



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday April 2, 2017 - Passion Sunday

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

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, “Thou art not yet 50 years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” Jesus said unto them, “Verily, Verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM.”

Twenty years ago, as I prepared for Easter, I listened to a radio program, moderated by a Jewish scholar, interviewing Christians about the relevance and value of the Bible. The panel featured an “Anglican Bishop” Holloway, from Scotland, who had authored a book, “Love and Christianity”, that denied the truth of Scripture, condemned the Church as Imperialistic and justified a pure Deism that gloried in the celebration of his own homosexuality as the epitome of mankind’s achievement. An Evangelical minister defended the Gospels as ethical guidelines, but didn’t share even that tepid endorsement for the rest of the New Testament, and joined the “Bishop” in his dismissal of the Old Testament completely. Two other Biblical scholars completed the panel, and they were dedicated to the translation of the Bible as poetic moralism and propaganda, propped up in their belief by what they considered to be the brutish, unsophisticated and erroneous science in the Book. That “bad” science not only included Genesis, but the miracles of the Gospels. Each of these men claimed to take the Bible “very seriously”..... Thank God for the Jewish moderator. He at least believed in Scripture as sacred, and professed a need for a Church based on Truth.

The next day, as I played catch with my son, he told me he had just read that Scientists had “proved” that Mary had not delivered Jesus in a Virgin birth, but that she had been raped by Roman soldiers. Over the years, Remi has come to me as each wave of scientific skepticism, or attack on the Bible as sacred text, manifested in his life.

Each time, it has been a lesson to me about the profound harm that is done to our belief in the sacred and mystical by the continuous assault of propaganda that falsely pits science against the sacred, and evidence against the miraculous.

Jesus tells us these miracles He performed were done to fulfill the Scriptures and to prove His identity. A miracle is something that cannot be explained by “scientists”. Miracles don’t invalidate science, they stand apart and above science, as Truth, which can only be comprehended by faith and grace. Scripture, inspired by the Holy Ghost, tell us that the works of Jesus are divine miracles. Scientists say that miracles can be explained away as delusion, or misunderstanding, or simply symbolic prose. Both parties can’t be correct. Someone is lying.

That makes us squeamish. We hate to stand up and be counted, to take sides, to be viewed as simplistic or backward because we do believe in sacred text and God’s work as miraculous. Scientism rules this world, and the world will laugh at us if we dispute it. We don’t quite dare to say Jesus was a liar, so we say, the Church misinterprets His words and sins in His Name, or we say He was a fable that shows the potential of man, and that He is not historical but allegorical. Or we say the writers of the gospel were naïve, deluded by their lack of scientific knowledge and that the life of Jesus only seemed to be miraculous. Or we say, He was a good man, or a great prophet, a good example equal to Bhudda, Mohammed or John Smith.

But Jesus doesn’t pull punches. He says clearly in today’s Gospel, “If I say the Truth, why do you not believe me.” He says “I Am”, I am the One God, the Son of God,

revealed to mankind, and if I say that I am anything less, than “I shall be a liar, like unto you.” We can’t have it both ways. We can’t take Jesus “very seriously” and deny that He is who He claims to be. Either, He is the Son of God, and the miracles He performs to manifest His Glory are Divine, or He is a pathetic liar, and we are all doomed. There is no salvation in a Jesus Christ who is less than He claims to be, who did less than die for our sins and rise again to defeat death for us.

St. Paul writes in 1st Corinthians that, “If Christ be not raised (from the dead) then your faith is in vain, and ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” (1st Cor. 15:16-7)

When Jesus says “Before Abraham was, I AM.” He isn’t saying he was a man before Abraham was. He is proclaiming the words of the burning bush, He is revealing His true name to the Jews and to the world. Jesus Christ is “I am who I am.” He is God, and man can never explain His being, His Glory, His love for us and His sacrifice. The Jews pick up stones to throw at Jesus because they do understand. They get it. Either Jesus is who He claims to be, or he is a delusional madman and sociopath who will turn the world upside down and cause the death of countless people who would believe his lie. The Jews faced the Truth and denied it. God have mercy on them. We face the same Truth, and we waffle, we rationalize and make excuses for our unwillingness to stand and be counted. We reduce truth to symbolism or good intention. God have mercy on us.

Jesus says, I am the Way, the Life and the Resurrection. There is no life but life in me, there is no Truth but my Truth, and no salvation but by faith in me. We moderns hate that. We hate that confrontation. How could a just and loving God condemn people who haven’t heard of him, or damn good people just because they haven’t been baptized? Isn’t there hope that some aboriginal baby will be saved? Will the good Bhuddist have the opportunity to proclaim Christ before the final judgment? Will the un-baptized be reconciled?

We ask these questions because wondering about somebody else’s business is our natural state. St. Peter did the same. When Jesus was chastising Peter for his willingness to return to his boats rather than to the work of the Gospel, Peter said, ‘but what about that man John’. Jesus told Peter that He would take care of John, and that Peter should be concerned with the specific charge given to him.

I believe in a merciful and just God. I believe it is His will that all that He has chosen will be saved. Jesus

will deal with the Bhuddist, the aborigine, and those dying before Baptism in some way that is just, but beyond my comprehension or understanding. But I also believe that Jesus says, “that if you deny me before men, I will deny you before the Father”. We have been blessed as first fruits of Christ, to live in this world knowing the Name of God, His love for us, and the Truth of Salvation. We know that we accept that Truth by revelation and faith and not by experience or science. We know that we have been given the responsibility of witnessing the Truth about Jesus Christ to the world in our Words and by our lives. I don’t know how God deals graciously with an aborigine who hasn’t heard the Truth, but I DO know how Jesus deals with a Christian who denies the Truth, the Scriptures, the Resurrection and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. That Christian is denied by Christ before the Father, and he goes to Hell. I trust in a merciful, loving and just God to redeem His Creation as is His will, and I fear, a righteous God, that will deny me if I fail to witness at the opportunities He gives me, or if my actions and life make others disbelieve the proclamation that I make with my lips. The question for us isn’t whether the un-informed are saved, but how those of us privileged to know the Truth can be saved.

The lie of science is to believe it denies the mystical. Science tells us how the material world works. It defines the boundaries of man’s ingenuity, and nature’s process. By science, we can recognize what is impossible in nature and what must be supernatural and Divine. But science doesn’t tell the Truth. The Truth isn’t an exposition of facts and processes. Science and experience can tell us that a man was judged, beaten, scourged, nailed to a Cross and bled to death, giving His last drop of Blood, and even water, to the tip of a lance that pierced His side. Science cannot give us a Resurrected and glorious Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday, because science can’t deal with the question of why that could, or should, have happened. Science tells us what it does know, and then faced with what it cannot explain, because it lacks the reason, must be a lie. Jesus tells us the Truth, because where science ends, Jesus reveals the reason why the Divine has intervened in history. The Truth is simple, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten to the end that all that believe in should not perish, but have everlasting life”.

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