



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Septuagesima Sunday
January 28, 2018**

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

The passage selected for today is taken from
the Book of Isaiah:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways. For
as the heavens are higher than the
earth, so are my ways higher than
your ways, and my thoughts higher
than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9

In our secular business, we take care of
people with complex and catastrophic chronic
conditions. At our weekly meetings, I ask the
nurses to share their success stories with the
rest of the team, which inspires those of us who
do the business instead of the healing. Recently
one of the nurses talked about a patient on
dialysis who had just been told he would have a
kidney transplant. His gratitude for the
incredible gift he was being given to have a
new life was reflected in his resolution. He
told the nurse he wanted to do everything he
could in anticipation of receiving his new
kidney, so that his body would be a healthy,
worthy recipient of the gift he was being given.

In our church calendar, and in the
reality of our lives, we are in the same place as
that patient. We have been given the incredible
gift we celebrate during Epiphany, the
extension of the gift of Salvation extended to
us, the Gentiles, and we are preparing for the
humbling understanding that our gift comes at
the price of the Cross. We are writing the
thank you note for the Incarnation, and
preparing to Evangelize the Crucifixion.

To that end, this Gospel is perfectly
placed. The workers who have been hired at
the end of the day, who receive the full reward
as those who worked the heat of the day, are us,
Christians who have been adopted by grace into
the inheritance of God's chosen people. The
question that we must consider when reading
this Gospel in the context of our Pre-Lenten
preparations is how we will respond to our
adoption.

Generally speaking, adopted children
respond in one of two ways. They make their
new family in the image of fears of their
orphaning, or they re-make themselves in the
image of the love shown them by their new
parents.

In the first case, the way of men, the
child is always living in fear the new family
will abandon him in his need, just as his old

family abandoned and failed him. There is a reserve, a constant testing, looking for the boundary where the new parent will surrender and return the child. They fantasize that they can rediscover their old family and re-make in some way that leads to a happy rather than the inevitable catastrophic end.

In doing so, they remain exiles in the midst of love. They deflect the attentions and the identity and the inheritance of their new family, playing it cool, remaining detached, protecting themselves from the fear of a new hurt at the expense of denying themselves the healing comfort of the love that surrounds them.

We see that fearful, and self-inflicted suffering in agnosticism, but we also can see it in our own tepid Christianity. We are always testing God, demanding one more miracle before we will surrender to his love, doubting his good will for us, denying that he can make us eternal and joyful lives from the ruins of our sufferings and doubts, because we will not surrender to His love and trust in His grace. We can't share the love we are given with our brother, because we never fully embrace and accept the love of our Father.

The other kind of adopted child is the child of resolution, the child of St. Paul's exhortation. When he talks of training for his battle and chasing the prize, he isn't foisting a shopworn sports analogy on us, he is helping us to understand how it is that we can embody gratitude for our adoption.

St. Paul's child is the child that child who recognizes that for some reason beyond

his understanding, he was chosen to be embraced by the love of this new family. St. Paul's child is the child that is determined to reflect that love back to his new family and to the world. The child determined to make his father proud, not because he could ever earn that gift of his adoption, but that he might express his gratitude by embracing the grace he has been given and proclaiming the joyful news of new life by living in the example of love given to him in his adoption.

That is our task for this Pre-Lenten season. To write the thank you for our adoption as resolution to reflect the grace of our adoption by making our ways like God's way. Not believing we can earn the grace we have been offered, because the truth is, we can never understand why it was offered, but doing our best to let down our defenses, to make ourselves vulnerable to the Love of God, to practice a faith that trusts that God will not abandon us in our difficulties and failings, but will transform the sadness and suffering of this world into eternal joy, if we will only accept His love.

We have an opportunity to consider how we will express our gratitude for the adoption by grace. Will we be fearful and insulated, testing God because we imagine him by our ways, or will we evangelize the world, living the Gospel of adoption and love, thankful for His love and determined to do our best to please God for His inestimable grace.

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