



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday July 13, 2014 - Trinity 4

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

The passage selected for the Sermon today is taken from the Gospel:

“Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful Judge not and you shall not be judged, Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned Forgive, and you will be forgiven, Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down

And shaken together, and running over Shall men give unto your bosom.”

St. Luke 6:36:38

When I counsel people preparing for marriage, I always remind them that a long and successful marriage is full of forgiveness. We have to quick both to ask forgiveness and to give it. That isn't easy, because forgiveness is a quality of Divine nature and is alien to our human character. In the face of hurtfulness, our human nature is either to draw back and build walls or to strike out in retaliation. Whichever way these grudges manifest, they take hold of our lives and our hearts and our time, draining us of our ability to love and share, filling us with fear and violent thoughts. These grudges, our unwillingness to forgive and ask forgiveness, truly make us prisoners of this sad and dying world. Jesus teaches us that

our freedom to do good, to do His will and to imitate His life requires us to let go of our grudges and fears and pride. He teaches us we have to forgive as He forgives.

We get the perfect model of Forgiving in the parable about the Prodigal Son. Despite the lack of appreciation, and the disrespect and petulance that each son manifests, the father still goes out to them with forgiveness and love. The father runs down to embrace the Prodigal son when he is still a long way off, and then the father even throws a party for his prodigal son. He also leaves the party, and goes outside to find the sulking elder son and to assure him of his love, that he would always be with him. The father didn't have to go out to the boys, but he raced to embrace those who had offended against him the most, and he forgave them.

The entire Old Testament mirrors of the parable of the Prodigal Son. From Adam, to Abraham, to Samson, to Moses leading the people out of Egypt, to David, to Nehemiah rebuilding the Temple, the entire Old Testament is the story of the Father reaching out to His children. He allows them to choose against His will, shows them their consequence, but then graciously forgives them

and restores them whenever they just begin to turn back to Him.

In the New Testament, Jesus continues the Tradition of forgiving established by His Father. He forgives Peter at his fishing boat, Matthew at the custom, Zachaeus in the tree, the Samaritan woman at the well, Mary Magdalene at His feet, James and John in their ambition, Peter again and again. In the end, when all who loved Him and professed to be His disciples deserted Him, running away in His hour of need, denying Him, quivering in fear for their own lives; he forgave them. The first thing He does when He sees them again, after the Resurrection, is to come to them and say, “Peace”, and “My peace I give you.”

There are those times in our lives where the need to forgive and be forgiven become critical. We’ve all been there, been in that spot where the only hope we had for forgiveness from God and the people we loved was the promise made in the prayer that Jesus taught us Himself. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In those times we forgive every person we know. We search for people that have wronged us in the past. We give every one we meet the benefit of the doubt, praying, please God, give me the grace of forgiveness from you and from the people you have given me.

Real forgiveness is difficult. There is no shortage of justification and rationalization for the grudges we hold. To be honest, real hurt, which can not be denied or diminished, is done to us, mainly by the people we love most. We can’t dismiss these wounds because they both pierce us with pain of the moment, and

then fester in our resentment and pride. The hurts we receive can even feel like mortal wounds, betrayals that are too painful to bear.

Forgiving that kind of harm doesn’t happen in a minute. It isn’t a rational decision. Self-preservation and self-justification overrule mere rationality and good intention. Forgiveness is an act of perseverance as much as it is an act of will. We have to pray that our hearts can be turned to forgiveness. It is not our nature to forgive on our own. Sometimes we have to pray for years for real forgiveness to take hold in our hearts.

But no matter how hard it is to forgive, no matter how long we have to battle our wounds and our indignation and our pride, we have to pray, and pray every day, until our hearts are turned, and real forgiveness comes to us. We have to do it, because we’ve made a deal. We have begged to be judged as we have judged each other, and in the end, we can only stand before God by the grace of His forgiveness.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will come into our lives and convert our hearts, giving us the spirit of forgiveness and awareness of our desperate need to be forgiven. May the Good Lord give us the will to begin forgiving those who have harmed us, give us perseverance to pray diligently until that forgiveness is made true, and make us aware of the peace that comes from forgiveness.

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