



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Maundy Thursday
April 13, 2017**

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

The subject of the meditation for Maundy Thursday is taken from the Prayer of Humble Access, which we recite before the Consecration,

“Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.”

The cornerstone of our being, our identity, is the undeniable need to know God. This fundamental drive, which is defined as Mysticism, is the foundation of every religion. Even Atheists, who claim they will not know God, are organized around the denial of this basic instinct. In the same way that telling a toddler not to spill their milk guarantees a soggy tablecloth, telling the adult brain to not pursue union with God makes the preoccupation with pursuing God inevitable.

While the desire to know God is an indelible and universal aspect of our person, **how** it is we can experience God is the question that dissolves unity and Christian charity. This division carves us into different religions; different factions within a religion, such as Protestant or Catholic; different jurisdictions within a faction, which is represented by the alphabet soup of Anglican organizations; and even different practice within a jurisdiction or parish, represented by our churchmanship, whether high, broad or low. The pattern of fervent bonding to the next fad promising transcendent union with God, then our intolerance of

anyone who dares pursue that union differently, and the vehement and hateful rejection of the gurus of that same fad when it ultimately fails us is our culture. That same pattern repeated over time, since the beginning of time, is what we call history.

Jesus teaches us that we are to come to Him as little children, and I believe that with my heart and soul. Children see through to the essence of personhood, and they know the essence of Jesus is Love and preservation. They don't demand miracles. They don't require scientific proof. They believe and understand despite the hypocrisy of the grown ups in their churches. How is it that the children know, because the Bible tells them so.

As we become older children, our cynicism and disappointment and hurt obscure our ability to simply know. We still believe that this world, and the way we live, is not the Truth, but we learn that the pain inflicted by the world is real. This conflict between the beautiful and mystical world of Truth, and the sinful and broken reality we inhabit, becomes the veil that separates Man from God.

As our experience multiplies, which means as the pain of this world, and its weariness and sadness multiply, our expectation of experiencing God, of knowing Him, becomes ever more demanding. The assurance of the Bible, the radiant glow from a morning prayer in the garden, the relief that comes from the deal making plea in our adversity, all become inadequate to sustaining our faith. In the face of the worries, and problems and suffering that comprise reality, the simple Truth of God's continual presence and the protection of His love become just a naïve child's belief, a hope for the world to come, an

inadequate shield in the reality we populate. We join with our friend Pilate, the archetype of the modern Christian, and echo his words, “What is Truth?”

Like us, Pilate faced the Truth, but wasn't impressed by it enough to cause him to change his reality. He certainly knew Jesus was different. He would not have given so much attention to a common prisoner, especially one accused of sowing insurrection. Imagine our new Supreme Court Justice bargaining with the crowd to release a suspected 9/11 suspect. Pilate knew from his wife that Jesus was a Holy man and that her dreams had been troubled by the encounter that was to come. He had been warned by her to have nothing to do with that Holy man's death. The continuing appeals by Pilate to the crowd, both before and after trying to palm Jesus off on Herod, showed Pilate at least believed his wife. When Jesus responded to the query about why his people would betray their king with the answer that “My kingdom is not of this world”, Pontius Pilate didn't scoff. He did not dismiss Jesus as a delusional madman. He re-doubled his efforts to get Jesus off, even offering an outlandish deal that would have released a true terrorist and murderer if the crowd did not recant their call to “Crucify Him”. When that ploy didn't work, he made a show of washing his hands OF the blood of Jesus, when what he really needed to be doing was washing his own soul BY the blood of Jesus. The best Pilate could do was compromise with Truth by lip service, represented by the writing above the head of Jesus on the Cross, that Jesus was the King of the Jews, which he refused to recant when the Jews demanded he amend the sign. Finally, Pilate befriended the man who shared his failure to repent, to defy the pressure and politics of his reality. He and Herod consoled each other falsely in justifying their inaction and their unwillingness to convert until the end of their lives, at which time they once again met Jesus face to face.

Like Pilate, we stand in the presence of Jesus. Like Pilate we are moved by that presence some. We give lip service to its power, but we aren't so moved that we change our lives. We know that the simple bread and wine offered on the altar should become the Body and Blood of Christ. We know that, even more assuredly than Pilate knew Jesus was the Christ. Pilate had his wife and her dreams to advise him. We have the Bible, telling us that we should know, because Jesus told us, it was so.

So we acknowledge the miraculous and Real Presence, without necessarily believing, because after all, its not really so impressive, these wafers and a sip

of wine. But that is the Truth about God. He won't so overwhelm us by His glory that He denies us our free will. He is not the roaring wind, but the still presence. We want the Lord rolling down in Judgment, angels at feet, a fiery sword in His hand. It would have been no act of faith for Pilate to proclaim Jesus free after He smote his accusers with fire and brimstone. Instead, Pilate got Jesus, a man obedient, forgiving and humble. It would be so easy for us to believe if instead of a wafer, the priest held up the bloodied and crucified body of Jesus. If instead of the cup of wine, we saw the tip of the Centurion's spear, the last drop of blood and water on its tip. Instead, we have what Jesus offered his Apostles, bread and wine shared in commemoration of His death for our sins, which becomes His life to be in us so that we can live in Him.

Now, we come to the place where we have to ask ourselves, “What is Truth?” As we come to the Altar rail, are we encountering the very Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, offered upon the Cross for our sins. If so, than we are required to change our lives, to be separated from our sinfulness, to be hopeful against the pain and suffering of our reality, to be changed by having the life of Jesus in us, so that we will not only act like Him, but become like Jesus, having His life in us so we can live in Him.

Or do we declare that to be true with lip service only. Saying that Jesus is present to us in the Eucharist, but not accepting the demand that our lives must be changed by that presence. Do we continue to live in our sins, surrendering to our worries, fears and the prideful selfishness of our reality. Will we seek to be in the presence of the Saints in light, or, like Pilate, will we surround ourselves with others who have seen the Truth and failed to change, giving each other false consolation, denying ourselves the benefit of His sacrifice.

Though we may not be impressed by these elements of bread and wine, we must see through their appearance to the Truth, that this is the very Body and Blood of Christ, given to us to redeem our lives because God so loves us that He has given His only Son, to the end that we should not perish but have everlasting life. How can we be sure that this is so, because in the Bible, Jesus tells us, this is so.

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