we receive hope that the knowledge is pertinent to us, transforming for us, redemptive of our sinful and death ended lives. It is Wisdom, the spirit of the Lord, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost, that causes us to fulfill the destiny revealed by faith by living lives of love to the glory of God.

We are saved by faith. We know the meaning of grace for our own lives by hope. We possess, and are possessed by faith, when like the blind man, we change our lives, follow Jesus and glorify God in charity to our neighbor.

St. Paul tells the Corinthians the greatest virtue is charity. He is writing to an existing Church. The Corinthians have known Jesus by faith, they have been baptized and converted in hope. The progression of grace is completed by the fullness of faith that is the love of God and Neighbor, charity for each other and for the world. That is the great challenge of faith for a Church, not just professing God, but living in godliness. We are saved by faith alone. Faith necessitates works. The fullness of faith, it's fruit, the reception of faith in Wisdom, is manifest in our good works done for the glory of God.

For Lent, which starts this coming Wednesday, we should look at preparing ourselves to live more Godly lives. Our habit has been to focus on what we can give up for Lent, and of course, fasting and self denial are good spiritual disciplines. However, I would encourage us not only to enter Lent with what we can give up on our minds, but also to be engaged in how much more we can give, give of our time, give of our resources, give of our witness, and give of our love. Let's make this a Lent dedicated to the virtue of Charity.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen