



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Rose Sunday in Advent
Sunday December 13, 2015

**¤ 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:

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto Him, Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Matthew 11:2-3

It is evident from a cursory glance, that this Sunday, which is both Rose Sunday in Advent and Ministry Sunday, is different from the other Sundays in Advent. The vestments are rose colored rather than purple, and we have flowers back on the altar. There is a gladdening of the somber mood of preparation of the season because we are nearing the long awaited event, the Coming of the Lord. Indeed, the message that Jesus send to John the Baptist in this passage is one of joyous signs; the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead raised and the good news is preached to the poor.

But even in the midst of these miraculous signs, as the kingdom, the power

and the glory of Jesus are proclaimed, we have poor John the Baptist, struggling with his faith, and sending his friends to find Jesus to settle the question that troubles him so deeply. Are you the one?

John had good reason to doubt. Things had started so well. Just two years earlier, he had been witness to the most glorious sight. As he baptized sinners in the Jordan, Jesus had approached him. He knew that he would see the Messiah, and that he would know Him because the Spirit would descend upon the Messiah in the form of a dove. As the prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus, the very heavens opened above him, and the voice of God issued forth, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

The herald in the wilderness, who had cried, "Make straight the way of the Lord", had come face to face with Jesus, the Way, the truth and the life. Things would surely snowball now. The King had arrived, Jerusalem would be justified, her enemies would be put under

her heel and the people of God would be justified and returned to their rightful place in the glory of God. John did the right thing. He humbled himself so that the glory due the Christ would increase. He sent two disciples, Andrew and John, to Jesus and they became the first of the Apostles. John himself would be changed, the world would be different, and the promises of his ministry would be fulfilled.

Well things did change. Those disciples that did not desert him for Jesus, chastised him for not competing with the newcomer. John, faithfully, stood for what was right. He confronted Herod for his sinfulness in his marriage to his brother's wife. The real King of the world had arrived and these earthly princes would be judged in His righteousness. But there was no miracle for John at this time. The earthly prince arrested him, cast him into prison, treated him with cruelty and disdain. But even that was not enough for the wicked wife. Angered because he wouldn't punish John even further, she sent her own daughter to fan the lust of Herod and take advantage of his desire to beg for the head of the Baptist to be brought to her in a bucket.

A cold damp gray prison cell, the Company of rats and roaches, bruises and welts inflicted by cruel and hateful men, disdain and ill will from the powerful, the sure and certain sentence of bloody and senseless death imposed by evil, vengeful enemies. No miracle. No acclaim. No comfort.

All those gladdening miracles of Jesus were of little comfort to the Baptist in His cell. If Jesus had really been the one, how could the fates have turned so awfully? How could John keep his faith in the face of these horrible disappointments. He had given his life for the

Christ, he had proclaimed His name and humbled Himself before His Lord, and this horror of a life and death was his reward. He sent two more disciples to Jesus, wanting these two to return with the answer to the doubts that tortured his soul more than all the other indignities he had to suffer. Are you the one? Are my ministry and my witness in vain? Are we to wait for another?

How difficult it was for John to remain a faithful witness. How difficult it is for us all to remain faithful witnesses when our lives are in shambles, when our hopes are in doubt, when we are unjustly attacked by the world, when we are pained in body and heart, when we find ourselves fearfully trembling in the shadow of death. The promises of our reward are not promises for this earth. An easy life is not the sign of God's favor. But, a peaceful life is. To keep faith and face our trials in peace is the witness we are called to bear.

John accepted the signs he was shown. He faced his enemies in peace. He died in his faith and he is a great saint. We are called to witness as powerfully as John. We have the same minister of faith in the Holy Ghost, and we have the same reward. Hopefully, we won't face the same death, but we are guaranteed the same life. A life with crosses that we must bear in peace, troubles we face for ourselves by providing comfort to others, death met with faith in our life in Christ.

"Let a man so account of us, as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the ministry of God." 1st Cor. 4:1

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