



ST. STEPHEN'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH
11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

2nd Week after Epiphany
January 20, 2019

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

The passage selected for the sermon is taken from the Epistle:

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind, one toward another.”

Romans 12:10-16

When St. Peter and the Apostles emerge after Pentecost to witness to Christ, they face Jews from every corner of the known world, and they speak in the native tongue of each sect. It is interesting to note that even though they spoke in dozens of different languages, they were all clearly recognizable to the author of Acts as Jews. That is the way it is with the Jews. They don't blend with the culture, even though they live in the midst of it. They recognize each other, and the world recognizes them, as Jews.

We might say that they have a national character that identifies their community. We should go a step further to acknowledge they

have a spiritual character, which sets them apart. That character is symbolized by the Circumcision which they share with our Lord. But while Circumcision is the outer sign of Judaism, what the world recognizes in them is their behavior toward each other as a peculiar and unique community of God.

Of course, as the inheritors of the New Covenant, we also have a peculiar character. It is the character that comes from our Circumcision of heart, and it should set us aside from our culture, as surely and clearly as the behavior of Jews set them apart from the culture of 1st Century Jerusalem. The identifying characteristics of the New Covenant are the behaviors that St. Paul specifies in the Epistle this morning. That unique character is bestowed upon us at Baptism, and the character of our Baptism is established in the Baptism of Jesus in the Gospel appointed for this morning.

John had been baptizing for a good while before Jesus came to him. He had established a reputation as both a religious figure and as the likely Messiah. His baptism was a call to repentance and change of life. His reputation was established with those whose livelihood would be affected by the Messiah. Those with wealth he commanded to share, to the Publicans he commanded they take only their appointed share, to the soldiers, that they

not abuse their authority to do violence. Even John and Andrew, who would become Apostles transferred the expectations of earthly power to Jesus from their prior allegiance to the Baptist.

When Jesus arrives, and bids John to baptize Him as well, the expectation is entirely changed. John sat in judgment of his followers and commanded them with the authority of a prophet. He is locked and loaded, looking every bit the Messiah's chief general, if not actually the Messiah. Jesus on the other hand comes to John with obedience and humility. From this very first encounter, we see Jesus defining the character we should have as His followers.

John knows that he has no authority over the Messiah and that his Baptism is merely foreshadowing of the sacrament that Jesus will institute. He is incredulous when Jesus submits himself. Matthew records that John tried to forbid the act, saying I have need to be baptized of thee. Jesus responded, "suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." What Jesus is teaching John and all of us is that appearances do matter. By this act of humility and obedience, he establishes the legitimacy of John as prophet, the voice crying in the wilderness. He shows us that He will share our nature, our temptations and our burdens. He will do what appears right, because that is the character He wants us to emulate. Not "appearing to do right" in a hypocritical sense, but humbling ourselves and lifting up our brothers so that the world can see who we are, and what we have to offer them.

As John performs the ritual he had repeated so many times before, something unique and mystically transcendent happens. The Father shows his presence to His people and makes the proclamation, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". The Spirit of the Father's love, in the person of the Holy Ghost, descends upon Jesus in the form of

the dove and abides with Him. The Holy Trinity is bearing witness to the obedient and sacrificial love the Son has for the Father, and the Father's will that his creatures should not perish, but receive everlasting life in His Son.

This moment is nothing less than an act of Creation. It is as powerful, actually more powerful than the creation of the world and imparting His breath to be the life of Adam and Eve. In that original act of Creation, He made us creatures like Himself, with free will and the ability to be obedient and loving. In this moment with John the Baptist, He establishes Baptism as the way that we are transformed from creatures whose free will has failed them, into sons and daughters, sharing the very life and love. In the Incarnation, Jesus, the Son of God, takes on our Nature, to reclaim and transform it. In this baptism, God gives us His Son, to give us the privilege of sharing His being. The Holy Spirit that descended upon the Beloved Son, is reserved and sent to us through Baptism. We become temples of the Spirit of God.

As such, as new creatures sharing in the life and love of God, it is our bounden duty to reflect that gracious gift and transformation to the world. As Jesus, in his Godly kindness shares His Nature with us, we are to reflect it back into the world. As we are drawn to Him, we are to be candles, lights to the world, drawing those that abide in darkness to us, and through us to the very light and love and life of God.

The children of the Circumcision of the flesh had a character that was resistant to contamination by the world, and those people, the Jews, became known for the way they cared for their kindred their relations, their people. The children of the circumcision of the heart, those of us who have been baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, must also make our character and identity known to the world. We do that by

giving good example through the way we treat each other. How we make brothers of those who are estranged to us, or who have been cruel to us, is the way we share the eternal life in Jesus by the power of His Holy Spirit.

“Let your light so shine before men that see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

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