



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday October 2, 2016 - Trinity 19

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

The passage taken for the sermon this morning is from the Epistle,

“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you” Ephesians 4:32

We are more aware of the atrocities committed in the world today than at any time in history, The media replay the bloody acts of ISIS and Islamic terrorists for us over and over again until we are numb. Our entertainment, the police shows and medical shows that pass for drama, are filled with outrageous acts of perversion, abuse, hatred and murder. We condemn the genocides of the last century and are peripherally aware that in Africa and the Middle East, murder at the same or even greater scale, continue.

Whether these beastly acts and the hate filled people who perpetrate them can be forgiven is a hard theological question. We confuse forgiveness with approval. We confuse mercy with amnesty. Forgiveness doesn’t mean we cease to oppose evil or protect the innocent. Forgiveness at that scale is about surrendering our inclination to be judgmental, that we put the final disposition of the souls of people who commit atrocious acts in the hand of God.

That kind of debate, about justice and theology, can be argued by either side with relish. In simpler times, it might even have been argued with respect and an open mind and heart. But that debate is not what this Gospel is about. This Gospel is about the insidious and seemingly

harmless manifestations of our nature that can cause us to sin to the peril of our souls. This Gospel isn’t about how we deal with the villains of the world. This Gospel is about the real spiritual danger of how we treat each other, the people we know best and pretend to love.

Twice in this Gospel passage it is made clear that Jesus has gone to his home. He took a ship, crossed over, and came to His home to start the encounter. After his exchange with the scribes, He goes to His home. This Gospel encounter is about dealing with the people who are close to us, our families, our friends, and even our parish.

Look at the way he greets the man with palsy. This man comes to Jesus broken in body and spirit. He is a sinner, and known to be a sinner of sufficient reputation that when Jesus says, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven you”, no one mistakes the absolution for polite conversation. Why does Jesus forgive the man. It doesn’t say he begged forgiveness as other sinners had done. He is forgiven because of the faith of his friends who carried him to Jesus. They believed in Jesus, and believed that He had the power to restore their friend. Jesus, always knowing what is better for us than we know for ourselves, restored the palsied man in the way that was most important. He restored him to grace. He separated him from the withering death of his sinfulness. He made him whole in spirit and for forever. And then, Jesus restored his physical health.

Who is it that is chastised in this encounter. It is the people who should have known Jesus best, the scribes. It was the men who were most familiar with the Scriptures and with the prophecies of the Messiah. The scribes, who were the revered authorities in His hometown. They knew Him well. They knew His teaching. They knew what it meant when he said He was the Son of Man, that He was proclaiming that He was the Messiah. But instead of being joyous for this man who is relieved of the burden of his sins, they presumed to pass judgment, to say in the hearts that Jesus was a blasphemer. And it was presumptuous. If they had doubts about what they heard, or what Jesus meant when he told the palsied man his sins were forgiven, they had the chance to ask the question. But they didn't. They made it their business to pass judgment.

The scary thing is they didn't even say the words out loud. They didn't challenge Jesus in the public forum. They presumed in their hearts, and it is for their thoughts that Jesus confronts them.

So what exactly were the sins those thoughts represented that elicited such a strong rebuke from Jesus. Very simply, the scribes were prideful and they were hardhearted. In a very real way, this encounter is the personification of the parable about the Publican and the Pharisee. The palsied man comes in his suffering and is humbled by his infirmity, borne on the faith of his friends and he is justified. The scribes, who by earthly standard would have been the holy men, the well churchd men of that town, are justified of themselves, presuming to pass judgment on this unfortunate man, and even to have the temerity to pass judgment on Jesus. These men are rebuked.

Worse is their lack of charity, their hardness of heart. It is the job of the well-churchd people to seek out the broken and sick and to comfort them. These men who had such pride in their knowledge of the law were untouched by the mandate of Love that it represented. You would think they would be joyful for this man, who came in His misery, and

whose sins were forgiven, for this man who was restored to the community of God, of which they were the most prominent representatives. But they gave no thought for this man. Their only thoughts were how they could look down on Jesus, how they could characterize Him of sinfulness for lifting the burden of sin from this sick and miserable man. In short, these men were hypocrites. They pretend to be Holy, when in fact they are just prideful. They pretended to have authority from the law, when they were called to have mercy.

What does this encounter mean to us. Certainly Jesus uses this man to prove for us that He has the power to forgive sins. He shows us His identity and His character by the power to raise the man up and restore his health. Most importantly, though, it is a warning to us. We are the well-churchd people. We are the ones who should know the Scriptures best, who should know Jesus best, who have known Him the longest.

Is our experience in the Church leading us to be like the men who brought the palsied man to Jesus. Are we bringing the sick and sick in spirit to Him for healing. Or are we passing judgment on the Church and on each other. Are we deciding in our hearts who is worthy of our kindness, and more importantly, who is not worthy of our kindness. Are we passing judgment on other people's knowledge, or churchmanship, or their appearance of piety, when we should be concerned with trying to live up to the expectation Jesus has for each of us to be tenderhearted, to be kind, to be tolerant.

Let us pray that when our time for judgment comes, when we are called to account for our sins and hopeful for absolution, that we will not earn from Jesus a rebuke for prideful judgment and hardhearted hypocrisy. Instead, may he find us in the same heart that was in the good friends of the palsied man, lifting each other up, strong in our faith, full of kindness, and tenderhearted.

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