



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Sunday March 18th, 2018 – Passion Sunday

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

In the passages selected for today's Gospel reading, we find our Lord in an all too familiar place: being disputed by the Pharisee. In fact in the verses just prior to these we find the Pharisee calling Jesus the devil whilst proudly proclaiming themselves the sons of Abraham and of God and further seeking trap and kill the Christ.

Jesus response to this is really quite reasonable, given the track record of his earthly ministry, he says, "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" And given all our Lord has said and done up to this point, in his earthly ministry, I can only imagine him being a bit indignant to this attack, even knowing, as he does, that this is the course he faces.

Now this is a "put up or shut up" moment in our Lord's ministry. He is saying, confront me with one action or word that I have committed that is contrary to the law.

The Pharisee opened this argument with assertions to the lineage of Abraham. I find great irony here, as Abraham and is the Archetype of the Father in the Old Testament. And these eminent men of the Temple, these great Talmudic scholars, with the Christ, the

genuine article, right in front of them fail to recognize him.

Undaunted by their immediate inability to convict our Lord, these holy men then retreat to an all too human way of addressing a difficult problem or person, by casting falsehoods and aspersions. Not content with labeling Christ a devil, they actually accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan, a thing they all know to be untrue. Being labeled a Samaritan in first century Judea was pretty damning, and just as cutting as the devil label. Even Nathaniel kept his slight of our Lord based in truth when he said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" And our Lord's response rewards his honesty with humour, "Here is an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile." , guile meaning deceit

So what can we in the 21st century glean from this moment in our Lord's earthly ministry?

The first thing that comes to my mind, is that things don't change very much with us human beings. When we are confronted with God, his creation, his laws and for that matter his love, we often feel the need to belittle it,

subjugate it to science or chance, and failing that name calling and screaming will suffice.

As Christ's disciples, we must face this very type of attack on a daily basis, and in fact, in the Lenten Season we are always faced with the usual barrage of, "it just can't be so." If it isn't a reprise of the "Gospel of Judas", the impossibility of the Resurrection, the children of Mary Magdalene; it's the way we Christians have conspired over the last two thousand years to create a myth out of whole cloth like the annually disputed Shroud of Turin.

As our Lord says in today's Gospel, "He that is of God, heareth God's words." The fact that we at very least hear his words can be attested to by the very fact that we are here. Like the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part." How then do we, as Christ's disciples, convince an unfriendly world of the perfect Love of God that is the Christ? We do so by simply preaching the Gospel continuously, and unrelentlessly as the waves of manmade hubris hit at us.

St Francis Assisi is credited with saying, "Preach the Gospel always, use words if necessary", and yesterday, today, tomorrow and eternally this is the way bring the truth of Christ to those who have not or will not hear. If we examine just John's Gospel up to this point, we are given by Jesus, an excellent road map for doing just that.

At the wedding at Cana our Lord gave his very best to those that endeavoured to set out on the Godly course of loving union, thus establishing the second dominical sacrament of marriage. He gave of his love, and he gave the best.

In the 4th chapter of John, Jesus is once again in Cana, and approached by a nobleman seeking healing for his dying son. John gives us absolutely no indication of this man's nationality, religious conviction, or his worthiness; and yet our Lord gives again of himself by extending a healing word, without any precondition.

At the pool of Bethesda, Christ again heals the impotent man by word alone, and does so without thought to the reaction of an uncaring world, which accused him of being "unlawful" for making a person better.

Just last week we heard of our Lord's feeding of the five thousand. As the men came unto him he saw their need and addressed it, and gave of himself by the very act of creation.

And no less miraculous to our closed up human hearts, just before this argument with the Pharisee, our Lord spares the life of the adulteress by forgiving her, and therefore creates reconciliation where before was only hatred and strife.

We can take much from these examples, but more importantly, we can give much more as our Lord has made example.

We, as God's children, can give just as our Lord did at Cana, by giving of that which God has given us, his very best without reserve.

We, like our Lord can extend a healing word to those afflicted by sickness or disease by heartfelt prayer and kindness.

We unlike our Lord are not able to create, as he did to feed the five thousand, but we can take of God's creation given to us and feed those who are hungry, be it a corporal or a spiritual hunger.

And most importantly, and perhaps most miraculously for us, we can Forgive and foster reconciliation in this world, just as our Lord did by coming to us, dying for our sins, and rising again.

In preaching the Gospel by living it, we may answer that burning question that opened the passages of today's gospel, "which of you convinceth me of sin?" that we might all answer of one accord, "Not I, Lord. Not I." Amen.

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