



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

The Third Sunday After the Epiphany, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son**  
**and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

Many folks today seem to think there are two ways of doing things: the Christian way of doing things and the sensible way of doing things. They assume the advice they get from the Bible is impractical, pie-in-the-sky sort of stuff.

They assume that people who suggest Christians ought to tackle their problems in a Christian manner are living with their heads in the clouds. To them, Jesus' teachings are mere beautiful thoughts that are totally out of touch with reality.

The idea that Jesus' teachings might contribute something useful to the way in which they run their daily lives – whether in personal relationships or in business – is dismissed as simply ridiculous. Anyone in the real world who tried to live by Jesus rules would soon be out of work and/or bankrupt.

The trouble with folks like this is they haven't read the Bible – or at least, they haven't understood what it was telling them when they read it. Folks who've really studied the Bible will tell you Jesus does nothing else but dispense good, practical advice – advice that works in the business world and private life. If people ran their businesses the way he advises they would all be successes. In reality, it is only when folks don't seek his counsel that they find themselves in hot water.

You see can how practical and sensible Jesus is both in the gospels and in the history of the Church. But this is sometimes difficult for people to grasp in our dull and prosaic age. It might, thus, be interesting to try to measure Jesus's achievements by modern American business standards.

You've all heard the old maxim: "If you build a better mouse trap, the world will beat its way to you door." You won't find that in the Bible – and a good thing, too, because it isn't true. The way to get the world to buy a better mouse trap (assuming you can produce it in industrial quantities) is to master the art of sales and delivery. This means assembling a top-flight management team. In this – as in everything else he touched – the historical record shows Jesus has no equal.

Ask Henry Ford or John D. Rockefeller Sr. what has been Jesus' most significant achievement here on earth, it is unlikely they would refer to any of the miracles, not even his virgin birth, resurrection or ascension. And they would be unlikely to mention changing water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, subject of today's lesson from the Gospel.

This is fair enough. After all, miracles are child's play to almighty God – and if those great capitalists didn't realize it here on earth, they certainly realize it now. No! A businessman truly worth his salt would single out the establishment of the Church and the dissemination of the Gospel throughout the world as Jesus' most significant accomplishment here on earth.

This might strike some of you as strange, but only because we take the Church for granted. It's been around for two millennia. That's a long time; time enough for us to discount entirely the profound influence the gospel has had in framing our society; in shaping our thoughts and aspirations. Indeed, the gospel has laid the very foundation on which our whole civilization is constructed.

But first consider what was involved in spreading the Gospel throughout the world; how swiftly it was accomplished. Within a decade of the Crucifixion, the faith had spread throughout the Roman Empire – that's tantamount to saying the whole of the known world.

Within 20 years of the Crucifixion, the faith was exerting such an influence on the Empire the Emperor took the first step towards persecution, expelling all Jews from Rome. (Christianity was considered an expression of the Jewish faith).

But within 30 years of the Crucifixion, Christianity not only had its own separate identity, it was thought to pose such a serious threat to the empire that a full scale efforts was under way to stamp it out completely. Not only were the leaders of the Christian communities being automatically arrested and sentenced to death, but the little people were being treated in the same manner.

Rational, well-organized societies like the Roman empire do not so this sort of thing unless they are confronted with a danger of quite overwhelming proportions. Religious persecutions were alien to the Roman tradition. In fact, the Romans were remarkably tolerant of foreign faiths and usually embraced exotic new religions with enthusiasm.

But two aspects about Christianity terrified Rome's political masters – first, what it taught and, second, the speed with which it was spreading. Christians taught that not only is God perfect love, but that he is perfectly and absolutely good and holds his people to absolute standards of goodness and righteousness.

Nothing is more calculated to instill fear into amoral dictators than knowing the people they rule are learning they are ultimately accountable to a far higher, all powerful authority.

When you consider how many foreigners regard McDonalds and Coca Cola –burgers and soft drinks – as a threat to their culture and nationhood, you can begin to understand how frightening this new religious faith must have been to the Romans. And just think how long it took for McDonalds and Coke to gain their market share. Did they dominate the world in a mere three decades? They wish . . .

The faith spread so far and so fast because Jesus put together the best sales team the world has seen. It might seem odd to picture the Apostles that way, but that is exactly what they were.

And the secret of success wasn't just that they had a great product. They pitched it perfectly. For a start, they were honest: painfully honest. They were honest about the faith. They never tailored it to appeal to their various audiences. They were honest about themselves. They never tried to cast themselves as heroes or impress listeners with their eloquence or the force of their personalities. They never tried to lord it over their fellow men.

As for their product, you'll find a sample in today's epistle: "Repay no one evil for evil . . . live peaceably with all men. Beloved do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath. Therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him; If he thirsts give him a drink . . . Do not overcome evil by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The Romans were practical people. They tried it and discovered it worked. What's more, when it's tried it works today. Life everlasting starts here on earth, and two thousand years of experience shows that it is the Gospel is that makes earthly life worth living.. *AMEN.*

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***