



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday November 9, 2014 - Trinity 21 & Veteran's Day

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

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

“So the father knew that it was the same hour in the which Jesus said unto him, thy son liveth. And himself believed, and his whole house .”

In two days, we commemorate Veteran's Day. Veteran's day is the American successor to Armistice Day, the signing of the Peace Treaty that ended WWI, the War to end All Wars. It is the habit to honor those who gave their lives by the wearing of poppies, and the receipts from those poppies go to veterans, their widows and families.

But while we remember the sacrifices that those soldiers, and their counterparts in the wars since, have made on the behalf of our freedom, we know that that war did not end all wars. The horror at the devastation of Europe that was believed would preempt any such conflict, was repeated and amplified in less than 25 years. We have been at war in one place or another in the world ever since.

The truth is we will be at war in the world for as long as we have, until the Good Lord comes to claim us. These wars of the world are reflections of the war that transcends time, the war for our souls and our lives. As St. Paul tells us in the Epistle, we wrestle against the wiles of the devil, against principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness in this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. This state of war is not a function of far places and other times, it is the real and present danger we face every day.

The war for our souls is not only played out on the world stage. It is also waged in the quiet of

families and even the internal dialogue we have in our minds and in our hearts. This father, who begs for the life of his child, is in the midst of a spiritual war. You can see how desperate the man is. Jesus has not yet established himself as the candidate for the Messiah. This is His second miracle, and the first was the business with the wine at the wedding. Believing this Jesus could deliver your beloved child from terminal illness is a far march from believing He could secure a happy wedding feast. To have come with such a desperate mission to see man with no established reputation for this kind of healing shows amazing faith.

Even more impressively, this man, like the mother of the possessed girl, who begged for the crumbs from the table, persists in his plea even when it seems like he is being dismissed. Jesus had included this man in the crowd He had rebuked. “Unless this generation see signs and wonders, it will not believe”. We can imagine, the desperate state of his love, that he would stand before Jesus after having been rebuked and dismissed to simply beg, please come or my child will die.

Jesus delivers this man from the sore distress he suffers because this man comes armored the way St. Paul tells us we must be clothed for spiritual battle. His loins were girt with truth. Though Jesus was early in His reputation, this man knew Jesus was the answer to his plight. He had on the breastplate of righteousness. The man begged his case for the sake of the love of his child, asking nothing for himself, only that his sick child might be saved. In that predicament, this man mirrored the love of God the Father, asking Jesus to be the means through which we, his children who were spiritually stricken with sin, might be saved.

The man was shod with the gospel of peace. He heard the Good News from the very source, and the man was not dissuaded by the simplicity and humility of the messenger. He put his child's life on the shield of faith in this undistinguished man who spoke with authority of peace and love and the good will the Father has for His children.

Most amazingly, Jesus did for this man what He always does for us. He weighs our prayers and our desperate bargaining, and He gives us what we need for salvation, He gives us more than we had imagined to ask. Yes, the man's child was relieved of the grievous illness. Yes, the child was delivered from death at that moment, but the real gift was that the intervention for the child became the means of salvation for that family. Because he experienced the grace of Christ, the man converted, and believed. He was given the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit.

Because the man believed, he and his family were delivered not just from the sorrow of their child's death, but they were delivered from the fear of death itself. They received the consolation of faith, hope that they would not be separated from their love, but that they would persevere through the grace of Jesus Christ to be knit together in light and life forever. That is the miracle that even the Apostles could not see until they were anointed with the Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ overcomes not only the sickness that we experience in time, but that He has defeated death and the devil for all time. He doesn't just console us in our war-torn lives, he gives us eternal lives of peace and love.

We are very much like that man who came to Jesus begging for a miracle for his child. Our lives are distressed. We are at war, and we are overwhelmed with fears and doubts and illness and anxieties. We are made afraid by the imminent and terrifying prospect of our own deaths, and made even more desperate as we contemplate the suffering and apparent death of those we love.

That man came to a preacher of small repute, to Jesus at the very beginning of his ministry, before the signs He would show would be the reasonable evidence of His power and His intention. He had faith to see in Jesus the answer to his most desperate need, even when the world could not see the same. We come to the altar rail, seeking that same life-giving grace, the very body and blood of Christ to dwell in us, as we receive, what appears to the world to be simply bread and wine. We have to make the very same act of faith when we turn back from the

altar. Though we can not yet see that our prayers have been answered, that Jesus through the Holy Spirit has given us even more than we had dared to ask, we hope in His promise, and we return to our homes seeking validation that He has blessed us, that He has granted our petitions.

Like that man in the gospel, we have to have faith that even though we can't yet see the work of Christ in our lives, even though we haven't seen the proof that our loved ones are delivered and that we will be united with them forever, that the price has been paid, that the grace has been given, that though we lack vision to see beyond the horizon of death, that death has been translated into the door of life. The war has been won, even though the battle rages on around us.

I had the pleasure of listening to Alan Walden relate the history of the War of 1812 a few weeks ago. It struck me that even though the Battle of Baltimore, the battle that inspired the Star Spangled Banner, effectively ended the War in victory for the Americans, that there was one last fearsome battle fought in New Orleans because the word of the armistice could not reach the combatants. In the war against the devil, and his minion death, we are like the forces in New Orleans, in real danger, in desperate straights, fighting for our lives. But while the danger is real, the fear is real, the fact is, the war has been won. The devil has been vanquished. His hold on us is broken. Death has been converted from our fearsome destination into the door we pass through into everlasting life and love.

Let us put on the armor of God, so that we too can persevere until we reach that place where we realize the Victory, where we are finally delivered from the terrors of this world.

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