



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sermon for the 7th Sunday in Trinity
July 19, 2015

**✠ 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

“I have compassion on the multitude, for they have been with me three days, and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way”

When Jesus looked out on this crowd, and determined to minister to their faintness, He was looking beyond the faintness that comes from physical hunger to their faintness of heart they would experience between His Crucifixion and the Resurrection. He also looks through them in time to view the faint heartedness of our own generation. He knew we would not be sustained in the wilderness without His grace to fortify us. The bread that He broke for the multitude was the symbolic foreshadowing of the Bread that He breaks for us, as we follow Him into the wilderness with our own shaky faith.

The wilderness is an important element of this lesson. In fact, wilderness is an image used throughout Scripture. Abraham was called to journey through the wilderness to start a new life in covenant with God. His willingness to go into the wilderness is the faith that was counted to him as righteousness.

Moses led the Jews from Egypt through the wilderness to begin the new life of Israel under covenant. Jesus even goes to the wilderness himself, to confront the devil, before he begins his public ministry. And in this passage, Jesus turns for the second time to the multitude who have followed him into the wilderness with compassion. He worries about their ability to journey home, without fainting and falling by the way.

Geographically, the wilderness of the Scriptures high desert and desert. The air is hot, and dry, and thin. It is a land full of scorpions and snakes. It is a land empty of earthly lushness and comfort. It is a place that challenges life, and metaphorically, it is the place of Spiritual challenge, the dominion of the devil.

How can we, that live in lush, green, bountiful Maryland relate to this desert. We relate because we too live in the desert. The desert of our lives is the Spiritual desert that we create by our unwillingness to confess and forgive. Each of us lives in a private landscape, stripped of spiritual nourishment by our selfishness. The air of our private desert is heated by the anger of grudges we won't let go. The poisonous beasts of our private desert are the hurtful words that spring, and sting, so

easily from our mouths. We are journeying through this private desert toward a better place, a place we are called to by Jesus, and He has looked on us, and pitied us, because he knows we won't survive this place without special grace. He intervenes to overcome our environment and our nature by nourishing us with Bread from Heaven.

This particular trip to the desert has a special meaning. It is no accident that the crowd has been on his heels for three days. This particular three-day trek looks forward to that three day journey into the dominion of the devil, which is death, that will happen from Good Friday to Easter. The faintness Jesus anticipates of this crowd is also the faint heartedness He expected from His disciples on the trek from His Crucifixion to His Resurrection, and from us as we traverse our personal spiritual wilderness.

From the Cross, that three-day journey from Good Friday to Easter looked bleak. We still faint in the face of that fearsome desert of death that seems to swallow life, and even the source of Life? But Jesus knows our weakness. He takes His very Body and Blood, the same humanity that seemed inadequate in the face of the Cross on Calvary, and was mystically transformed and Resurrected on Easter. He offers us that same Body and Blood to feed us in our own dangerous and lonely journey and to comfort us as we face our fear of death.

This Gospel teaches us the essential nature of Eucharistic grace, and its importance to our salvation as we make our spiritual journey. This multitude that followed Jesus into the desert had listened to the very word of God from Jesus for the last three days. They had received the teaching in their hearts. They knew He loved them for their faith to journey

in the wilderness. But walking through the wilderness with Jesus was not enough to sustain the disciples when they left His presence.

That multitude would faint physically, His disciples, his Apostles, even Peter who confessed Him as the Messiah would faint at heart on Good Friday. The Christians of today, of this place, and in this building; though we are baptized and filled with His Word, though we are converted and transformed, *will* still faint on our journey through this life and death unless He feeds us with the Bread of Heaven, which is His very Body. There is no doubt that the Bread of the wilderness is the precursor of the Bread He offers us at the Last Supper. He uses the same words of consecration to deliver the gift. He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the crowd in mystical abundance, filling all who eat, and then overflowing them with grace to share with the world.

We will be offered this very Bread of Heaven in just a few minutes. It is the Bread that we know to be the Very Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive in our hearts by faith to sustain us and to cure our faintheartedness in the face of death. It is the gift that sustains His life in us, and by which we are sustained in Him. Come to the altar and receive the Bread of life in awe and thanksgiving. Bless our Lord for talking pity on us, for feeding us to strengthen our faith, when we would faint on our journey home without him, and sharing with us His very Body and Blood, His Resurrection and His Eternal Life.

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