



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

**Second Sunday after Trinity
June 29, 2019**

**✠ 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 Epistle:

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”
1st St. John 3:23

To the Pharisees that heard Jesus, this parable would be very difficult to understand. The activities the first guests use as excuses are perfectly valid reasons for Jews to avoid coming to the annual celebration of the temple for worship, codified in Mosaic Law and Pharisaic custom. Why then, if the excuses are perfectly suited for even the highest religious duty, is this king so worked up and angry.

The real point of the Gospel is not the character of the excuses, but that there are excuses at all. In Isaiah, God proclaims, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. (55:8-9) Nowhere is this difference more pronounced than in our willingness to be charitable to each other.

I won't talk about charity in regard to our money and resources. Today I want to talk about our charity of character, of kindness and patience and courtesy.

The king was interested in sharing his joy. He didn't have an event to celebrate, or a debt to repay. Of his bounty, he freely and graciously decided to bestow his blessings upon those who had less. We know he had the greater abundance because he was the one to bid the guests to come. It wasn't just an invitation to share his blessings, it was a command. Come to my banquet, and be blessed by my generosity.

Why would this great king make such a command. He makes the command because it is his nature, and because he expects the guests to emulate that behavior, to open their houses and share their blessings. He first reaches out to the privileged in the very reasonable expectation that those to whom he had given most would also follow his example and bless those who had less than they did.

Which brings us to the question of what he was sharing with the first guests. He wasn't re-distributing his wealth. He wasn't making bequeaths. He was offering his joy, his time and his company. He was offering himself, and since this great king is clearly God, and God is love, what is being offered is love.

What is being returned is rationalization. What is being revealed is self-centeredness, ingratitude, discourtesy. The first guests live to the letter of the law, but they live without the spirit of the Law. Even better, He reveals the Spirit of the Law is the person of the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit that is the manifestation of God's love and the fulfillment of the sacrifice of Jesus.

The people to whom this parable is spoken are being warned. Instead of repentance and amendment of life, the Pharisees are indignant and murderous. They decline the invitation, and we become the beneficiaries. The Christian Church was the halt, the blind the maimed, those who are out of place and dispossessed in the by-ways and hedges.

Of course, this parable isn't confined to the 1st Century Pharisees and earliest converts. It is just as timely, and just as pointedly intended for us as it was for them. We, too, live in a legalistic society that perverts justice and charity in ways the early Jews would never rival. Our system has lost its way, and the Spirit of God in our laws and custom is as scarce as the Name of God is in our schools and government. That isn't a cause for Left or Right, blue or red, that is a concern for us as Christians.

I would also suggest that the place to start reforming our legalistic world is within our own hearts. After all, we have become the first guests. We are the ones privileged to know God best, through Scripture, through sacraments and through fellowship. We are the now ones invited to the banquet first, and of whom it is expected we will learn and emulate the Spirit of God in our own lives.

How often have we looked at our lives and congratulated ourselves. We are good Christians. We come to Church, we put our money in the plate, we read the newsletter, and support Evensong and Garden Party and Cookie walk. Don't we also use our satisfaction with those outward rituals to excuse ourselves from our duty to Love, to be present, kindly, patient forgiving and generous with our time.

And I don't mean our dedication to charity lacks. We do fairly well there. We support the Anglican charities well enough and we are quick to welcome visitors and guests. But is the Holy Spirit in us as we deal with our spouses, our parents, our siblings, our co-workers and friends. Are we patient with the person whose story takes too long, or the one who seems to have asked for a hand out once too often, or who wants our time when we would rather read, or golf or watch TV or post on Facebook. Are we busy on our phones when our children are tugging our pants leg.

We are the privileged. We are the 1st guests. We are the ones offered the first taste of the banquet, and of whom it is expected we will make a banquet of our own blessings, our own gifts, our own patience, forgiveness, courtesy and kindness. It is so much easier to live up the letter of the Law, to the expectations of society, to surrender to the demands of our self centeredness than to really try to live as saints. And yet, that is our responsibility, and by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do better today, and tomorrow and until we can hear for ourselves, "well done thy good and faithful servant".

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