



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sexagesima Sunday
January 31, 2016

**✠ 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:

They on the rock are they, which when they hear; receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in the time of temptation fall away. Luke 8: 13

It will come as a shock to some of you that I'm not a native Virginian. In fact, since I have been observed pushing my plate away with the grits intact, I should confess that I am not even a Southerner. I know you're shocked. I am from New Hampshire, and since New Hampshire is the granite state, we'll all have a fixation about rocks. My school song even ends with a tribute to the granite of New Hampshire in our muscles and our heads.

So it should not be a surprise that I'm attracted to preach on the rock part of this Gospel. Our Lord thinks this parable is so important, that he takes the time to spell it out in plain language. The seed on rocky ground has no root, and in time of temptation it withers away. The Word is received, and appreciated joyfully, but it is not implanted deeply enough in our hearts to survive temptation. For those of us with granite in our heads and our hearts, it is important to discover how we deal with temptation and make our ground productive so our seed can bring forth one hundred fold.

I don't think Jesus is talking about those overt and obvious temptations. Seed that falls on uncovered rock never sprouts at all. This seed sprouts. The Word is accepted, but it can't withstand adversity. The uncovered rock is part of the path. The rock in this verse is that rock hidden just beneath the surface. That personal, private hardness of heart that lays beneath our apparent Christian good nature. It is that part of ourselves that pulls us back to our material death ridden world, even though we have been baptized into a new world of Life in Baptism.

In New Hampshire, we have miles and miles of rock walls. They don't mark boundaries, they just ring every field and path, seemingly without purpose or reason. As a city kid, I was a constant amusement to my rural buddies when I asked questions about subjects like this. It seems that the walls are the rocks cleared from the fields, piled in the nearest convenient place. The reason there are so many of these walls is that even when the field has been cleared the previous year, it has to be re-cleared every year you intend to plant. The frost and snow break up the rock deep beneath the surface, and new rock works it's way toward the surface every year.

Temptation is like that new rock. Even when we are converted and our field is clear of new rock, new temptation, bubbles up beneath the surface pulling us back toward to our old sinful nature. I'm not talking about actual sin, but the secret yearning

and weakness we have for a drink, or a pill, the illicit affair, the pictures on the Internet, the easy gossip, the protective lie, the convenience that leads to sins of omission, as well as commission.

So what are we supposed to do about this temptation. How do we dig up the subterranean rocks of our unconscious or hidden conscious. We have to turn to Our Lord for instruction. He was like us even in his ability to be tempted. We know of two incidents.

The first was Gethsamane. On the night before he died, he was tempted to let this cup pass, to do His own will instead of His Father's. It was not easy to give Himself to humiliation and the pain of nails in his hands and feet, hanging on a cross to death, when He had the power to avoid it. We are told He prayed so hard that his sweat was blood. He asked the Apostle's to pray with him, but like us, they didn't know how to pray like that. In fact, like us, they went to sleep instead of praying. If Our Lord Jesus Christ won't face temptation without such rigorous prayer, how can we be so presumptuous to believe we can overcome the rocks hidden in our hearts with our wimpy, casual, incidental and occasional prayer.

Prayer is like a muscle. It has to be exercised, worked, stretched. After all, we have to exert our prayer muscle to lift up and put away the those heavy rocks of heart that call us back to our sinful nature. It is our prayer muscle that takes the rock out of field, and piles them in a wall at the outside of our growing area so we can be productive seed of the Word of God.

The other incident of Our Lord's temptation is well known. At the outset of his ministry, he was offered food, riches, the earthly dominion of the kingdoms of the world to test God, to give in to the temptation of his human Nature. His preparation for that challenge is well documented. He went out to the desert, He willfully deprived himself of comfort for the glory of God, and fasted and prayed. This wasn't easy either. Jesus wasn't John. This is the Man who blessed the wedding with wine, whose disciples feasted while John fasted, who justified their happiness, because they were celebrating the

Bridegroom. Yet, He prepared. He prayed and fasted for forty days. He exercised His will power, His prayer power, and because He did so, He had the strength to meet the temptation, because he was properly prepared.

We are about to enter our forty days. Lent starts in ten days. We want to celebrate a Life beyond death with Him at Easter. We want to partake in His Mystical Body and reclaim that grace spurned by Adam. We want to put away our sinful nature, and put on the nature of Christ, the life eternal of a Christian. It is a free gift to us, but it is not an effortless gift. Our human corrupted nature does not let go so easily. With every frost, new temptations, new tests bubble up into our hearts and pull us back to the abyss. Our gracious Lord is there to fill us with grace, to give us strength to overcome, but we have to meet him. We have to make prayer muscles that will accept His strength. We have to open our ears and our Hearts to bear his fruit, to stretch the roots of the Word deep into the nutritious soil so we can feed on the grace of that fertile ground and bring forth our hundred fold.

This Lent, be determined not just to give something up. Be determined to prepare for the exertion of defeating temptation the way our Lord did. Exercise our prayer muscles vigorously. We can not presume to overcome our rock filled hidden hearts unless we pray like Jesus.

We are Anglicans. What gives us our particular and unique character is not our denial of the Pope infallibility, or acceptance of married priests, or even the theological refinement of our esteemed Divines. We are the Church identified by our commitment to Common Daily Prayer. I encourage you to make this forty days, the days that honor Our Lord's forty days, a proper Anglican Lent. Let's join daily in Common prayer, the daily office, Morning and Evening. Let's stretch our roots into the grace filled earth of prayer and burst forth at Easter with Our Lord bearing the hundred fold fruit of the people of His Name, Our Name, Christians.

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