

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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A MEDITATION ON TRINITY VI

Measuring up to God's standards of holiness

The most accurate measuring instrument in creation is a child's eye. It doesn't matter how carefully you slice a chocolate birthday cake, one little tyke is bound to howl: "Her piece is bigger than mine." And, you know what? The child is right. The other kid's slice is bigger: microscopically bigger; four or five crumbs bigger; but bigger nonetheless.

This propensity to measure stays with us throughout our lives. It seems hard wired into our humanity – part of our fundamental nature. We measure the size of our houses against the homes of our siblings; the cost of the cars against the price tag on the new vehicles next door; our pay against the salaries of our co-workers.

And there is nothing more human than the way we measure ourselves against other people (usually favorably) – in terms of looks, intelligence, wit, education, wealth and, indeed, virtue.

Virtue is, in fact, one of the things we most frequently measure, especially in church. For it is in church that we are compelled to examine the state of our souls. And, if we undertake this exercise seriously, we invariably find ourselves wanting.

(This doubtless helps explain why church is becoming increasingly unpopular these days of self-esteem. It is never a pleasant experience to confront the reality of one's shortcomings.)

The traditional way of dealing with personal shortcomings [Note: I didn't say sins. Other people commit sins. Most of us just have shortcomings.] is to acknowledge them to God, and assure him you are adopting a program to eradicate them.

(After that we can take comfort in the fact that our sins are quite minor in comparison with those of the sinner across the aisle.)

Measuring sin is one of the issues Jesus is dealing with in St. Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. And he kicks off with a series of statements against which many folks are inclined to measure themselves: The Beatitudes. "Blessed the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, etc."

But measuring our virtues is not the purpose of the exercise. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus explains to us that it doesn't matter how virtuous we are, we can never hope to achieve God's level of holiness.

He says that even if, we manage to keep all of God's commandments – something, even the Pharisee rabbis of Jesus' day agreed was utterly impossible – we would still fall far short by God's standards.

God did not give us his laws to eradicate sin. Rather, he gave them to us because we are, by nature, sinners. We cannot change this because of the hardness of our hearts, therefore God's laws are designed to enable us to live more peaceably with our neighbors.

Jesus says: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." It is a warning that even if we obey the very letter of the Law – something the Pharisees tried meticulously to do – it will not save us.

This was terrifying news for his listeners. The Pharisees might seem to get a raw deal in the New Testament, but by human standards, they were admirable people. They led active religious lives. They prayed and studied the bible

daily. They fasted at least twice a week and gave generously to beggars and charitable causes. They tithed everything they owned scrupulously to the Temple – down to the most insignificant leaf of mint in their kitchens.

Nor did they regard themselves exclusively as "Chosen People." They were at least as conscientious about their duty to spread their faith as Christians today. They eagerly shared God's message with the gentiles, and warmly welcomed them into their congregations as inquirers and converts. Jesus was not exaggerating when he claimed they would travel to the end of the earth to make a convert.

It must have been a shock for the disciples – not to mention 'the publicans and sinners' – that the most righteous, pious and charitable people in the Land of Judah didn't stand a chance of making it into the Kingdom of Heaven. It was bit telling us that we need to be more pious than St. Paul and more charitable than Mother

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: Bill, Pam, Eileen, Rebecca, Catherine, Richard✕, Janis, 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, Mitchell, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, David, Wade, Sifa, Eileen, Ravi, Theresa, 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:

THOSE WHO MOURN:

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

Theresa in order to get to heaven.

But Jesus' purpose in this is to explain why we need him as our Savior. He is pointing out that it is impossible for us to love our fellow men as freely and fully as God loves us. God's standards are so immeasurably high, he says, they are quite literally beyond our comprehension.

By God's standard, for example, we don't need to do people harm to incur God's wrath. The simple act of getting angry with another person is enough to consign us to hell. Even the slightest feelings of resentment against another person are enough to earn us damnation. This is an impossibly high standard for even the most high-minded of people.

Our complete inability to match God's standards of holiness comes as no surprise to Jesus. He, after all, has shared our humanity. He knows exactly what we are like from personal experience. His message in today's Gospel reading is actually one of comfort, not condemnation.

While there is no way for us to meet God on equal terms. But Jesus is telling us that we do not need to. He is promising us that he will act as our mediator before God. This is a cast iron assurance of salvation for everyone who seeks it from him. GPH✕

FROM THE PARISH CLERGY

New County rules on Covid19

Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch, Health Officer for Baltimore County, has promulgated the following edict: “Beginning Thursday, July 23 at 9 a.m., Baltimore County individuals ages 2 and up are required to wear face coverings in any indoor business, service, organization or establishment that serves the general public. This includes, but is not limited to, retail establishments, recreational establishments, houses of worship and other locations open to the public.

Residents are strongly encouraged to wear masks in outdoor public areas where social distancing of at least six-feet is not possible. Exemptions to the decree are:

- Individuals who cannot wear a face covering (as defined in Governor's Executive Order No. 20-04-15-01) due to a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability;
- Individuals who are communicating or seeking to communicate with someone where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication;
- Individuals at food service establishments while eating or drinking, which shall all be subject to the same existing regulations and exceptions previously in place under the Governor’s Executive Orders and the Health Officer Orders

of the Maryland Department of Health In addition, all non-seated parties, must wear a face covering when moving in or about a restaurant or bar premises.

- Individuals are not required to show documentation that an exception applies.

The full text of th Health Department Directive and Order and the Interpretive Guidance can be found at the County web site.

Our Sunday service schedule

Services will resume at 8.00 AM, 9.15 AM and 11.00 AM and we shall be celebrating the Eucharist at all services. Sunday School will be informal.

For shut-ins and folks st in quarantine we will be continuing our videos of Feast Day and Sunday Eucharists. These are posted on the **parish website (www.ststeve.com)**, **Youtube** and **Isaac the Eagle’s Facebook** page.

You’ll find them from 9.00 AM onwards every Sunday and Day of Obligation at **ststeve.com** at the bottom of the Home Page, under “Recent Blog Posts. A new midweek “broadcast” talk by the rector can also be found on the website every Wednesday or Thursday.

Meanwhile, we have opened a Post Office Box for the exclusive use of the treasurer. Please mail your offerings to: **St Stephen’s Anglican Church, P.O. Box 6161, Timonium, MD 21094**. All other mail should be sent to our street address. GPH✘ & JPN✘

St Stephen’s Anglican Church

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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)
11 am: 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.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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