



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

1 1856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

March 24th 2016 - Maundy Thursday,

“Lord, is it I?”

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

When I first contemplated preaching for this Maundy Thursday, I looked to the other narratives of The Passion and the commentaries written on them and they are myriad to be sure.

The more I thought about the narrative differences, particularly the events at Golgotha, on which much is written and our CSI fed interests are bound to be piqued. I became more drawn to the charging and condemnation of our Saviour Jesus Christ as recorded by Luke.

In this theatre, if you will, and it was that. We have four persons. The Pharisee surely is an entity, and it can well be argued that their operation was so choreographed and synchronized as to render them one person, and they fiercely and fervently charge at Pilate, with the Christ by the neck, as one person.

The next is Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, who ultimately must cast sentence on the Christ. As a Roman governor, Pilate would have been extremely watchful for trouble of any kind that might garner the attention of Rome, and both the Jewish priests, elders and Herod Antipas were capable of providing just such trouble.

Herod, “that fox” as Jesus called him, is third in this group; and any bible cracking child knows the story of Herod Antipas, his half-brother’s and his wife Herodias and her daughter Salome’s dance for the head of John the Baptist. These appetites bespeak his greasy character to say the least.

With these three, it must be noted that our Lord and Saviour really becomes a secondary concern. The end result being, the aspirations, the base want of each of these entities, supplant our Lord even now. Even Now when Christ is being made ready for his

grave. Even now as people scream for his blood, our Lord has become nothing more than a curiosity to the event.

In this light, I began to ponder what these interactions with Christ could tell us about our relationships with our Lord.

The Pharisee’s single-minded blind charge to crucify Christ really speaks to me of our incessant need as humans to accomplish and or achieve no matter the cost. First, when they tell Pilate of Christ’s “perverting the nation” and “that he himself is Christ a King”, Pilate is unimpressed, and says; “I find no fault in this man.” So the Pharisee ramp it up with, “he stirreth up the people...” How many times do we all build up a head of steam to do something and we will not be deterred no matter the evidence before us, and if needs be, a little gild of the lily for good measure? Most times in our fervent dash to achieve whatever the result, we can convince ourselves “it’s for the good, or it’s holy, or just; and sometimes it’s just: “we/I really need/want, this or that.”

My longsuffering wife could tell you, that I can rationalize the purchase of a drill press or a vestment with alacrity and like nobodies business, in spite of impending bills, and when that fails, I’ll say “but it’s on sale!” Sometimes the issues that we as Christians find ourselves hurtling out of control over are far more serious and have far greater ramifications. When we do this we leave Christ out of the equation of our lives and right where the Pharisee left him.

Pilate’s interaction with our Lord is perhaps just as predictable a piece of human perversity. Self-preservation is certainly an understandable instinct; total self-interest is another thing entirely. Pilate accomplishes both in the most elemental of terms on

the hands, feet, and life of another man. He also accomplishes his tasks with incredible disregard for anyone around him. What is this Christ to him? An inconvenience on an otherwise sunny day, and so I believe are the mercurial Herod and the Pharisee zealots.

For Pilate, economy is the name of the game, and his way of life. How many times in our lives do we pass by people, events, or things that require our attention and aren't convenient to us? I know I can leave mail or a coffee cup on the front table for aging; and I'll venture to guess, like most who can hear my voice, that after awaking on a Sunday morning I have, instead of thanking the Lord; wished I didn't have to get up and go engage in of all things: Divine Worship! And I lament to say I have passed by situations in my life where I might have made a positive difference and did not (and will never know), and I venture some of us know that feeling too. When we do this we leave Christ out of our human conversation, and right where Pilate left him.

Herod was certainly ruled by self interest as was Pilate, but Herod's interaction with Christ speaks of a childish cruelty, and an impatience and petulance as well. We know from Mark that after he would "gladly hear" John the Baptist, in other words was on friendly terms, he still took his head for Salome's reward.

When Christ comes before him, Herod has been anticipating this meeting for some time. He has heard of the works of this man Jesus and wants to see the miracles on display, much like a child with a new toy. According to Luke, the reason for Jesus' appearance before him, seems secondary to his lurid curiosity of the man, and when Christ does not participate in Herod's game, he mocks him, beats him, and throws him out. Just like a child with a new toy that won't perform to expectation.

I don't know how many times in the past, I've asked God to come through and save me with some phenomenal event, usually from a catastrophe of mine own making.

How many times do we, like Herod, call on God for some remarkable parlor trick in our immediate time? Then, when he has failed to perform to our high standard, we say "well, I knew that wasn't going to happen." And then we trundle on to seek the next possible solution to our problem, leaving God aside? When we do this we act as an impatient and petulant child as well.

All three of these persons, the Pharisee, Pilate, and Herod and their actions would at first glance indicate that they have left Christ behind, or at

very least aside. When we as Christians model aspects of these behaviours it is we who have left Jesus aside.

Or Have We? When we charge forth, headlong and undeterred to accomplish some task or achieve some thing no matter the cost, as the Pharisee did; be it holy, devout, or just a drill press, we don't leave Christ aside. He is, where he was then, is now, and ever shall be: right beside us. We have not subtracted Christ from our lives, we have chosen to ignore him.

When as Pilate, we act with lethargic indifference to actions, events, and occurrences in the lives of our fellow man or the world around us, when we feel that stepping around a human difficulty or issue is best to our self-preservation or just plain ease, we do not exclude Christ from our conversation, we refuse to let him speak. Christ is, as he was then, is now, and ever shall be: right beside us.

And when, like Herod, we ask the God of God to perform wonders for our immediate satisfaction, and are then incensed by our own vain disappointment; we objectify our Lord and attempt to relegate him to a toy box. We don't, and we can't He is there, The Great I Am.

You see, when we act such as this, Christ is standing right beside us just as then; silently watching, waiting, and loving. And just as then, when we behave in these ways; we as Christians charge Christ all over again. We display Christ to those who don't know Him and might want to know Him as a God whose followers as egotists who don't care for their fellowman and are basically out for themselves. And Christ is Condemned all over again.

The good news is that when we find ourselves in situations such as this, we can step back, be prayerfully silent, and stand with our Lord, as he has always with us, in his loving calm. Standing with him not merely around him, listening to him, and not talking at him.

It is only in this way we can better hear him and his will, and we can more clearly see him for ourselves, and show Christ to others as he has always been from before the world began. Christ the Patient, Christ the Loving, Christ the sacrifice, Christ the Victorious! Patiently ready to give his love, Himself, his body, his blood, for our sins and the sins of all men.

So as we face the people, tasks and issues that we as Christians must every day, I pray we remember the journey to the Cross of the Condemned. And as we travel to the Table of the Victorious, let us first ask the words recorded by Matthew two-thousand years ago on this night. Lord, is it I?