



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday September 11, 2016 - Trinity 16

**✠ 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:

“when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still.” Luke 7:12-14

There has been a sad disintegration of manners in our country over the last decades. It was not that long ago that a procession of cars with their lights on, and following a hearse, caused the world to stop. Cross traffic patiently waited for the whole procession to pass. If you were walking on the street, you stopped, made the sign of the cross, and shared a prayer for the repose of the deceased and for the consolation of the family. In the minutes it took for the procession to pass, you might consider your own mortality. At the very least you remembered your beloved family and friends that had gone on before you.

Today, if traffic stops, it is begrudgingly, and even accompanied by the occasional honking horn or exasperated rude gesture. Chances are very good that someone will cut into the line of the procession, and make their way along their journey oblivious to the once holy and civilized rituals of acknowledging the final passing of a neighbor. If you can get people to stop, the chance of a prayer, of consolation, of even a thought

toward our mortality becomes less than an afterthought. Those few moments become the opportunity to return a text, or a call or whatever else it is we do with these little demon cell phones that demand our every attention.

Later today, the sports world, the political world, the world of entertainment will all be obsessed with whether our paid gladiators stand or kneel during the National Anthem at our football games. Whether we believe black lives matter, or all lives matter, whether we believe police are unrestrained or unappreciated, we will be busier with this conversation than we are with the importance of the day. This conversation is like the noise of our cell phones clattering as the funeral procession passes by, making us deaf and blind to the timeless considerations.

Of course, today is a sad and solemn anniversary of the massacre of innocent civilians by a band of radical terrorists, the single most devastating attack against America since Pearl Harbor. It was an attack against the character of America, our economy, our culture, our democracy and just as importantly, our very existence as Christian country. 9/11 was not just a cowardly terrorist attack, it was a religious massacre. Those who believe that Islam is a religion of peace have forgotten all the triumphant celebrations following that day in the streets of Islamic countries, and the neighborhood Islamic enclaves in Christian countries, over the success of that atrocity. The apologists ignore their fellows kneeling in prayer beside them today, who celebrated in the privacy

of their homes and hearts that the caregivers and heroes of 9/11 are dying still from the injuries to their limbs and lungs from their effort to find survivors and to secure the dignity of the bodies of those who died.

In a very real sense, the days, weeks, even months following 9/11 were our national funeral procession. Instead of cars with headlights on, the procession was comprised of police cars, ambulances, fire trucks, cranes and dump trucks. When a body was retrieved and transported, men stopped, took off their hard hats, rested their shovels and they prayed.

We regained our sense of propriety during that mourning. We stopped being busy with the minutiae of our lives and we considered our mortality and our character. It did not matter if heroes or victims were black or white. Everyone was gray, gray with the debris of the buildings, or gray from the shock of the attack. What did matter was that we discovered that a Christian country responds to that kind of pointless senseless death with compassion, with unity, with hope, with prayerfulness. We responded with the self sacrificing love that was epitomized by the brave men and women who lost their lives saving others, and those who are still suffering because of their efforts in those days after the attack. A Christian does not glory in taking innocent life. As Christians, we respond to death with indignation, with hope in everlasting life, with compassion, and with love.

We responded the way Christ did in the encounter from this morning's Gospel. This man, the only son of a widowed mother is being carried from the city. His mother is not only grieving the loss of her son, she has to be anxious about how she will survive herself, alone and without his support. The whole city recognizes the tragedy in this death and accompanies the mother on her sad journey. The son is also on a journey, through death, to meet His Lord and Savior.

And there He is. The funeral procession stops when it encounters Jesus. Subconsciously, in their hearts, the grieving party knows they have reached their destination. The son did not journey far into the next life. As he passed through the gates in death, the gates of death, Jesus was there. He did not wait for the widow's son.

Jesus came to find Him, just as the father does in the Prodigal Son.

Like that Father, and like His Father, Our Father who art in heaven, his response to the young man and to his grieving mother is compassion. "Arise", he says. He raises the young man, just as He Himself will be raised. To what end is this compassionate Resurrection? To the simple end that the son will be restored to His mother, that she will be made whole herself because she is together with him. What is unsaid in the exchange is that this death is redeemed because, as Abraham said to Isaac when he asked where the Lamb might be, "God Himself will provide the sacrifice".

As we look on this encounter from the distance of history, we ask ourselves why Jesus chose this young man, this particular grieving widow as the objects of His mercy. Because our vision is confined to this world, and our faith is faint, it is hard for us to see through to the truth. The compassion shown this young man is not an object lesson. It is not an isolated case. This young man and his mother are blessed in their encounter with Jesus so that we will have courage, hope and faith that Jesus will have compassion on us as well. What Jesus does for this particular man, He does for every one of us.

Our coming journey through will be death is simply coming through the gate. There we will find that Jesus has already come for us. We won't have to seek Him. He won't leave us in doubt. He will be there. He will be waiting for us with His compassion and love. He will say to us what He said to the young man. "Arise". He will share His Resurrection with us, and He will restore us to the people that we love and who have loved us, not only for a moment, but for eternity. Jesus reconciles and reunites this family because it is what He does. It is who He is. It is what He will do for every one of us.

As we prepare for Communion today, let us stop, take a moment to honor those who have passed on before us, to have compassion on those who are grieving, to consider not just our mortality, but the gift of immortality Jesus has offered us.

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