



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

The 4th Sunday after Trinity
July 14, 2019

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

The passage for the sermon for this morning is taken from the Gospel of St. Luke:

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

Having children in the house is an endless source of material for sermons. The other day, Claire and her baby brother were tussling and, of course, the inevitable happened. Something precious to Carolyn tumbled off a bureau and broke. At four years old, precocious Tristyn knew exactly what he had to do. Even though we had witnessed the incident, he turned his big eyes on us and exclaimed “It was her fault. She did it.”

That’s human nature. That’s the way we’ve been since the Garden of Eden, neglecting our own responsibility and our own sinfulness in favor of blaming others, in favor of pointing out and measuring all

those people around us. We come by it naturally.

Remember Adam in the Garden of Eden, after Adam had taken a bite of the apple and was confronted by God, he said “She made me eat it. And, by the way, You gave her to me.” So it was actually God’s fault that they disobeyed. Then God turned to Eve, and what did she say? “The devil made me do it.” By then, I’m sure God was as fed up as I was with my two little nine and four-year old children and just as anxious to hear someone say, “I’m sorry. I did it. Forgive me.”

I wonder, what our march towards sanctification would be like if only Adam and Eve had said, “I am sorry.”? Would they have been punished the way they were? I think the reason that they were punished in that way was because they would not, could not accept the responsibility for their sin. Consequently, they couldn’t be forgiven so easily, and they couldn’t so easily pass through to grace.

And it has been that way throughout the Bible. David decided he would have Bathsheba to his wife and had Uriah the Hittite, her husband, sent into battle and

killed so that he could have her. He was confronted by Nathan the Prophet. Nathan came and told him about a man who had everything and yet stole a sheep from his neighbor so that he could entertain his friends. David was full of indignation, and he stormed about how he would punish that man and how he would make his house a heap of ashes. And Nathan said, "Oh, by the way, it's you. You're the one who did this when you took that woman to be your wife and you had her husband killed." Easy to deflect; hard to accept.

And in the New Testament, Peter -- even after the Resurrection -- standing around after fishing, eating with Jesus, and being told, "Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep," responded to Jesus how? By saying, "But what about John? What about him?" It's our nature. It's what we do. But we should not give in to nature. We have to fight that hypocrisy.

When I talk to people that are un-churched, the one thing that comes back again and again, especially among young people, and especially among teenagers whose hypocrisy meter flutters with great precision, they say, "I can't go to that church or your church because the people there are hypocrites."

That is the way young people think about church. That's a really hard truth for us to accept because when there is hypocrisy, the work of the Holy Ghost is obstructed. With hypocrisy, with that blaming, comes an inability to admit our faults and our sinfulness. With that blaming comes an inability to be ashamed of the harm that we do with our sinfulness. With that blaming, that finger pointing, and that hypocrisy is the prevention of grace that comes from repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

So how do we fix that? One way to fix it is to come together to worship like this. I have lots of friends that say, "I don't come to church. I sit on my rock by my stream in the woods on a mountain, and I commune directly with God one on one." And God bless them, that's a beautiful way to pray, but that doesn't replace what we do here because the antidote for the hypocrisy, finger pointing, and the unwillingness to take blame is a community of love -- a community that comes together, that holds each other to a high standard and, more important, makes themselves vulnerable so that when someone says, "My fault, I'm sorry," there is a receptive ear and a forgiving heart to receive that admission and to bring that forgiveness.

We do a very good job of reflecting Christ to the world at St. Stephen's. This is a very lovely parish. This is a wonderful, open, giving community, and yet we all can still pray to be more receptive, more willing to say, "My fault" first. More willing to be vulnerable and let someone be vulnerable with us and admit their fault in the hope, in the realistic hope, that they'll be loved and that they will be forgiven.

If we do that, if we can continue to grow in that grace, then we will be reflecting the Gospel out to those kids who are afraid to come to church because there won't be any hypocrisy in us, and this will be a place where they can come and be vulnerable, and they can receive forgiveness. It will be the place they can come to observe and to receive the love of God.

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