



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, August 21st 2016 - Trinity XIII

“Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”

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

A dear friend of mine who attends a parish in Lutherville and I were recently discussing a rather disturbing article that was all over the news in the spring. It's election season, as everybody knows, and election season really tends to bring out the worst in us as a people. In this case, it seems a 25 year old woman with psoriatic arthritis, fibromyalgia, and Crohn's disease was in a car accident on the interstate in South Carolina. So she calls for a tow truck, and a half hour later, one pulls up.

The tow truck driver gets out and surveys the situation, and deduces from the woman's bumper stickers that she's pretty clearly a socialist. Then, citing the fact that he was a Christian, the driver told her we would under no circumstances tow her. In an interview after the fact, he actually went so far as to say "I think the Lord came to me, and he just said get in the truck and leave." And that's just what he did - because he was a Christian and this woman, regardless of her religious beliefs or race, was a socialist, he got in his truck and abandoned her on the side of the highway. For Jesus.

Now, I should mention that this conversation was happening on the Internet, which is where all good discourse goes to die. So it wasn't long before somebody came along and said "you people have it all wrong. Leaving that woman on the highway is exactly in line with the teachings of Jesus. After all, it was Jesus who drove the money changers out of the temple. Try reading your Bible." I said "mate, that's not how it works," to which he

replied "you don't want to argue about this stuff with me; it's only fair I warn you that I have taught Bible study lessons before!" I said "oh, then by all means, please do provide me with the exegesis you used to come to this. I am after all a mere parish priest." I don't know if his computer broke or his iPhone died, but for some reason, that part of the conversation ended as quickly as it began.

And I wish I could say I was embellishing this tale just a bit to make a point, but I sadly am not. But this is what happens when we stop listening to what Jesus actually said, and start listening to what we wished he'd said, according to our own prejudices and biases. That's why Jesus goes to such great lengths to make His point; He knew we'd struggle with this. The young lawyer naturally assumed that his "neighbor" would be a friend, or at least a fellow Israelite; an Israelite would not be condemned to death by the Sanhedrin for killing a resident stranger in Israel. And while they were barred from contriving the death of a gentile, the Israelites were under no obligation to deliver a gentile from death if he were to fall into a life threatening situation. So you can imagine how much Jesus turns things upside down with this parable; the Samaritans weren't merely a different class of people; they were barely people.

Now, if you know Jesus, you know He wasn't one to waste words on idle talk, and **certainly** not one to waste them on boring platitudes about being nice. And although good works are the fruit of our faith, this isn't a lesson on works; this is a lesson on Biblical love, on the kind of love that

God expresses to us. We're all different from each other here; I can't imagine some of our WWII vets sharing my love of 80s thrash metal, but I'm sure nobody can picture me jumping out of an airplane with a machine gun, so there's that. But none of us are as different from each other, as all of us are from God.

What do we know about God from Scripture, from the prophets, and from Christ? We know that God is absolutely perfect and sinless. We know that God exists in a way we can't comprehend, eternal and outside of the constraints of time and space. We know that God alone is absolutely righteous and just, and that God exists in perfect love and agreement in the persons of the Holy Trinity. We know that it is God alone who sanctifies us, and that no amount of trying on our own will accomplish that. We know both that God *is* love, and that God loves us.

And while we do experience love, we aren't on the same scale of measure as God. No matter how much we love our parents or our wives or even our children, we are not capable of experiencing or knowing the kind of love or scope of love that God both experiences and exhibits. And no matter how angry somebody makes us, or how deeply they hurt us, we do not experience the kind of sins against ourselves that God experiences from us. And even if you don't agree with me, and think that perhaps you love as deeply as God or are righteous and just enough to be sinned against like we sin against God, none of us, and I mean none of us, are so desirous of reconciliation with those who have sinned against us that we would send our only begotten Son pay for those sins, and to bridge the gap between us and them with His blood. Nobody, no person in this church would be so intent on reconciling with a former best friend who betrayed us, or a sibling whose behaviour hurt us, that we would allow our very child to go and bridge that gap with His life. None of us. That is how incredibly different we are from God.

Jesus isn't teaching His disciples and us how to be "nice;" nice is for amateurs. Jesus is teaching what we can to imitate God; to imitate Him. If God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sin even though we are so terribly unlike Him, how can we possibly then turn around and deny Biblical love and charity to those whose creeds or lives are unlike ours, and yet expect Him to show us grace we refuse to show? No, this isn't a lesson in

manners nor is it a lesson in works; it's a lesson in Godlike love. We have the privilege of loving God only because God loved us first, and we have the ability to love others as Christians because we were first loved of God.

So when you see the long haired heavy metal dude with the upside down cross on his jacket, remember that he's not as different from you as you are from God. Or when a family from a war-torn nation are resettled in your apartment complex, and their customs and clothes seem so completely foreign that you can't tell where the falafel ends and the lamb curry begins, remember that you have way more in common with them than you do with a perfect and righteous God who existed before time began and walked among us in the person of Jesus Christ that we might be saved from our iniquity. Remember that Christ died for their sins no less than He died for yours and for mine, and that He desires a place for them at the wedding feast of the Lamb. Show them such Christian love that *source* of that love is something they want to know for themselves. Show them a love that is so genuine and which burns so brightly, it can only come from Jesus Christ.

As one of the Men In Black at this parish, I don't make it my business if you're a Republican or a Democrat, a progressive socialist, a constitutional Libertarian, or an anarchist. I don't care if you're black or white. I don't care if you're a Chevy person or a Ford person, especially since we Dodge people look down our noses at both of you. Honestly, the only thing I care about is that you're a Christian on the other six days of the week, when you walk out of here. We are called to make disciples of all nations, to do our part in bringing souls to Christ. Fortunately for us, He gave us a rather simple instruction manual to get us started in Godly living and disciple making, and it's the second thing we say at the start of every Mass - "Our Lord Jesus Christ said 'hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment and the second is like, namely this: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these; on these two commandments hang all the law, and the prophets.'" **Amen**