



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord

Being Easter Day, Sunday, April 16th, 2017

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

There's something entirely paradoxical about the way Christians treat God. Every time we go to church we praise him for his almighty power, his boundless wisdom and limitless knowledge.

We affirm these fundamental aspects of his nature in the creeds, in our prayers and in our hymns; then we declare our love for him because of the kindness, love and mercy he's shown us.

But once we leave church it's quite a different story. Far from behaving as though he is all-powerful, all wise and all knowing, we treat God as if he is a doddering old incompetent, utterly incapable of doing a single thing without our help and counsel. It's really quite bizarre.

Jesus' final command to us was: "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost – teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

There's nothing unduly complicated about this command. It doesn't lend itself to a multiplicity of interpretations. It, quite simply means: "Go preach to Gospel to the world."

Yet when you study the way so many churches operate – especially during their synods and conventions – one might be forgiven for thinking that Jesus had actually told us: "Go

politick among yourselves. Wheel and deal to advance my kingdom rather than bother with the tedious business of preaching the Gospel."

Christians, by no means, have a monopoly on this sort of behavior. It seems to be a basic human trait, as old as Adam and Eve and the Serpent. Indeed, the first Holy Week had been a week of heavy-duty politicking.

Rather than trust God to figure out how to redeem mankind without any outside help, Jerusalem's entire religious establishment – scribes and Pharisees, priests and Sadducees – had been frenziedly plotting. The religious parties, ironically, had even attempted to make common cause with the Herodians, secular politicians who were their archenemies.

But, then, Jesus' disciples had been busy politicking too. They were working desperately hard to gin up support for the armed uprising against the Roman Empire they expected Jesus to lead. In fact, most of them had hoped Jesus would order the attack immediately after his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But in what seemed to be a dose of cold feet, instead of striking while the iron was hot, Jesus only frustrated his disciples by dribbling away time – teaching in the Temple, debating his critics and antagonizing the most influential of his potential supporters.

As his friend desperately tried to egg him into action, Jerusalem's religious leaders, no less desperately, cast around for ways to derail the coming revolution.

It wasn't they disbelieved the prophecies that God would send his Messiah to free his people from their foreign yoke. But realists that they were, they knew that this was not the right time. An untrained peasant rabble wouldn't stand a chance against the might of Rome's invincible legions.

The Romans were not forgiving people. They put down rebellions with merciless ferocity and with frightful slaughter. The nation would be crushed and its political and religious leaders (i.e. themselves) executed or sold as slaves.

It was Caiaphas – the chief priest that year and, like so many leading churchmen – a consummate politician, who came up with what seemed to be the only practical solution. “It is expedient,” he said, resignedly “that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not.”

This was easier said than done. Jesus was constantly surrounded by his disciples and allies. It would have been impossible to arrest him without sparking a riot. It was, however, one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who solved the problem for them.

Frustrated by Jesus' apparent reluctance to act, Judas – himself a former terrorist – decided to force Jesus' hand by providing Jerusalem's religious authorities with an opportunity to arrest him. This, he reasoned, would surely force Jesus to fight back and start the rebellion. Iscariot's bid to force God's hand sealed Jesus' fate.

The curious thing is that all the participants in this ugly business (with the possible exception of Pontius Pilate and Barabbas) were firmly convinced they were doing God's work.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, Caiaphas, the disciples and even Judas Iscariot were all so certain of their own rectitude it never for a moment occurred to them that they were making

a tragic mistake. Indeed, it wasn't until Jesus was on trial for his life that the disciples became fully aware that something was dreadfully amiss.

They don't seem to have recalled that he emphasized, time and again, he had not come to fight for an earthly kingdom. Nor do they seem to have recalled his many warnings that he would be arrested, tried, flogged and crucified. Indeed, six weeks after Jesus' resurrection they still didn't get it.

There are an awful lot of lessons to be learned from the story of that first Easter – not least that we should beware of trying to read God's mind. He has told us that the way we should demonstrate our love for him is to love our fellow men just as we love ourselves. Plans that deviate from this rule are certain to lead to trouble.

But the most important lesson of all is that God is not just almighty, all wise and all knowing, but pure unbounded love. In other words, he doesn't merely “love,” he actually IS love. Love is his very nature.

And this pure unbounded love enables him to take all the wicked, thoughtless and foolish things we do and make them turn out not just for the good, but for the very best.

Not only does his love give your lives meaning, he has given you the promise of eternal life so that you can enjoy his love forever. Indeed, the message of the resurrection on Easter Day is that God so loves the world he gave his only begotten Son to the end that all who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.
AMEN

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.