



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday August 9, 2015 - Trinity 10

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

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“It is written, My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a house of thieves.”

About 20 years ago I was in Mexico for business and found myself close to the town of Guadeloupe. The town is famous for the apparition of the Virgin Mary to 3 impoverished children from the town, and a shrine had been built to commemorate her appearance. On the road to the shrine were numerous little outdoor stalls selling statues and rosaries. To be honest, I was a only a little bit put off by the commercialism, until I got to the shrine itself and my full indignation kicked in. The shrine was small wooden structure that had been damaged by earthquakes, but next door to it was a glass and steel visitors Center in beautiful condition and selling the same statues and rosaries as the roadside stands, but claiming the advantage of having the truly blessed and official rosaries. I was so upset that I only bought rosaries for my grandmother, mother, Carolyn and a few extras. I wasn't ready to emulate Jesus, even though I was squeamish about the trade.

One of the reasons it is so dangerous to commit the sin of Adam and Eve, presuming to be like God, is that we so rarely think the way God does. Adam and Eve eat of the fruit, and they are expelled from the Garden, their sanctuary. Cain murders his brother, but is given a sanctuary city for protection. Jesus forgives the adulteress, He forgives the thief and murderer on the Cross, He even forgives the people who have crucified Him before He gives up the Ghost on Good Friday. However, when Jesus encounters the buyers and sellers in the Temple, he drives them out, whipping them and condemning them for making his Father's House a House of thieves.

It is hard for us to imagine this is the sin that drives Jesus to rage. The buyers and sellers performed an important ritual service. The temple sacrifices required a perfect offering, a lamb without spot, or a perfect turtledove. Not everyone that came to the Temple had a perfect lamb to

offer, and many could afford little more than the turtledoves. Without the buyers and sellers, the ritual life of the Temple would be severely curtailed, maybe even stopped. These merchants were in place with the blessing of priests and Pharisees, and yet, Jesus, in sadness and anger, drives them out with whip like cords from their stalls and stores.

The reason that Jesus is enraged is because these merchants went past enabling the worship of God to violating the First Commandment. “I am the Lord they God, and thou shalt have none other strange gods before me.” The merchants had let their advantage in the transaction supersede their primary duty to have God first in their hearts and lives and livelihood. Even though Jesus had driven the merchants away, the Temple had become so polluted by the political, economic and nationalistic goals of the men whose charge it was, that its corruption and desecration were sufficient that Jesus would pronounce Judgment in His prophecy that it would be completely torn down, with not one stone left standing atop another. That prophecy would be fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans laid siege to the city, and eventually destroyed the temple.

Though the Temple was not destroyed until the Roman siege, it had ceased to be the place of God on earth and in time a few decades earlier. At the conception of Jesus, the human nature of Jesus replaced the Temple as the Center of God's presence. The Jews of the day were blind to the Holy nature of the Incarnate Word, as they had become blind to the purpose of the Temple. Expediency and profit replaced piety and worship, leading first to the desecration of the Temple and finally the Crucifixion.

During the 40 days after the Resurrection, the Resurrected Body of Jesus was the undeniable place of God's presence on earth. Jesus promised the disciples that when he left, when He would be ascended, that he would not leave the disciples comfortless, but would send the Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles at Pentecost, and by the gift given

them, the Church and its sacraments became the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit would be present in the world. The Temple, the focal point of our worship of God, had been superseded first by the Person of Jesus, and then realized in the Church and sacraments. The home of the Holy Spirit in the world today is the life of every baptized Christian. You and I are the Temple of the Holy Ghost. In First Corinthians's 6th 19 St Paul writes, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

That we have become the Temple is the reason that this Epistle is paired with Gospel for this Sunday. As Temples of the Holy Ghost, we are filled with the gifts the Holy Ghost brings. These gifts are unique to each person. As St Paul says in the Epistle, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Those gifts, as they are enumerated, are unique to each of us, but which gift we have is not as important as the fact that each of us HAS a gift, and the gift we are given is meant for the glory of God and the witness to the world of the Love of Christ that is manifest in the way we care for each other.

That passage lists some of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but the list is not exhaustive or complete. We might not have wisdom, or speak in tongues or interpret tongues, but we have been given gifts. Sometimes those gifts are illness and affliction. The adversity that comes into our lives can be the means by which we glorify God, offering up our difficulties and ministering to others even as we struggle with either our wealth or health. Even those gifts can be profitable to the purpose for which we were created.

The tricky phrase in that passage explanation that these gifts are given to us "for profit", and I think it is over that concept that the buyers and sellers stumble, bringing upon themselves the wrath of Jesus. Honestly, quite a few Christians stumble over the concept today, with preoccupation on materialistic wealth as the symbol of God's favor and approval. If we are honest with ourselves, we all stumble with preoccupation with the material, whether that preoccupation takes the form anxiety and worry over our economic condition, or the form of compulsion to accumulate wealth in the sense of that adage the he who dies with the most toys wins. Either end of that spectrum is destructive, self destructive and spiritually bereft.

In the parable of the three servants who are each given talents while the Lord is away, which precedes today's Gospel in the readings for Morning Prayer yesterday, the expectation of profit is clearly explained. The two servants who please their Master take the talents they are given, and they use them, they exercise them, they grow in proficiency of their duties, and as a result, they please the Master with the increase of the gift that was given to them. That profit only comes from application and exercise of

that gift in the world. The servant that allows his gift to lay fallow, that doesn't put his talent to work, has that talent taken away from him, because he is an unprofitable servant.

When I read that parable yesterday, I was also caught by surprise by the closing line. I had forgotten that what had called the Master away in the first place was to deal with troublesome servants who rebelled in his absence. The parable closes with the Master saying, now bring before me those servants who would not be ruled by me, and put them to death before me. Those rebellious servants were the buyers and sellers. What so enraged Jesus was that even though they were doing what was proscribed by the Law, making it possible for the Temple sacrifices to be offered, they did their work with a primary concern for their self interest, instead of with priority for glory to God through service to their neighbor.

And so, we too have to be careful. We have to make examination of our hearts and our intentions. Are our lives fit to be Temples for the Holy Ghost and His gifts? Are we using the particular and peculiar gifts we have been given to the glory of God by serving our neighbors? Are we winning the battle against the temptation to serve mammon instead of God?

If we are honest, we don't win that battle as often as we would like to. Which brings us to the question of how we can change our lives if that self examination convicts us of failing to put God first, of making the doing His will our first fruit, the first thought and intention of our day and of our days. We can start at the beginning, with prayer to start our day. If we are saying Morning Prayer every day, the prayers to orient our lives and our gifts to the purpose God has given them to us are beautifully written to remind us and restore us to that purpose. If you aren't yet saying the Morning Prayer Office, you can ask God to keep you mindful of his primacy in your life and the purpose of your gifts in your own words, and in just a few seconds. And we can end our days with a prayer as well, either the Evening office, or a private prayer before we fall asleep, asking forgiveness for the failures of the day and fortitude to serve God better tomorrow. If we will just do that, we will be converted from unprofitable servants who will not be ruled by the Master, and will become gradually but inevitably, better and more seemly Temples for the Holy Ghost and the manifestation of His gifts in our lives.

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