

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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FROM THE PARISH CLERGY

A P.O. Box for the treasurer and plans for a "reopening"

In an effort to prevent the theft of checks mailed to the church, we have opened a Post Office Box for the exclusive use of the treasurer. In future, please mail your offerings to: **The Treasurer, St Stephen's Anglican Church, P.O. Box 6161, Timonium, MD 21094**. All other mail should be sent to the parish at our street address.

Meanwhile, we have been making plans in hopes that Governor Larry Hogan will shortly permit the state to begin returning to normal, although when we are allowed to open it is likely that some restrictions will still be in place.

It is, for example, expected that we will have to monitor the numbers attending our various services, especially in light of the fact that non-family members are likely to be required to maintain "social distancing."

This might present problems at our 9,15 AM Eucharist which, with children, normally well exceeds 50 people in the nave. Furthermore, until the governor's rules are completely lifted, running the Sunday School might also present difficulties as children generally like to be in close contact with one another.

Because of these constraints, we believe it best to celebrate the Eucharist at all three Sunday services until we are able to resume our normal worship schedule. This will enable parishioners who usually attend the 9.15 AM Eucharist to consider occasionally worshipping at the 8.00 AM or 11.00 AM services.

We will also continue for the foreseeable future the video recordings of Feast Day and Sunday Eucharists. These are posted on the **parish website** (www.ststeve.com), **Youtube** and **Isaac the Eagle's Facebook** page by 9.00 AM every Sunday. You'll find them at **ststeve.com** at the bottom of the Home Page, under "Recent Blog Posts."

The first midweek broadcast talk by the rector took place on Wednesday, April 29th. They can be found on the website and will be continued every Wednesday for the foreseeable future.

God bless you all, **GPH** & **JPN**

SERMON FOR THE 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Holy Land – An odd home for a chosen people

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday After Easter is a petition to "Almighty God, who alone canst order the wills and affections of sinful men . . ." And it might be worth spending a couple of minutes considering just how he goes about the business of ordering our wills and affections.

One thing that's clear is that God doesn't order us about in the way we order other people about. He doesn't shriek orders at us like a drill sergeant and then zap us with lightning bolts when we stray from the straight and narrow.

The fact that he doesn't do this leads a number of people to conclude that the notion he "orders our wills and affections" is just so much hot air – either God doesn't exist, they conclude, or he doesn't care.

This is a naive way of looking at things. Human beings don't tend to respond very well to bullying. Shouting and zapping simply makes them dig their heels in. God knows this as well as we do. After all, he made us. To see the way he works, we need to study the history of children of Israel. They, after all, were his first pupils.

And we could do an awful lot worse than consider the implications of the place he had picked out for them to live. The Holy Land is a rather peculiar place for God to have selected as a homeland for his Chosen People. For starters, it's not particularly fertile. In fact, growing things there takes a lot of trouble. Much of it is what the Bible calls "wilderness."

Sure, there are areas where you can literally throw seeds on the ground and they'll shoot up. But most of it is quite arid. Either you have to irrigate the land to make it produce or you have to rely on relatively unpredictable rainfall. Nor is there much in the way of natural resources.

What's more, it's a difficult country to defend. Its wadis and canyons, craggy hills and mountains make it ideal for guerrillas warfare. But guerrillas can't defend a nation state.

Besides, the natural obstacles do not offset the disadvantages of wide valleys and plains that favor large and well-disciplined standing armies. The Children of Israel were formidable fighters but there were never enough of them to fend off the powerful nations surrounding them.

As if these disadvantages weren't bad enough, the Holy Land stood at the hub of the ancient world. Anybody who wanted to

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the parish office (410) 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Eileen, Rebecca, Catherine, Richard,

Janis, Parisa, Daniel, Leona, Rachel, Elizabeth, Kim, Dorothy, Donna, Skip, Dan, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Heidi, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John Tom, Michell, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, David, Wade, Sifa, Eileen, Ravi, Theresa, Lisa, Larry Ricard, Judy & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Cameron, Caroline, Karen, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Chip, Elizabeth, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Colin & Christian.

IN MEMORIAM: Mr. John Grill

THOSE WHO MOURN: Mrs. Susan Grill and family

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt. Col. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

go anywhere dry shod had no choice but to use it as a highway.

Egyptians marched across it to attack Lebanon. Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians marched across it to attack Egypt. And Alexander the Great marched across it to attack absolutely everyone he could lay his hands on.

Why did God put his Chosen People in a dump like this when he could have put in far more attractive places – Africa or Europe, or the best of all, the United States?

The answer is God was trying to teach them – and us – something that can't be taught in a comfortable backwater where food falls off the trees.

God was teaching them – and us – even the most powerful human beings are subject to his laws and are utterly powerless before him. He was demonstrating that he will protect, defend and nurture all those who put their trust in him. It is not an unduly complicated lesson, but in order to make it quite clear, God had to plant His Chosen People in the most vulnerable spot conceivable. It was, for example, solely thanks to God's intervention the Israelites were able to settle the land of Canaan. The people who conquered Canaan under Joshua were runaway slaves. The Canaanite military was far better armed and equipped and yet they were vanquished by the Israelite rabble. It was a miracle, pure and simple.

One might imagine that after such a demonstration of God's

power the Children of Israel would have learned – once and for all time – to put their trust in God. But it is clear that their humble sense of awareness lasted only a couple of generations.

Read the Book of Judges and you'll see that God's role had entirely been forgotten. The people turned to worshipping the more congenial Canaanite gods. Everyone "did what was right in his own eyes." Slowly but surely, they were dispossessed of everything their ancestors had won at God's command.

The Book of Judges details what happens when god-fearing people abandon their faith. First, social and sexual morality breaks down. Then, the crime rate starts to rise; slowly at first and, then, exponentially. Finally, society disintegrates, altogether.

It is, in fact, one of the predominant themes of the Old Testament. The message is that we exist not thanks to its own abilities and resources, but thanks to God's grace alone.

The Bible makes clear that God would much prefer us to learn this lesson the easy way – by studying the history of the Children of Israel with the idea of avoiding their errors. Failing that, we can learn things the hard way by bitter personal experience.

It is a lesson that has been learned, unlearned, and learned again – at the cost of untold human suffering – throughout the history of our own Western culture. And the depressing thing is that a glance at the television news suffices to show that our generation is not very much more inclined to learn than the Children of Israel were in the days of the judges. Indeed, it would really be truly depressing if it weren't for another lesson God is equally determined to teach us.

It's another of those lessons he had to teach us time and time again. It is that God is always ready to forgive us our sins and to make things right again.

This, too, is a lesson we seem no more inclined to learn than the children of Israel. Read the Psalms, and one sees that in times of catastrophe even the most pious people give way to despair, and succumb to the notion that God has abandoned them.

But what the Bible shows us is that – no matter how foolish we are or what evil things we do – God never abandons his people. In fact when we think he has abandoned us, it is usually the case that we have abandoned him.

We turn our backs on him, imagining that somehow we are in control of our own destinies. We try to do his thinking for him, imagining our tiny finite minds can frame a better plan of action than God's infinite mind.

We try to rely on our own limited resources rather than on his infinite supply. It's hardly fair to do things our way and then blame God for abandoning us when things go wrong. But that's exactly what the Children of Israel did . . . and so do we.

The good news is that God is always ready to forgive us for our mistakes and to set things right again. Indeed, that is why he sent us Jesus Christ. And this – the most important lesson of all – is eloquently summed up by St. John: "So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life." GPH✠

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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Office: 410 560 6776 · Rector: 443 425-2420

Vicar: 410 878-5275 · Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector

The Rev. John Novicki, Vicar ·

Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. C. Daniel Bursi,

The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers,

The Rev. M. Wiley Hawks & The Rev. Mark Newsome,

Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care

& Wedding Coordinator

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

Choral Services (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

For Our Country.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage; We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favour and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honourable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogancy, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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