



# *Sermons by the Sea*

YEAR B 2006

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Carlsbad, California*



D E D I C A T I O N

*For my wife Therese, whose deep desire for all things beautiful and true  
has encouraged me to become myself.*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Advent III <i>John 3</i>	1
Last Sunday After the Epiphany <i>Mark 9</i>	5
Ash Wednesday <i>Matthew 6</i>	9
Lent III <i>John 2</i>	13
Easter Vigil <i>Matthew 28</i>	17
Easter V <i>John 14</i>	21
Easter VII <i>John 17</i>	25
Proper V <i>Genesis 3</i>	30
Proper VIII <i>Mark 5</i>	35
Proper X <i>Mark 6</i>	40
Proper XVI <i>Ephesians 5</i>	45
Proper XIX <i>James 2</i>	49
Proper XXIII <i>Mark 10a</i>	54
Proper XXIV <i>Mark 10b</i>	59
Proper XXVII <i>Mark 12</i>	64
Proper XXVIII <i>Mark 13</i>	67



*If there is any truth in these pages it is Christ's alone.*

DBS †



## ADVENT III

*John 3.23-30*

11 December 2005

*John also was baptizing at Ae'non near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized. For John had not yet been put in prison. Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying. And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease."*

**T**here was a cartoon in last weeks *New Yorker Magazine*. A husband and wife are shown in their living room. The husband sits on a couch reading his newspaper, while the wife sits next to him in her armchair, reading a book. In between them is a round end table with nothing on it but a telephone. Behind the end table, in between husband and wife, there is a large elephant, holding the telephone receiver in his curled trunk. The caption reads: "No, this is the elephant."

Most of you are no doubt familiar with that figure of speech, that colloquial indictment, "there's an elephant in the room." When someone refers to "the elephant in the room," they are referring to that obvious piece of information or subject matter that everyone is aware of, but no one is willing to address. In cases of extreme negligence or intentional oversight, when something is overwhelmingly obvious and yet still being ignored, it is considered a pink elephant.



These elephants are generally situational obstacles. Ironically, when there is an elephant in the room, the key to forward movement, to continued growth, to relational progress, usually lies in addressing the elephant, addressing the very thing that seems to be holding us back.

So why all this talk about elephants? Well don't look now, but there's an elephant in today's gospel.

The third Sunday of Advent is traditionally Gaudete Sunday. That is Latin for rejoice, or simply, joy. The pink candle on the Advent wreath symbolizes (not pink elephants) but this joy. There are different types of joy for different church seasons. Gaudete is translated as the joy of anticipation. That's what this Sunday is about, the Joy of anticipation. So what are we anticipating, and why are we joyful? Well I think it's clear what we're anticipating—the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. But why are we joyful? Yes, Jesus is coming, but why is that cause for joy? The answer is in the elephant.

This scene from today's gospel is fairly straightforward. John the Baptist has prophesied that someone will come who is greater than he, and indeed that one—Jesus—

has arrived. So here we have both John and Jesus baptizing people in different locations. But it turns out that Jesus is getting all the crowds. So some of John's disciples are freaking out, and they come running up to John saying, "Hey man, that Jesus guy who you were telling everyone about, he's stealing the show, everyone's going to him now instead of you. What's the deal, we're gonna go out of business?!"

John isn't phased in the least. You can almost see him shaking his head, "You've been following me around, you've heard what I've been saying. I am not the Christ. Did you think I didn't mean it? I've told you, I was just sent before him. And now he has arrived. Therefore this joy of mine is now full!

Why is John genuinely joyful? Yes, because the Christ has arrived. But really *why*? The answer is in the elephant. "He must increase, but I must decrease." Now we've heard this before, some of us have heard it all our lives. So how is this the elephant in the room? That Jesus must increase but we must decrease?

This is how. As with most principles of the Christian faith, our culture is working against us. We live in a world that promotes the self, that increases the self. But



Scripture is teeming with references to the contrary.

St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians tells us “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” And “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.” In his letter to the Colossians he writes, “For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” And to the Galatians he writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” And John the Baptizer tells us today that, “He, Jesus, must increase, but I must decrease.”

You see, we are presented with conflicting messages. We are daily exposed to the cultural message that clamors, “YOU MUST INCREASE.” Compare that with John the Baptizer’s confession, “I must decrease,” or St. Paul’s charge, “to die is gain.” Culture, “You must increase,” Christianity, “You must decrease.” We cannot do both. We can only do one. And when we do one, we are acting against the other. As we can’t do both, we are forced to ignore one of them. When we are not decreasing our self, we make John’s words the elephant in the room. We know they are there, we may even believe they are true, but we are forced to pretend they do not exist.

So let’s address the elephant. What is so great about decreasing our self anyway? This is beginning to sound like a very gloomy sermon. What are we supposed to do, walk around in hair shirts and flog ourselves every hour on the hour? I thought this was joyful Sunday? What is so joyful about decreasing our self, or dying to our self?

The answer to this question is one of the great ironies of the Christian faith; God wants us decrease ourselves, so that we might be fully increased, so that we might have fullness of life. We die to ourselves, so that we might live the richest, most joyful life possible. God made us. Why would He want us to die? To the contrary, He wants us to live our lives to the fullest maximum potential. Which is only possible “in Christ.”

When we think of the Christian life, we tend to think about “following” Jesus, or “obeying” Jesus, or “believing in” Jesus. All these are truths of the Christian journey, but we must not forget that profound mystical truth at the center of our faith, that we are “in Christ,” members of his body, himself the head. We plead in our Eucharistic prayer that “we may be made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him.” His body and blood



mystically and gracefully feeds ours as we continue to be transformed into his likeness. St. Paul tells us, “as therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him.” Do you see the picture unfolding?

There is a baby on the way. Do not be afraid to make room for that child, to allow him to grow inside of you. We must decrease, so that his tiny presence can increase, and grow in us. In so doing, we will not become less of ourselves. To the contrary, we will be freed and empowered by the spirit of Christ to become the person God wants us to become, the person He has created us to be. Alive, in Christ, so our joy will be made complete.

And that is something to look forward to.

*Amen.*



# LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

*Mark 9.2-9*

26 February 2006

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Eli'jah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah." For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.*

**W**ell, Lent is fast approaching. Get it?

And if you've been reading your bulletin these past few weeks, you know that the youth of St. Michael's had a bit of a Lenten warm-up this weekend. They participated in World Vision's 30 Hour Famine. The 30 Hour Famine is exactly what its name suggests; Fifteen youth and a handful of adult leaders began fasting

on Friday, and went without food until dinner last night. Not only did they raise money to help feed children who have no food, they also experienced what it felt like to be hungry—really hungry. They learned about the problem of hunger, not just internationally, but also right here in North County. They went on a scavenger hunt at a grocery store to see which team could buy the most food for \$30, and then they took all that food to Brother Benno's,



a local outreach that feeds the hungry. They learned about our brothers and sisters in Lusaka, Zambia, and the hard realities that many in that country face. They helped plan and participate in Saturday evening's mass. And then they dashed over to Ede Hall for a celebratory feast.

It was a special time, and God could not have provided a better liturgical feast for the occasion; the celebration of the Transfiguration of our Lord. The parallels are absolutely uncanny.

At the beginning of Mark's gospel lesson, we learn that Jesus takes Peter, James and John, and leads them up a high mountain. Now that's a really short sentence, he leads them up a high mountain. It's very easy to gloss that line and continue reading. However, it is most likely that these four men ascended Mt. Hermon, a nine-thousand foot peak. If you are familiar with mountaineering, you know that such an endeavor is a little more complex than simply saying, "he leads them up a high mountain." Peter, James, and John, following Jesus, would have hiked and climbed for quite possibly 30 hours, to get to the summit. But what happened at the end of that time was so extraordinary that it surely erased any of the

pain and discomfort they encountered. When they reached the top, Mark's gospel tells us, "Jesus was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." The Greek word for "transfigured" is actually "metamorphosis." Which means a change *from within*. Jesus was not *bathed* in blinding light from above. He was actually *emitting* the light from within his very being. Spectacular isn't it? It was a true epiphany, which is why this feast is so fitting for the last Sunday of Epiphany. Jesus, the son of God, revealed himself, his true nature, to these three apostles.

Now before climbing up the mountain, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ. But there was no way that he or the other apostles really understood what that meant. Remember, they didn't know about Christmas or Easter or Epiphany. This story was unfolding before their eyes. They were living it.

So they spent a lot of time around Jesus. They saw him heal people, cast out demons, and preach with authority. They even believed in their hearts and confessed with their lips that he was the Christ, the Messiah, sent by God. But they hadn't experienced his true nature, his divine identity, until now: until he



was transfigured before their eyes, until they glimpsed the glory of God dwelling among humankind, in the person of Jesus.

St. Augustine wrote, “What the sun is to the eyes of the flesh, that is the Lord to the eyes of the heart.”

The youth did not break their 30 hour fast in Ede Hall. They broke their fast with the bread of life, and the cup of salvation, with the body and blood of Christ.

Last night I told them my prayer for them was that this retreat would be a special experience, that they would experience the true nature of Jesus—his divine identity. That the eyes of their hearts would in some way be blinded by the real presence of Jesus. That is, after all, what we really want, what we crave as spiritual beings. Whether we realize it or not, whether we can place it or not, there resides in all of us a deep longing to be with our Lord.

What I did not tell the youth last night was the lesson we can learn from Peter. Who, upon seeing Jesus transfigured, and talking with Moses and Elijah, says, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” The southern California translation actually reads,

“Peter freaked out,” or “Peter totally lost it.” Now on the one hand it’s hard to blame the guy. Here he is, experiencing God incarnate in all His glory. Is there anywhere else he’d rather be? Is there anywhere else you would rather be? I’m sure most of us would be cool just pitching a tent and hanging out. Peter’s reaction is really pretty normal.

But again Peter does not have the advantage of 2,000 years of history. He does not realize what is happening. This is not the kingdom come. This is not the resurrection. This is not the ascension or the second coming. This is a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven. A preview of the glorified, resurrected Christ. A momentary glance at eternal God.

Peter does not realize that Lent is fast approaching, that, as C.S. Lewis wrote, “the cross comes before the crown.”

This extraordinary manifestation of God’s son, this epic attestation by Moses, representing the law, and Elijah representing the prophets, and God the Father representing Himself, that Jesus is indeed the Messianic King come to restore Israel, this climactic epiphany, is really only the beginning of a long journey down the mountain, toward Jerusalem, and the way of the cross.



Well if we can't hang out on the mountaintop, what's the point of this transfiguration? What's the point of experiencing Jesus—divine presence if can't last?

The point is assurance: sure and certain hope that Jesus has already won the victory. Why is this important? Because pain and suffering are real. Because our sin is real. Because the weight of the cross is real. In those times we can take our experience of Jesus with us, so that, as we prayed in today's collect, beholding by faith the light of Jesus' countenance, we may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed, ourselves, transfigured, metamorphosed, changed from within, into his likeness, from glory to glory.

*Amen.*



# ASH WEDNESDAY

*Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21*

1 March 2006

*[Jesus said,] “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

*“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

*“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*



Three-hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ there lived a man, a Greek Philosopher named Diogenes. Diogenes was chief among the school known as the cynics—that is, he believed human actions were insincere and motivated by self-interest. He lived a life of extreme asceticism, extreme self-denial. His home was a tub in the streets of Athens, where he was completely exposed to the weather. He wore rags for clothing. The single wooden bowl he possessed, he destroyed on seeing a peasant boy drink from the hollow of his hands. He avoided earthly pleasures, because of a great disdain for what he perceived as the folly, pretence, vanity, social climbing, self-deception, and artificiality of much human conduct. But perhaps the most telling anecdote, about Diogenes the cynic, were his wanderings about in broad daylight, in the public square of Athens, carrying a lighted lantern. Whenever he was asked about this behavior, he would respond, “I am searching for an honest man.” And though Diogenes apparently did not find an honest man, he felt that he had, in the process, “exposed the vanity and selfishness of humanity.”

Don't you find it odd, that for all his outward expressions of self-discipline, self-denial, and self-control, it was to other people that

Diogenes searched for honesty? Perhaps he could have shortened his search and moved onto some other activity, had he thought to turn inward, examine himself, and strive for inner transformation. The honest man might have been a mirror's reflection away.

Holy Lent is upon us. For hundreds of years the Christian Church has set aside these forty days leading up to our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection as a period of intentional self-examination, penitence, and devotion. As we embark on this journey together here at St. Michael's—as the body of Christ—I want to challenge us to keep in mind this one question: “Where is my focus?”

Where is my focus? Now to really make this easy I'm going to narrow down the answers, multiple choice style. The only answers to choose from are: outward... or inward. Is my focus outward, or is it inward?

There are many different Lenten disciplines to choose from. We can give things up, we can take things on, we can commit to increase prayer, or church attendance, or alms giving, or kindness or patience—the list is endless. (Incidentally, if there's something you're thinking about doing but you're not sure if you want to, or need to... you probably should. That's my experience



anyway). There are many different disciplines to choose from, but will our focus be outward, or inward?

An outward focus is simply one that looks out at others. In today's gospel reading, Jesus shares a little Spiritual Discipline 101:

- Beware of practicing your piety before others
- Don't sound a trumpet so others will praise you
- Don't let your left hand know what the right is doing
- When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray in secret
- When you fast, don't make funny faces so as to advertise what you're doing, in fact, do the opposite: put oil on your head, wash your face, look your best so that it goes unrecognized.

When our focus is outward, we are seeking the acknowledgement of other people, as if their approval were the sole reason for our discipline. But what other people think and what other people do is irrelevant to our task. Having an outward focus actually prevents us from receiving the rich benefits of

keeping a spiritual discipline.

What are those benefits? Who cares if other people know what I'm doing? I'm still doing it aren't I? And isn't that the point? That I muster up enough will power to maintain my Lenten discipline?

Actually, that's not the point. Indeed, trust in one's will power may quickly lead to the sin of pride. So what is the point of keeping a Lenten discipline? The point is spiritual renewal, the point is spiritual growth, the point is spiritual transformation, the point is spiritual healing. The emphasis here is on the spiritual, or what is inside, or eternal.

From dust we came and to dust we shall return. Treasures on earth won't last, moth and rust consume, thieves break in and steal. During Lent we have the opportunity to set aside some of our treasures and pleasures on earth to make room for some spiritual treasures, some heavenly treasures. Lenten disciplines are a means of receiving those heavenly treasures, of receiving God's grace. They allow us to open ourselves up before God so that He can transform us.

In his book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster writes, "A farmer is helpless



to grow grain; all he can do is to provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He puts the seed in the ground where the natural forces take over and up comes the grain. That is the way with Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. The Disciplines are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where He can work within us and transform us.”

This Lent I want to commend us all to keep an inward focus, to keep our hands to the plow and to not look back.

*Amen.*



## LENT III

*John 2.13-22*

19 March 2006

*The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.*

**T**here are many puzzling stories in the Bible: stories that excite and confuse and frighten all at once. Today's gospel, where Jesus "cleanses" the Temple, is just such a story.

For starters, when I consider the word "cleanse" I think of some generic television ad for a facial moisturizer, with "deep cleansing power that is

gentle on the skin." But there is nothing gentle about Jesus' cleansing the Temple, which is perhaps the most uncomfortable thing about this account. Jesus is really, really ticked off. And the idea of God Himself raging like a bull in a china shop in his own Temple is pretty unnerving.



There are lots of descriptions of God in the Old Testament being jealous or angry. But one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the New Testament is the new law that Jesus sets forth, the law of love. Love God and love your neighbor. Like many of you, I was raised with images of a long blond-haired, blue eyed, almost-surfer Jesus. So whenever I stumbled across this passage, I didn't know what to think. Here was a violent Jesus, whirling around cracking a whip and flipping tables? It seemed more like Indiana Jesus and the Jerusalem Temple of Doom.

When we consider the extreme nature of Jesus' behavior in this scene, the driving question seems to be: "Why is Jesus so angry?"

The text doesn't really give us a lot of information. Jesus went to Jerusalem and in the temple he found people selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. There is a violent outburst, after which Jesus says, "you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." That's all the information we've got; what does it mean?

I used to think it meant that you couldn't sell anything at church. Awhile back I heard of a mega-church in the suburbs of Chicago that put a Starbucks in their church building. All

Saint's Cathedral in San Francisco also has a coffee shop in their basement. I can remember thinking of this passage and quietly judging these churches.

At the church I served when I was at Nashotah House, they had a little gift shop in a corner of their parish hall. That seemed pretty harmless. But if this passage meant what I thought it meant—that you shouldn't sell anything at church—was it wrong to have this gift shop? And speaking of gift shops, last time I checked we've got one across the way in Ede Hall. What would our incarnate Lord do if he walked into Ede Hall this morning? Would he rip down the lattice work, smash all the figurines, and chase everybody out of there by whipping bean-bag frogs at them?

I don't think so. Do you?

So what is this passage about then?

Why is Jesus so angry?

This is one of those passages of Scripture that is like the tip of an iceberg. Its meaning would have been quite clear at the time of its writing. But we are 2,000 years removed from 1st century temple worship in Jerusalem. Context, or a framework or foundation, is essential to understanding this story.



First of all, it was Passover time. If you lived within a 15 mile radius of Jerusalem, you were required to attend. But by this time the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. And most of them longed to celebrate at least one Passover in Jerusalem. So the Temple would have been very busy with people from far and wide.

Now the temple itself was made up of several different areas. When you first walked in, you were in the court of the Gentiles. This was the largest area, and if you were not a Jew, you could go no farther. You had to stay and worship in the court of the Gentiles. The next area was the court of women, then the court of the Israelites, and then, the Holy of Holies. Only the high priests could enter the Holy of Holies, because that was where the presence of God remained.

But all the commotion took place right as you walked in, in the court of the Gentiles. Every Jew over the age of 19 was required to pay an annual temple tax. This tax helped to defray the cost of the daily rituals and sacrifice. The tax was a half shekel. (Now I did a little math, so from here on out I'll be speaking in 2006 US dollars. Keep in mind these are just estimates.) So a half-shekel was roughly \$100. Now the

temple tax had to be paid in Galilaean shekels. But remember there were pilgrims arriving from all over the world with all kinds of coins: coins from Rome, Greece, Egypt, Tyre and Sidon, etc. Because this money was foreign, it was considered unclean. So what did they do? They had *money-changers*. Now so far, everything I've described is on the up and up; the tax and the money-changers should have fulfilled an honest, necessary purpose. But the money-changers were completely ripping off these poor pilgrims. It would have cost you something like \$150 to get your \$100 temple tax in the correct currency.

The animal vendors were even worse. Why were there oxen, sheep, and pigeons there in the first place? They were future sacrifices. These animals were victims. Now you could purchase a pair of doves outside the temple for around \$60, as any animal brought in from the outside again would have been considered unclean. Which is fine. The problem was that a pair of doves inside the temple ran close to \$1000!

So now we have a better idea of what was going on inside the court of the Gentiles. This was shameless social injustice being practiced in the name of religion. Makes you kind of mad



doesn't it? Same with Jesus.

First, God's house was being desecrated. There was worship without reverence. In fact, the irreverence was out of control. Arguments about prices, disputes about coins—all this greed and deception was taking place in this sanctuary.

Second, Jesus' outburst, "Get these pigeons out of here" points directly to the fact that, as the prophets had been saying for hundreds of years, God does not desire sacrifice. Jesus did in fact cleanse the purpose and intention of worship in the temple. When the people wanted a sign, what does he do? He predicts his own death and resurrection. Christ alludes to himself as the new temple. And indeed, it is Christ whom we adore. And not only that, but true devotion—true worship—take place by him, and with him, and in him. We are the body of Christ—not this building—but these people. But Jesus is our head. And what use is the body without the head? Not only was dishonest haggling going on in the temple, but they had completely missed the point. Consumed with their own rituals and their own process, the body had forgotten the head. God Himself was forgotten in His own house.

Thirdly, and perhaps worst of all, the

hospitality and witness within the temple was just deplorable. Remember, if you were a Gentile, you could go no further than the court of the Gentiles. If you were there to worship, you were forced to do so amidst this unholy commotion of selfishness.

So what does this have to do with us? No, I don't think Jesus would knock over the cash register in Ede Hall. But as we continue to examine ourselves this Lenten season, let's try to consider our Lord's reaction to us, his perspective on us, by focusing on these three questions.

Are we reverent in our worship?

Is Jesus Christ the head of our body, and do we worship him in spirit and in truth?

And do our visitors, the traveling pilgrims among us, in our pews, in this village, in our communities, do they experience an unobstructed view of God's love for them through his son Jesus?

*Amen.*



# EASTER VIGIL

*Matthew 28.1-10*

15 April 2006

*Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Mag'dalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."*

**A**lleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

I have a friend from seminary, from Nashotah House, who was a bit of a practical joker. He pulled countless little pranks during our three years at the House. I won't go into any details because I don't want to give these acolytes any ideas. There was one however, that he

had planned especially for the Easter Vigil. It was a simple idea. At the point in the service when all the bells ring and the lights go on, he was going to unleash hundreds of little bouncy balls from the ceiling that said, "Jesus Loves You" on them. He spent a solid year drawing little pencil diagrams of his masterpiece, editing, revising, polishing. His plan involved a large cardboard tube to hold the rubber balls,



a fulcrum, some weights, a system of pulleys, and fishing wire. All you would have to do is pull the fishing wire from your chapel stall to trigger the cardboard tube. The result would be a cascade of rubber balls ricocheting off the hardwood floors and pews of St. Mary's chapel, along with smells and bells and loud organ music: a glorious chaos of ancient and modern liturgy. He never did incarnate his plan. Although he still has several hundred super balls that say, "*Jesus Loves You*" on them. Perhaps Fr. Moquin would consider a new custom for next year's Easter Vigil?

I share this story for the simple reason that this image does catch some of the spirit of this night. There is an excitement, an energy, a rejoicing, a happiness about Easter. Why? It's all wrapped up in those three joyous words. In fact, the whole of the Christian faith is contained in them. Our very salvation is found in them. You know them. Alleluia... Christ is risen! Christ is risen! This evening I want to take a brief look at each of these words.

The first word is Christ. The anointed one. The Messiah. The very Son of God. Is that who Jesus was? The disciples confessed him as the Christ. Jesus presented himself as such, even predicting his own death and resurrection.

But who could really say? A guy walks around calling himself the Messiah; there are bound to be some people who believe him. He is finally killed as an imposter. That's the end of that nut.... until the third day.

The two Marys go to visit the tomb. An angel descends from heaven, rolls back the stone and says, "You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here." Well where is he? He has risen from the dead! The reality becomes clear to them. Jesus is indeed the Christ. His identity as the Christ is fulfilled in the resurrection; if he had not risen, he would not be the Christ. But Jesus rose from the dead, just as he said he would. There is no dead Jesus. There is only a risen Christ. The angels' words hold true for us today: "If you seek Jesus who was crucified, you will not find him. He is not here." Let us instead continue to seek the risen Christ, who has revealed himself to us in all his glory.

Christ is Risen.

That second word is a tiny one but so incredibly important. Is. Christ *IS* risen.

It is not, Christ *WILL* rise. We are not waiting for Christ to die and rise. We are waiting for him to *COME* again, but not to rise.

And it is not, Christ *HAS* risen. This is true,



that he rose again 2,000 years ago, that the event really took place in history, on this earth.

*But it is not over.*

Christ *IS* risen. He is alive and well right here and now April 2006 in Carlsbad, California. Perhaps this is not so clear to you. Perhaps you feel you have lost Jesus somewhere along the way. It's easy to do these days. Our culture is like a smoke screen—like a hall of mirrors—trying desperately to undermine the credibility of Jesus and his good news. *The Da Vinci Code*, the Gnostic Gospels, the newly translated *Gospel of Judas*; it's easy to get lost in the smoke and mirrors. (Incidentally, any history professor will tell you that there is nothing *NEW* about Gnosticism. It has been a much-studied Christian heresy for some 1800 years. Proving once again, as the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us, "There is nothing new under the sun.") Nonetheless, it is a confusing age in which we live. Rest assured even if you feel you have lost Jesus, he has not lost you. He is alive and well right here and now.

He is risen!

Which leads us to our third word. Risen.

Jesus is not just alive, he is risen. And one cannot be risen, or resurrected, unless one

first dies. Which is precisely what Jesus did. He died. He died for us. For our sins.

As St. Paul reminds us, the wages of sin is death. Or the result, the outcome of sin is death. Sin... leads to death. Our sin leads to our death. Jesus took that sin, and died its death. Sacrificed for us, for our sin. Dead.

But the great triumph of the Easter story is that Almighty God raised him from the dead.

Jesus rose from the grave. In so doing he destroyed death itself. He stripped sin of all its lethal power. He shattered the grip of death on our souls. The wages of sin *IS* death, our sin still leads to death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The result of Jesus destroying death is that, in Christ, we are no longer slaves to our sin.

The sacrament of baptism is a living symbol of this reality. When we are baptized, we are baptized into his death. The early church used to immerse its members completely under the water, to signify this drowning, or dying with Christ. When they emerged from the water they were resurrected to new life in Christ. As we heard from St. Paul, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by



the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Through our baptism, we share with the risen Christ, in his risen life.

For we know that Christ being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So we also must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is the power of the Easter message.

So let us rejoice with the saints throughout the ages, and proclaim with joy the good news of our salvation in Christ Jesus.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

*The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

*Amen.*



# EASTER V

*John 14.15-21*

14 May 2006

*[Jesus said,] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.*

*“I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”*

**A**s many of you know, we have a new mouth to feed in the Stambaugh household. Actually there's more than a *mouth* to deal with. Despite the sleepless nights, I think most would agree it's an awesome and wonderful experience to behold the miracle of life presented to us in a brand new baby. Perhaps one of the most amazing things about every little baby girl, is that hidden within this delicate new life is the potential to conceive, and give birth to more new life. Our mothers all started off as tiny little miracles of life.

They grew up, and eventually gave birth to us—more miracles of life. In this sense, women—or mothers—are truly givers of life.

It is very fitting that we should be honoring our mothers this weekend, our life-givers, as the message from today's gospel is all about another life giver... THE life giver. The Holy Ghost. The Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of God Himself.

Recall what we confess in the Nicene Creed every week: We believe in the Holy Ghost, the



Lord, the *giver of life*. All that has life, all that is, all that has been, and all that ever shall be, comes from the Spirit of God, the giver of life.

The Spirit of God was there in the very beginning, before all creation. The Hebrew word for Spirit is "*Ruach*" which can be translated as Spirit, or breath, or wind. We read in the second verse in the whole Bible that the "Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Remember how it is that God creates in the Genesis account? He spoke, and it was. Let there be light. Let there be trees and vegetation. Let there be fish and birds and animals. Let there be waves for surfing. Etcetera. Actually, waves are a direct result of wind, but we won't go in to that right now.

He spoke, and it was. And what comes out of our mouths when we speak? There are two things primarily. Words. And what animates the words, what gives them life? Breath. The *Ruach*, the breath of God, was there in all creation as God spoke and all things came into being.

The Genesis text also tells us that God created Adam out of the dust of the earth. But didn't Adam have life right away? Not until God breathed into him. Genesis 2.7 says that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;

and the man became a living being.

The Spirit of God is the giver of life.

That phrase, the giver of life, which we say in our creed, comes from the very same gospel we heard from today. The Gospel of John. Earlier in the book the writer tells us, "it is the Spirit that gives life."

But in today's reading Jesus reveals an entirely new dimension to the Spirit of God. He refers to the Holy Spirit as both a Counselor and the Spirit of Truth.

The Greek word for Counselor that Jesus uses is "paraclete." Some versions of the Bible translate this word "paraclete" as comforter. Which is appropriate, as the Holy Spirit is able to provide us much comfort in times of distress. But the Holy Spirit is much more than simply a comforter. The word "paraclete" means not only comforter, but also Counselor, Helper, Intercessor. The Holy Spirit not only consoles us, but intercedes for us, rallies for us, brings us back to our feet in times of trouble, energizes us, strengthens us, braces us, revives us, reinvigorates us, puts a new heart and courage into us.

Jesus also refers to the paraclete as the "Spirit of Truth." Who can guide us when we are lost,



bewildered, not sure which way to go? The Spirit of Truth. Who offers peace when we are puzzled, perplexed, bewildered and confused? The Spirit of Truth. We don't have to go it alone, or figure it out on our own. In fact we can't. But the Spirit of Truth will lead whosoever will listen to him into the truth.

Sounds pretty great doesn't it? How can we be a part of this Spirit of Truth? How can we access the assistance of this divine Counselor?

Jesus, speaking in John's gospel, is very clear. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever."

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples, but it is a conditional promise. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

So what are Jesus' commandments? Well just a few verses earlier in John 13.34 Jesus tells his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. In particular, you will love one another. It's important to emphasize here,

that the call to love one another is not floating in outer space. We are not to love one another, "just because." The call to love one another is completely enshrouded in our love for Jesus and our desire to follow him. Our love for each other does not stand alone, it is to be rooted in our love for Jesus.

This priority of our love for Jesus is emphasized in 1 John which reads, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us to do."

If we love Jesus—because we love Jesus—we will love each other. Jesus tells his disciples that he will actually *pray* to the Father for them. And the Father will give them a Counselor. A guide. A helper. An advocate.

The ultimate reality of the Christian faith revolves around the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

There is a lot of information floating around in the world today. There are lots of theories about the Christian faith that continue their rise to prominence in our culture. In fact, at a glance, half of the books in the local bookstore that are stocked in the "Christianity" section, aren't even Christian. The presence of the



Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is the way you can differentiate the Christian, from the non-Christian. Jesus says so himself in today's gospel.

The world cannot receive the Spirit of Truth because the world neither sees nor knows him. To the world, there is no such thing as the Spirit of Truth. He is *not there*. And guess what, you won't find him in half of the books listed under Christianity. Or half of the TV shows or magazine articles you come across. He is not there because the world cannot see him. And guess who else cannot be seen? Jesus himself.

"Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you... you will see me. You know why you will see me? Because the same Spirit that is in me, will reside in you. Because I live, you will live also."

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and for that life we can and do give thanks to our mothers this day. But that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And as such, Jesus tells us, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

The world cannot see Jesus, because they

cannot see the Spirit of Truth. But because we have the Spirit of Truth, Jesus has promised to manifest himself to us, to live in us, and to be with us forever.

*Amen.*



## EASTER VII

*John 17.11b-19*

18 June 2006

*[Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying,] “Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.*

**I** imagine. Jesus is sitting with his disciples at their last supper together. He has washed their feet. He has spoken of his betrayal. He has given them a new commandment to love one another. He has told them, “I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me.” He has warned them that the world will hate them, will reject them. But he has also promised them that he will not

leave them comfortless: that he will send them a helper, the Spirit of truth, to strengthen and guide them.

And then, in the presence of his disciples, he lifts his eyes towards heaven, and he begins to pray for them.

“Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may



be one, even as we are one.”

John 17 is often referred to as Jesus’ High Priestly prayer. Our gospel lesson is taken literally from the heart of this prayer, where Jesus prays to the Father that his disciples would be One.

As the saying goes, hindsight is always 20/20. All we have to do is take a brief glance at 2000 years of Christians history, and it is clear that our Lord knew exactly what he was praying for. It didn’t take long for Jesus’ followers to begin conflicting. The New Testament itself witnesses to a number of conflicts among the faithful. The early centuries of the Christian Church are filled with church councils whose primary purpose was to settle theological disputes. In 1054 AD the east and the west split apart... and then there were two. And the reformation of the 16th century was like a hydrogen bomb that exploded at the center of Western Christendom, the tremors of which have yet to cease. Christian Churches continue to split, and therefore multiply, over various conflicts. Our very own Anglican Communion is not without its disagreements these days.

And yet Jesus, before his death, resurrection and ascension, prays to the Father that, “They may be One.”

*What* did Jesus mean by this Oneness, by this unity? And *why* was it so important to him?

These are the questions we will explore today.

Let’s start by examining unity itself. And before we ask what unity is, let’s ask ourselves what unity *is not*.

Unity *is not* a group of diverse elements in proximity to one another. Unity is not a conglomeration of different things under the same roof. For example, a jar of marbles is not a symbol of unity. Sure, the different colored and various shaped marbles are gathered together in a single glass container. Being housed in a glass jar is what the marbles have in common, but the marbles are not truly *in union* with each other.

At the heart of unity is the state of being one: combining or joining separate entities to actually become one. St. Paul gives us a fine example of unity when he speaks of a body having many members. In the human body, though there are different members, there is an organic unity. The members share the very same breath of life—the same veins, muscles, organs, nerves—indeed body and blood.

The heart of unity is the state of being one. But what does Jesus tell us in his High Priestly



prayer about *his* understanding of unity? There are three points that stand out.

First, he prays, “Holy Father, *keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me*, that they may be one, even as we are one.”

What is this name that the Father has given Jesus? It is the very name of God Himself. You may remember early in the book of Exodus God revealed His name to Moses when He said, “I AM WHO I AM. Tell the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.”

From that moment on, I AM was understood by the people of Israel as the divine name.

Fast forward to the New Testament, to John’s gospel. Jesus refers to himself in many different ways. “I am the way and the truth and the life.” “I am the light of the world.” “I am the bread of life.” “I am the good shepherd.” But it is when the Jews ask Jesus if he has seen Abraham in John 8, that he replies, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” In using this divine name Jesus is equating himself with Almighty God. This was naturally upsetting to many people, it still is today. But that is who we believe in, Jesus as very God.

“Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which

thou hast given me, that they may be one, *even as we are one.*”

In point of fact, it is precisely this union—of Jesus as very God—that he is referencing when he prays for the disciples unity. How might they be one? As we are one. As Jesus and the Father are one. *That Jesus is God. As Jesus is God.* That is the first condition under which Jesus prays for this unity to occur.

Second, Jesus prays, “Holy Father, I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because *they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*”

Jesus was not of the world. He was hated by the world; indeed killed by the world. The same is true for his disciples, for the body of Christ. Jesus is clear that he has no desire to remove his disciples from the world, just to deliver them from evil. And yet, they are not of the world. This is the second distinct condition under which the disciples’ unity occurs. They are not of the world.

And third, Jesus prays, “Holy Father, for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.”

The word “consecrate” is filled with mysticism and power. It is the same Greek word for



“sanctify” or “holy.” It is generally understood as a separation, or to set something apart for God’s purposes. But it is not simply setting something apart, it is also a type of dedication or equipping for those same purposes. In this sense it is very similar to the idea of sacrifice.

Here Jesus has consecrated *himself*, that his disciples might be consecrated... in truth.

That qualifier, **in truth**, must not be overlooked. What does Jesus mean by “consecrated in truth?” What “truth” is he referring to? Jesus is very clear, “thy word is truth,” (v. 17).

God’s word is truth. What is God’s word? Who is God’s word? Recall the beginning of John’s gospel? In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” Jesus, the self-same word of God, the way—the truth and the life. And so we have found the third unique condition of unity of which Jesus prays to the Father: that his disciples would be set apart, dedicated, and equipped for service to God... in Christ. The Christ who came from the Father, the Christ who is one with the Father, the Christ who is not of the world, but died for the world. The Christ of faith whom we profess in the creeds, who was crucified, died and was buried, who on the third day rose again, ascended into heaven and is seated

at the right hand of God. That Christ—not Christ as we understand him to be—but Christ who has revealed himself to us. Christ who is. That Christ. He is the one by whom we become unified. Which is precisely why we the church, the body of Christ, its many members, feed together at the altar on Jesus body and blood. That his very life would course through our veins.

Now if you really have your thinking cap on tight, you may be wondering, “OK, Jesus prayed this prayer of unity for his disciples, but maybe it was just for those twelve and not for us sitting here all these years later.” It’s a fair question. And if all we read was the lectionary, if all we read was today’s gospel lesson, we might never know the difference. But Jesus continues his prayer at, “I do not pray for these only [that is, the twelve], but also for those who believe in me through *their* word,” (v. 20). Who’s word? The apostles’ word. The ones whom Jesus sent, the ones who continue in the apostles teaching, breaking of bread, and the prayers, the ones who remain a part of Christ’s one holy and apostolic church. **Us.**

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through *their* word. That they may all be one; even as thou, Father,



art in me, and I in thee, that they also may  
be in us.”

Why?

“So that the world may believe that thou has  
sent me.”

Our oneness is to be our witness.

Our unity is to be our testimony.

The body of Christ—alive and intact—testifies  
to the *body of* Christ. The body of Christ—alive  
and intact—indeed testifies to the *risen* Christ.

We are to be one.

We are to be one in *Christ*.

We are to be one in Christ, for Christ’s sake.

*Amen.*



# PROPER V

*Genesis 3.1-21*

18 June 2006

*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.*

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." The LORD God said*



*to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.*

**I** was listening to a comedian the other night who happens to be Roman Catholic. He drew some of his material from popular Bible stories, one of which happened to be the story of Adam and Eve from Genesis chapter 3. He addressed the notorious tale this way.

"Adam and Eve got kicked out of paradise for eating an apple. An apple? Have you ever been tempted by an apple? I would've been like, "Yeah cover it in caramel and come back to me... You got any cake back there!"

How many of you would have been tempted by

an apple? I must admit I usually take my apples with a small chunk of smoked gouda cheese. Growing up, I'm sure my mom wished I would have been tempted by fruits and vegetables. The truth is, I can think of plenty of foods more tempting than a plain apple... Butterfingers, sushi, Pizza Port.

Of course, Adam and Eve's temptation really had nothing to do with an apple. Just for starters, the word "apple" is never even mentioned in the text. The apple was born out of tradition. But the text does say fruit, so it very well could have been an apple. Whatever



it was—apple, banana, pomegranate—it was still not the *fruit* that tempted them. The entire garden was filled with trees and fruit. They could have had apples for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, day after day for eternity. No, it was not the fruit that tempted; it was the nature of the fruit that tempted.

That nature was two-fold. First, the fruit was forbidden. It was off limits. God told them not to eat it. This particular fruit—the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—was forbidden.

This is the first part of the tempting nature of the fruit, and one that many of us can probably identify with. When something is forbidden that generally increases its appeal. An apple? Not that tempting. An apple I can't have? Hmm. Tempting. What exactly do you mean I can't have it? I mean, why can't I have it? What if I want it? I didn't want it until you told me I couldn't have it.

We don't like to be told what we can and can't do. We don't like to be told what we can and can't have. Which brings us to the second reason the fruit was so enticing: for what it represented—that is, the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent's sales pitch says it all. He tells Eve, "You're not going to die. This fruit

won't hurt you. As a matter of fact it will do just the opposite, it will give you great wisdom. God knows that when you eat this fruit, your eyes will be opened, you will know good and evil... You will be like God."

So Eve checks out the tree. The fruit looks pretty good; the text tells us "it was a delight to her eyes." Not only that, but now she had the "truth" about the fruit: it would make her like God.

So here we have a fuller sense of the temptation involved. It was not the apple that tempted. It was the forbidden apple that contained within it the power to be like God.

At this point, it is helpful to remember that the story of Adam and Eve is the first chapter in God's Holy Word. It is the very beginning of the story of salvation history. As such, it presents to us a number of "firsts." One of which is the first sin. The forbidden apple that contains the power of God is an important theological symbol for the nature of sin.

First, we don't like to be told what we can and can't do. We don't like to be told what we can and can't have. Second, we would prefer to be in control of our own destiny, and in charge



of our own lives. To be our own gods, subject to no one.

Make no mistake about it. We are free to choose.

God has given us the freedom to choose Him or to choose ourselves. We are free to try and master our own universe. Beginning with Adam and Eve. God didn't tell Adam and Eve that they *couldn't* eat the fruit. In fact, in Genesis 2.17 He explains that if they eat it—in the day that they eat it—they will die. God didn't tell them that they *couldn't* eat the fruit. He told them *not* to eat it. They had the freedom to sin, to choose their will against God's, and they exercised it. We also, have the freedom to sin, and when we choose our will over and against God's will, we exercise it.

Interestingly, the Greek word for sin is "amartia," which actually means "to miss the mark." What do you suppose is the mark? An obvious answer is that the mark is God's will. And when we deliberately act against God's will for our lives, when we knowingly place our will in front of God's will, we miss the mark. We sin.

However, our freedom to sin comes with a price. Today's reading suggests that first, we

are responsible for our sin, and second, that there are consequences to our sin.

Adam and Eve demonstrate how *not* to take responsibility for your behavior. After they did what they were asked not to, their response to God is absolutely classic.

God comes walking through the garden in the evening breeze; He's probably stepping over apple cores and fig leaves. Adam and Eve are hiding from Him because they are naked. God asks, "who told you of nakedness? Did you eat from the tree that I told you not to eat from?... Adam points to his wife, "she made me do it." But it's even worse than that. He says, "the woman *you gave me*." In other words, "It's both your faults." God looks at Eve and her response is the same, "the serpent made me do it." They passed the proverbial buck, one to the other. Neither is interested in taking responsibility for their disobedience.

And while taking responsibility for our sin isn't always easy, St. Paul assures us that, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Our sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, but we do have to ask. Confession is the first step. It is the beginning of our reconciliation with God.



Jesus himself wandered around the villages of Israel preaching, "Repent and believe the good news."

And lastly, there are consequences for our sin.

Today's reading is filled with the consequences of Adam and Eve's actions. Snakes and labor pains and weeds and hard work and eventually, the dust to dust of death.

Sounds kind of harsh doesn't it? Why would God do that to his creatures? Well He doesn't. That's not at all what He wants for us. It is precisely those consequences that God wants to spare us from. He doesn't want to see the creatures that He loves so much suffer, and ultimately die. What we might perceive as rules, regulations, and restrictions are really designed for our own health, well-being, and life. The wages of sin is death. God didn't want Adam and Eve to eat from that tree because he knew if they ate from it they would surely die.

But thanks be to God for sending his Son our Savior Jesus Christ who has defeated the powers of sin and death. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. By the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ we are given the power to flee temptation, to resist sin and to choose God.

Remember it was Jesus who told us to pray to the Father, "Thy will be done."

It was Jesus who said to the Father, "Not my will, but thine be done."

It was Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. But rather emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in human likeness. Humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death on a cross.

Jesus, as very God, submitted himself to the will of his Father, over and against his own will. He has given us a perfect example of obedience. He desires us to do the same.

In today's gospel Jesus invites us into his heavenly family saying, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Everyday we have the choice to do God's will or our own will.

Whose will you choose?

*Amen.*



## PROPER VIII

*Mark 5.22-24, 35b-43*

2 July 2006

*Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Ja'irus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.*

*There came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Tal'itha cu'mi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*



There is a certain writing style, or literary style, that is found in the Gospel of Mark. Believe it or not, it is called the “Marcan Sandwich.” In Seminary this was a very distracting concept for me. Whenever our New Testament professor would mention the Marcan Sandwich, on the outside I would have that inquisitive, introspective look on my face like I was paying attention; but inside I was thinking to myself, “Gosh I wonder what they’re serving for lunch today, I’m sooo hungry.”

Anyway, the real Marcan sandwich is a literary style that Mark uses in his gospel where he interrupts one story with another one. So you have the beginning of story A, then he inserts story B, then he finishes story A. So story A is like the bread and the inserted story B is like the meat. And he does this for a reason. The two stories inform each other, or as one theologian says, they “knock sparks off each other.”

This morning’s Gospel story, where Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead, that’s story A. Take a quick look at your bulletin. Notice the reference for today’s gospel? Mark 5.22-24, and then it skips to verse 35-43. Verses 25 to 34 are omitted. Our lectionary has removed

the meat of this particular Marcan sandwich and presented us with just the bread. So before going any further I want to read the middle portion of this text.

We just read about Jairus who asks Jesus to come save his daughter. Jesus agrees and they begin to travel towards Jairus’ house. It is at this point, as a great crowd travels with Jesus and Jairus, that the second story begins:

*“And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.” And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, “Who touched my garments?”*

*And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’”*

*And he looked around to see who had done it.*



*But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.*

*And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

At this point Jesus continues on to Jairus' house where he raises Jairus' daughter from the dead.

These stories belong together because they are both about **fear and faith**.

First lets explore the fear factor (pun intended). We learn that Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue. He was like the lay president of the congregation, not unlike our senior warden. As such, Jairus most likely would have wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Jesus' presence was upsetting to the experts of Jewish law. His notoriety was tenuous at best and only time would tell if he was the real thing or just a lunatic. Jesus was definitely *not* Jairus' first pick for help.

But a crisis had fallen upon Jairus. His 12-year-old daughter was about to die.

So Jairus is filled with a swirling mixture of fears. First, it is risky for the synagogue

president to approach this itinerant preacher Jesus. What would his Jewish peers think of him? But that initial fear was overshadowed by a second and greater one—the life of his daughter. Who cares about religious controversy and political danger when the life of a child is at stake? And so Jairus goes to Jesus, falls at his feet and begs him repeatedly to lay hands on his daughter that she may be made well and live.

At this point, we break to the second story and a different set of fears in the hemorrhaging woman. First, she had been afflicted with this bleeding for 12 years. She had tried everything, seen every kind of doctor and healer, spent everything she had. Not only had she not been healed, but her condition had actually worsened. Chief among her fears was whether or not she would *ever* be healed. Coupled with that, due to her condition she was considered unclean according to Jewish law. And not only herself, but anyone or anything that she came in contact with. If anyone in that great throng of people knew her condition, she would have been immediately cast out. Yet, amidst these fears, she pushes through the crowd; hoping not to be discovered, hoping to touch just a thread of Jesus' clothes, hoping to be healed.



Isn't it interesting how it is that this man and this woman come to Jesus? They are both in life and death situations—Jairus on behalf of his daughter, and the woman on behalf of herself. Jesus was not their first choice; in fact he was their final choice. The fear of being embarrassed or ashamed about turning to Jesus, was completely eclipsed by the fear of anguish, suffering, and loss. The fear of what others might think about them had been completely overshadowed by the fear of death itself.

And so, in their final hour of desperation, when they had exhausted all their options, when nothing else worked...

They sought Jesus.

They went to Jesus.

They reached for Jesus.

Perhaps you have found yourself in a similar situation. Perhaps you *will* find yourself in a similar situation. I know I have.

So what happens?

Well we learn that the woman, upon touching the hem of Jesus' garments, was immediately healed of her disease. Instantly. And Jesus, perceiving that power had left him, whirled

around asking, "Who touched me?" His disciples think he is absurd as they are traveling in a swarm of people, but the woman, in fear and trembling, fell down before him and told him the truth. Jesus' response, "Your faith had made you well."

At this point some folks came from Jairus' house to report that his daughter had already died. And they advise Jairus, "Why trouble the Teacher and further?" If they are devout Jews it is possible that they want Jairus to have nothing further to do with Jesus. But Jesus ignores the report, turns to Jairus and says gently, "Do not fear, only believe." Have faith. They continue on, and Jesus, taking the child by the hand says, "Little girl, I say to you arise." And she is raised to new life.

*Do not fear, only believe.*

*Your faith has made you well.*

What role does faith have in these two stories?

What is it that does the healing, that does the saving in these stories? (It is the same Greek word used to indicate both healing and saving). Is it God's power that heals and saves? Or is it our faith that heals and saves?



There is no question that it is the power of God that both heals us and saves us. But it is the power of God *through* faith that acts upon us. (Interestingly, in the very next chapter, Mark 6, Jesus goes to his home town but “could do no mighty work there” because the people did not believe. “He marveled because of their unbelief.”

Which brings us to our faith.

Do you believe that Jesus healed the hemorrhaging woman? Do you believe that he raised the little girl from the dead? Do you believe that he can work the same healing power within you, even today?

Common sense tells us these things don't happen. Reason and logic look for other explanations. Perhaps they are imaginative accounts. Perhaps the girl wasn't really dead. In any case, we know better now. There is so much more we understand about the human body, about chemistry and biology. Simply because we live in the year 2006, we are much more apt to question the healing power of Jesus.

I am not suggesting that we be unreasonable, rather that we remain faithful. Do you believe that God can heal you? Do you believe that

God can save you? I am here to tell you that he can, but it takes faith. God's power works through our faith. It takes the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things unseen.

Faith is *not* the power of positive thinking. It is unrestricted *belief, assurance, and conviction* in the saving power of Almighty God through his son Jesus Christ.

Christian faith ignores the rumors that hope has died, in the same way that Jesus ignored the report that Jarius' daughter had died.

Do not fear. Only believe. And then *act* on that belief.

St. Augustine had only one brief comment to make on this passage of Scripture. He wrote, “Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him.”

*Amen.*



# PROPER X

*Mark 6.7-13*

16 July 2006

*And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, "Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.*

**Y**ou might not recognize it at first glance, but today's gospel lesson speaks almost directly to us at St. Michael's by-the-Sea. Take another listen as Jesus sends out the twelve. He charges them to take nothing for their journey, except to "wear sandals and not put on two tunics." That is so Carlsbad isn't it? Wear sandals? We already wear sandals. Everybody wears sandals. And don't wear two coats? No problem. We don't even wear one coat. Come to think of it, most of us don't even own coats anymore. This stuff is a snap.

We naturally look the part. But what are we

supposed to do anyway?

Today's lesson is all about *mission*.

And what is the message and purpose of this mission? Repentance and Healing.

Mark's gospel is entirely consistent with this theme.

In the very beginning of the gospel, we read of John the Baptizer preparing the way for Jesus. Mark 1.4 says that he "appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."



A few verses later Jesus arrives. He is baptized by John, then driven into the wilderness where he was tempted. Upon returning from the wilderness in Mark 1.14 we learn that “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”

Jesus continues to bind up unclean spirits, cast out demons, and heal the sick. And in Mark 1.38 Jesus says, “Let’s move on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” What message? Repent and believe the good news.

Jesus continues to travel and cure many people so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. Two weeks ago we learned how he raised a young girl from the dead. And this week what happens? Jesus sends out the twelve to preach repentance and heal the sick. Repentance and healing. John the Baptist did it. Jesus did it. And now he has given authority to his disciples and sent them out to do it.

Which brings us back to St. Michael’s. Yes we’re disciples of Jesus. Yes we wear sandals. No we don’t wear two coats. But what about this repentance and healing? Are we called to share

in this ministry of repentance and healing? It sounds a little forward don’t you think? And after all, we are Episcopalians aren’t we?

On the front cover at the bottom of your bulletin is our St. Michael’s mission statement. Let’s read it together:

***A beacon of God’s truth and love through the richness of traditional Anglican worship, in the equipping of saints to bear witness to Christ wherever they may be, and by sharing in Christ’s work of reconciliation and healing in the world.***

What is our mission? To bear witness to Christ. How do we carry out that mission? By sharing in Christ’s work of reconciliation and healing in the world. This passage from Mark’s gospel is our mission statement, or rather it is Christ’s mission statement that we have pledged ourselves to.

Let us peer more closely at both reconciliation and healing.

Reconciliation comes from the latin “re” for “again” and “conciliar” to make friends. So it means quite literally to make friends again. The definition of the Greek word for reconcile “katallasso”, is literally to change/exchange coins for others of equivalent value. From



there it was used to mean bringing back into relationship those who are at variance. To put into friendship with God, or to lead others to be put into friendship with God.

We hear this word reconciliation a lot these days—especially in the Episcopal Church. It is often used in reference to the relationships we have with one another; that we would overcome our differences and be reconciled with each other. St. Paul uses the word “reconcile” in this sense, in relation to the Jews and the Gentiles. In his letter to the Ephesians he speaks of Jesus “reconciling both groups to God in one body through the cross.” So while the two different parties are to be reconciled, it is *to God through Christ* that the reconciling takes place, which truly captures the primary use of the word. When we speak of reconciliation in the church we are primarily speaking of reconciling ourselves to God and becoming God’s friend again.

Why do you suppose we need to become God’s friend *again*? When we say “again,” it sounds like we were already friends once and then something happened. What happened?

Sin happened.

And in order to become friends again what do

we need to do? What did John the Baptizer preach? What did Jesus preach? What did his disciples preach? Repentance.

Reconciliation begins with repentance. You’ve heard of the sacrament of confession right? Well guess what it’s called? Open up your *Book of Common Prayer* with me to page 447. Reconciliation! “The Reconciliation of a Penitent.” Reconciliation begins with repentance. Sacramentally speaking, reconciliation is penance.

It is important to add here that repenting is not simply the recognition of one or two things that we’ve done that are bad. Repentance is like a sea-change of heart—a reversal of our entire outlook on life. The message to “Repent!” is a very disturbing and unpopular message, because with it comes the implication that the way we were going about things was wrong. To repent means to change one’s mind and then to fit one’s actions to this change. Repentance is the message that Jesus himself preached, because it is the first step to bringing ourselves into friendship again with God. It is no accident that we confess our sins during every service before we go up to receive communion. It is a prerequisite to a right relationship with God; it is also the beginning



of that transformation and healing that takes place in our lives through Christ.

Repentance and Healing are like two sides of the same coin. The disciples went out and preached that everyone should repent. And then they “anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

Sounds familiar. Seems like there’s a lot of oil being used around here at St. Michael’s too. Every other week we provide the sacrament of Unction, which is the anointing of oil and the prayer for the sick. Perhaps you’ve never received unction after you’ve come up and received Holy Communion. I wouldn’t either if I wasn’t sure what it was that was going on. It is the very same thing that the disciples did when they went out; they anointed people with oil and said a prayer for them that they would be healed.

What is the significance of the oil?

Well in the 1st Century world oil was considered a powerful remedy in the case of many illnesses. Physicians already used oil. What Jesus did was take a human method and fill it with the power of God. The healing that took place—the healings that continue to take place—are not by virtue of the oil, but

rather the power of God’s Holy Spirit working *through* the oil.

I pray that everyone here—if you haven’t already experienced it—will experience the forgiveness of sins and spiritual healing through our Lord Jesus. But if you have—and when you do—understand that that is only one side of the coin.

The other side—part and parcel to experiencing Jesus love—is extending Christ’s work of reconciliation and healing back into the world.

The disciples came to Jesus, and Jesus sent them back out into the world. It is the same for us. In fact, we do it every time we come to mass. We come to Jesus, repent of our sins, receive his real presence in our lives. When we walk out the door we are called to extend that presence and that message out into the world. That is precisely what we are doing here today, and every day.

As one commentator put it, “Unless a church reaches out it passes out.”

Perhaps you feel presumptuous about sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Know that it’s not our message; It’s not your message. We are carriers of that message. We are... Messengers.



Another St. Michael's theme, is it not? It is Jesus' authority. It is Jesus' message. But it is our calling. So in the words of today's collect:

May God grant that we may know and understand what things we ought to do, and may He grant us the grace and power faithfully to accomplish them.

*Amen.*



# PROPER XVI

*Ephesians 5.21-33*

27 August 2006

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

*Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

I went to the grocery store the other day. And as I was driving around the parking lot looking for a spot, I realized that everyone in North County decided to go to the same grocery store. So I drove up and down the rows of cars

for a couple minutes, until in the distance I saw that tell-tale gap in-between cars. A spot! A spot! Yes, I've got a spot!

Have you ever gone to pull into an open space only to find a motorcycle tucked in there?



Well that didn't happen to me this time, it was something even worse: one of the cars next to the open space was parked at an angle. And not only was it crooked but it was taking up a third of the open space. No wonder the space was open. You could barely fit a shopping cart in there, much less an automobile.

But that wasn't going to stop me not this time. Out of sheer will power I squeezed my car into that space. Then I sucked in my gut, slithered out the cracked door, and strutted my way in to the grocery store.

I have to admit the entire time I was shopping, I kept thinking about the *nerve* of that person's parking job. I mean what kind of a self-centered so-and-so has the gall to just sprawl out over several parking spaces? I'd just like to get a glimpse at this King or Queen of the lot, just one glimpse...

As I rattled my shopping cart out to my car, to my astonishment, the cars on either side of me had left. And guess how my car was parked? At an angle. And not only was it crooked but it was taking up a third of the open space next to me.

I stood there for a moment, and my mind slowed to an enlightened stop.

There are many morals to this story:

- Don't make assumptions
- Don't judge other people
- Don't jockey in a parking lot

But the one I want to focus on today is simply this:

Our behavior shapes other people.

We affect others by how we treat them, and we are affected by how other people treat us. The way we interact with each other has an impact—most times a lasting impact—on the personal growth and character of each participant.

I wouldn't have parked at a funny angle if the car next to me hadn't been parked that way. For all I know, that car was reacting to a car that was there before them. Who knows? Maybe the whole thing started with a bad parking job back in the eighties and the chain reaction has continued to this day.

Now, you may be thinking—and it's true—that I didn't *have* to park in that spot. I could have been more patient, driven around and looked for another spot. My experience simply demonstrates that who we are and how we



treat other people has an effect on them.

Our behavior shapes other people.

If our behavior shapes other people, the next logical question for a Christian community like St. Michael's is simply: "How then are we to treat one another?"

How are Christians to treat each other? St. Paul gives us a very clear answer to this question in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes to the community of Christians in Ephesus, "*Be subject* to one another out of reverence for Christ."

That word *subject* is actually pretty shocking. It means exactly what you think it does: to submit to, obey, be under the authority of. Be *subject* to one another.

This teaching is really like the exact polar opposite of the culture in which we live.

If the culture is up – this is down.

If the culture is right – this is left.

It is completely counter-cultural.



Where our culture says,

“Be your own boss.”

St. Paul says,

“Be subject to one another.”

Where our culture says,

“Answer to no one but yourself.”

St. Paul says,

“Be subject to one another.”

Where our culture says,

“Obey your own appetite.”

St. Paul says,

“Be subject to one another.”

If you're like me, at this point you're asking yourself “Why? Why should I subject myself to other people? After all, as a Christian my job is to subject myself to God Almighty and Him alone, right?”

And this is the real kicker. Why should we subject ourselves to other people? St. Paul answers in the second half of that same verse, “Out of reverence for Christ.”

That Greek word translated *reverence* also means *fear*. Holy fear. Fearful reverence. We are to be subject to one another out of Holy fear and reverence for Christ. The way we treat each other is the way we treat Jesus.

It is one and the same action. It is one and the

same behavior. Recall Jesus' words in Matthew 25 when he says, “Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me.” We are to be subject to one another—not primarily, for the others sake—but for Christ's sake; out of *reverence* for Christ.

The way we treat each other is the way we treat Jesus.

Do we believe we are the body of Christ? If we snub or hurt or mistreat a fellow Christian, we are doing the very same to the body of Christ, to Jesus himself.

The way we treat each other, is the way we treat Jesus.

C.S. Lewis, that great Anglican Light of the 20th century, put it this way:

“Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, (and by that he means the body and blood of Christ made present in Holy Communion)... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, *your neighbor* is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he (or she) is your Christian neighbor, they are holy *in almost the same way*, for in them also Christ – the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

*Amen.*



## PROPER XIX

*James 2.1-5, 8-10, 14-18*

17 September 2006

*My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?*

*If you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*

*What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.*



There is a principle in surfing that once you have decided to go for a wave you'd best stick to that decision and go for the wave. There is no halfway.

I tested this principle just a few days ago.

I had been in the water for half an hour or so, caught a few waves, and was pretty loosened up. Then all of a sudden, a sneaker set came rolling in from the horizon. A sneaker set is just what it sounds like, a set of waves that are much larger than the average set waves. They appear unannounced and unexpected.

When a sneaker set appears you basically have two options. You can paddle furiously for the horizon and hope to make it over the incoming set before it crashes on you. Or, depending on your position, you can paddle for the peak of the wave, quick turn around, drop in on the wave and hope for the best.

For some reason this second option seemed like the better of the two.

As the wave approached I quick turned around and paddled for it. I could feel the force of the ocean begin to lift me. As the wave stood up and stretched out the long drop got longer and longer. All of a sudden the bottom was way down there, and I was way up here, on the crest

of a wave that was preparing to hurl itself—and me—into an oblivion of white water.

Let's push the pause button here. I'd like to invite you all to join me in hanging at the top of that wave—in that eternal moment. What do you do? Remember the surfing principle: once you have decided to go for a wave, you'd best stick to that decision and go for the wave/ there is no halfway. You can't *kind of* drop in on the wave. You can't *sort of* go and *sort of* not go. You're committed. You can either stand up on your board and hope for the best, or you can try and back out and definitely prepare for the worst.

What would you do?

I'll tell you what I did. For purely experimental reasons and as part of this week's sermon preparation (whoever said sermon preparation was boring) I decided to try and back out of the wave. If you want to know the whole truth... I freaked out. I sat back up on my board, dug my legs into the rushing water and leaned back as hard as I could.

Have you ever been on one of those roller coasters with the drop that's straight down? In surfer terms, I went "over the falls," board between my legs and all. See what I have to go



through to prepare sermons?

When you drop in on a wave, it's all or nothing. There is no halfway. This same principle is true of our lives as Christians, as followers of Jesus—it's all or nothing. There is no halfway.

St. James repeats a similar message in his letter.

First, there is no halfway with our relationships with other people. Whether they are rich or poor, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus didn't command us to *especially* love our rich neighbors, and only *kind of* love our poor neighbors. Rich and poor stand on the same level in God's eyes. No one's riches set them in the least nearer to God, nor does any person's poverty set them at a distance from God. In fact, James tells us, "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?"

As Christians, there is no halfway to our relationships with other people, we are to love our neighbors—all of them—as ourselves.

Second, there is no halfway with God's laws; it's all or nothing.

Two verses omitted from today's lectionary

selection provide these admonishments;

*(10) For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*

*(11) For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, "Do not kill." If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

In other words, it is not our job to decide which of God's laws are reasonable and which are not; it is not up to us to pick and choose which commandments are best suited for us and disregard the rest. God has not provided His law as a type of moral salad bar or ethical buffet. It's our job to follow all of God's laws. Our obedience to God is all or nothing: *Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*

When it comes to our obedience to God's laws there is no halfway.

And finally, St. James reminds us in striking fashion, that there is no halfway to our faith.

It's not enough to have faith; it's not enough simply to believe. Now you might think, "What do you mean? I thought it was all about belief?" St. James would differentiate.

You may never hear it in church because



our lectionary leaves it out, but right after today's passage cuts off, in the very next verse James says, "You believe that God is one? That's nice. Even the demons believe" (v.19). Demons believe, and yet act out against God. We could also believe and act out against God, or we could believe and not act at all.

Which is precisely why faith alone is not enough. In fact, James tells us that faith *without works* is dead.

As followers of Jesus, there is no halfway to our faith. It's all or nothing. If we really believe then we are compelled to act on that belief. If we do not act on our belief then St. James tells us that our faith is pointless. Useless. Dead.

It is a bit of a truism to say that surfers are people who surf. I mean if you watched a lot of surfing from the beach or on videos, or read a lot of books and magazines about surfing, you probably would not call yourself a surfer. It makes sense right? Surfers are people who actually surf.

Well the same is true for us as Christians. Followers of Jesus are people who actually *follow* Jesus. Who love people the way Jesus loved people. Who follow the Father's

commandments the way he followed them. Who, as we heard from St. Mark today, pick up our crosses the way Jesus picked up and carried his cross, and follow him.

There is no halfway to following Jesus. We can't *kind of* follow him. Or *sort of* follow him and *sort of* not follow him. Or *pick and choose* when we want to follow him and when we'd rather do it our way.

I mean, we *can* do our own thing. In fact, we often do do our own thing. It's called sin. And when we only go halfway, as I demonstrated earlier, we are bound to get pitched over the lip of the wave. We are bound to wipeout.

And let's be honest, we're going to have our wipeouts.

But surfers surf. That's what they do.

And Christians follow Jesus. That's what we do.

And the waves keep coming.

Every wave that rolls in from the horizon is another opportunity to go all the way. To throw our whole self into loving each and every one of our neighbors, rich and poor alike, as ourselves. Another opportunity to obey all of God's commandments. Another opportunity



to love God with all our heart and mind and soul, in the thoughts we think, the words we speak, and the deeds we do.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the Surf is Up! So pick up your boards of faith, paddle out into life, and drop into God's will with your whole self. With all that you have and all that you are.

And I will see you in the water.

*Amen.*



## PROPER XXIII

*Mark 10.17-31*

15 October 2006

*And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.*

*And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."*

*Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and*



*mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first."*

**N**ashotah House Theological Seminary is a very unique and special place. It is located on a pristine lake in the tranquil woods of Southeastern Wisconsin. Its peaceful rural setting makes it feel like a world all its own.

There are many extra-curricular activities available to the Nashotah House community: hiking, fishing, cycling, canoeing. And when we were there we added one more archery.

One summer I found an old target that was being thrown out by a nearby summer camp. It was shaped like a giant hay coin. I built a stand for it out of some old 2x4's and set up our own private archery range. There was a narrow strip of grass between the back of the seminary town homes and the thick woods behind them. My then 3 year-old son was very much into bows and arrows as he was going through a Robin Hood phase. Target practice became a father and son ritual for a little while. Then the rest of the seminary kids started catching on. Pretty soon, all we had to do was walk out the front door with our bow and quiver of arrows and a herd of future deer hunters would come running.

One particular day I walked out of the house with the bow and arrow and about a dozen kids all came running towards me. The unruly mob was unusually hyper, jumping up and down and shouting, "I want to go first, I want to go first, I want to go first!" Not knowing quite how to handle the situation, I raised the bow above my head like some Old Testament prophet, and put a finger to my lips. Eventually, a hush fell over the youthful crowd. I knelt down among them and asked, "Does anyone remember what Jesus said about going first?"

There was silence.

I continued, "He said that the first will be last and the last will be first."

After a very brief, yet very pensive moment, the chorus erupted in unison, "I want to be last, I want to be last, I want to be last!"

My three-year old boy was clearly confused at this miraculous turn of events, but ever the opportunist, he joined in with all the more hopefulness, "I want to be first, I want to be first!"



These children clearly wore their hearts exposed. Regardless of what came out of their mouths, their desires were obvious; their hearts were transparent.

The same is true for us in our relationship with God. Regardless of what comes out of our mouths, our desires are obvious. Our hearts are transparent to God. Put another way:

God Knows Our Hearts, and not just some of our heart. **God knows our whole heart.**

Recall the prayer that we begin each service with The Collect for Purity:

*Almighty God, to you all hearts are Open, all desires known, and from you know secrets are hid.*

To God, our hearts are open and our desires are known. God knows our whole heart.

Jesus also demonstrates this in today's Gospel reading. This young rich guy runs up to Jesus and kneels down before him and asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gives him a list of mostly don'ts: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat. And he throws in honor your father and mother. (You may recognize this list as the second half of the 10 commandments).

The young man tells Jesus he's kept to all the commandments. Jesus looks at the man—he loves the man—and he says, "You lack one thing: go, and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me."

Jesus knows this man's whole heart. He knows that this man had many possessions, and that is why he begins by saying, "You lack one thing." Christ knew the full story.

But there's more.

Not only does God know our whole heart.

**God wants our whole heart.**

Remember the first and greatest commandment: we are to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart (and all our soul, and all our mind, and all our strength).

There is to be no love that comes between (or before) us and God. Any such love that stands between us and God is a violation of that first and great commandment.

**God knows our whole heart.**

**And God wants our whole heart.**

Jesus knew not merely that this man was wealthy, but more importantly that this man's



wealth stood between him and God. He loved his wealth more than he loved God. And in this particular case, the man chose to *keep* wealth as his first love. He walked away from the challenge of Jesus. He walked away from Jesus in favor of his money.

Now you may ask, what's wrong with wealth? The disciples asked the same question. They were really confused. Jesus was throwing a major curve ball. He had actually turned an accepted Jewish teaching on its head. Popular Jewish morality was simple. If a man was rich, God must have honored and blessed him. Wealth was therefore a proof of excellence of character and of favour with God. Why then was this man's wealth a problem?

Because it was a first love. It came before God. It kept the man from giving his whole heart to God.

There is nothing wrong with wealth in and of itself. But Jesus teaches his disciples that wealth can be a very difficult and dangerous thing. When our material needs are met, it is much easier for us to ignore or simply forget about our spiritual needs. This is the danger of wealth. When we have all the conveniences of modern living, it is much easier to live under the illusion that we are in control of our own lives;

we do not need anyone or anything because we already have what we need. It becomes much easier for us to get along *without* God.

We have a startling example of this principle in our own Anglican Communion. Do you know what is happening to the church in the enlightened, developed, wealthy west? It is dying a quick death. This is due in large part to its wealth; it no longer *needs* God.

Contrast that to the Global South—the underdeveloped nations of the Third World. Are you aware of what's happening to the churches in African and South America? Where there are not enough resources to go around? Where the AIDS epidemic continues its rampage? The churches are exploding! The Holy Spirit of Almighty God is sweeping across these nations like wild fire. These poor nations *know* that they need God. And theirs is truly the kingdom of God—their treasure in heaven abounds as we speak.

No, there is nothing wrong with wealth in and of itself. However it is a very difficult and dangerous thing filled with temptations of the subtlest and strongest kind. It is both a burden and a calling that requires the utmost faith to overcome.



But the greater points remain:

**God knows our whole hearts.**

**God wants our whole hearts.**

It doesn't matter what it is—if it comes between us and God. It's a problem. It could be anything, not just wealth. It could be bad things like habits or hang-ups. But it could also be good things, like friends or work. In fact, the only thing it couldn't be is surfing, right? Just kidding of course. It could even be surfing.

So, like the young man, I encourage you this week to run to Jesus. Kneel before him and ask him what you must do. Like the young man, ask Jesus what it is that stands as an obstacle from loving him with your whole heart.

But unlike the young man, when you receive your answer, for the love of God **do not turn away**. Remain at the feet of Jesus, loving him first, with your whole heart.

Let us pray.

*Almighty God to you **our whole hearts** are open, all our desires are known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts and desires of our hearts, by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may put you first in all*

*things, perfectly love you with our whole heart, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*



## PROPER XXIV

*Mark 10.35-45*

22 October 2006

*And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

*And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

**B**elieve it or not, there are parts of the Bible that are very humorous. Today's reading from St. Mark is one such instance. But you know, I didn't notice too much spontaneous

laughter during the gospel reading, so maybe we'd better take another look at the passage.

Actually, to understand the humor in this week's gospel, we have to begin with last



week's gospel. Last week, you'll remember, the reading ended with Jesus famous line, "Many that are first will be last, and the last will be first."

So *right* after Jesus explains this to the disciples, two of them, James and John, run up to Jesus and say, "Hey, umm... Jesus? We want to sit next to you when you're reigning in glory. What do you say?" Jesus responds to James and John, "What did I *just* say?! Why are you trying to cut to the front of the line?"

The disciples just do not get the whole first and last thing. Amazing isn't it? Immediately following Jesus' teaching on the "first and last," James and John start a pole position routine.

But there is much more that the disciples don't comprehend. Not only do they miss the concept of the first and last, they have missed the very heart of Christ's mission on earth.

And what is the heart of Christ's mission?

Our lectionary has omitted a few crucial verses; so in order to get a full sense of what's going on, we need to include them. Last week's lesson ended with verse 31 ("first, last" etc). This week's begins with 35. Let us attend to the following:

*(32) And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,*

*(33) saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles;*

*(34) and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."*

Here Jesus not only predicts his death, but he predicts the *manner* in which he will be killed. They will mock me, spit on me, scourge me, and kill me. And how do James and John respond to this news? They run up to Jesus and ask if they can sit on either side of him in all his glory. **THEY DON'T GET IT.** Jesus predicts his death in gruesome detail and the disciples skip right over it to the glory part.

Jesus explains the heart of his mission—the cross—and James and John **SKIP OVER THE CROSS.**

Now, you can't very well follow Jesus and skip



over the cross. In that very moment that James and John and Jesus were talking, Jesus was *leading* them to Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus did not skip over the cross, he headed straight for it. And as followers of Jesus we have no other choice but to do the same. We *can* skip over the cross, but in doing so we wouldn't be following in the path of Christ.

So James and John skip over the cross, they want to cut to the chase and get on with the business of reigning in glory. What they don't understand is that in the cross itself, Jesus will forever change the very definition of glory. They think that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to take political power and reign as literal king over all Israel, and they want some shares of that *earthly* glory.

What they don't see is that the cross is the fulfillment of servanthood, of self-sacrifice, of *heavenly* greatness.

Jesus tries to explain this to them:

*You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.*

*But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be*

*slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Now, keeping these words in mind, that the "Son of man came not to be served but to serve," remember the beginning of the conversation between James and John, where they approached Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

What is your gut reaction to their demand? What would you say to someone if they came up to you and said, "we want you to do whatever we ask you?"

But how does Jesus—the Messiah, the Son of Almighty God, the second person of the trinity, the Savior of the world—how does Jesus respond? He says to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Here Jesus is demonstrating for them in real time that the "Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." *What do you want me to do for you?*

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For Jesus, the cross is not simply a difficult episode to be got through on the way to a happy ending. The



cross is not merely a means to an end. It is precisely God's way of standing worldly power and authority on it's head. It is the center of Christ's redeeming work, the culmination of God's plan for salvation history. It is a destination all it's own.

Let's think about this another way. What is your vision of greatness? James and John were thinking of greatness in the only way they knew how—a worldly way—a king on his throne in glory and splendor. The world's vision of greatness today remains similar to James' and John's. What is your vision of greatness?

The shocking Truth of Jesus' message is this: Servanthood is not a means to greatness as we understand greatness. Jesus is *not* saying that if you serve you will be great like a senator or celebrity. Our understanding of greatness is *our* problem. Jesus also redefines greatness; greatness lies in servanthood. The act of serving is not a means to an end of worldly greatness, it is its own end. It is itself Spiritual Greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the great doctors of the early church, St. Ambrose, wrote, "We know that the soul survives the body and that being set free from the bars of the body (that is, in death), it sees with clear gaze those things which before,

dwelling in the body, it could not see."

This is reminiscent of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians writing, "now we see through a glass darkly; but then we will see face to face."

There is more to this life than we can see. What we see is real. But there is more. We do not see the world the way God sees the world. If we did then perhaps serving others might make a lot more sense, or come with more facility.

The wonderful, glorious mystery of the Christian Faith is that in the person of Jesus Christ we can see glimpses of the real world—the *real*, real world—the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus we can see the world the way God sees the world.

If you have ever seen someone serve another with the love of Jesus you've caught a vision of heavenly greatness.

If you have ever been served by someone with the love of Jesus you've received a stroke of heavenly greatness.

If you have ever served someone with the love of Jesus, in that very moment you have entered into true heavenly greatness.

So may we, with the disciples, continue to follow Jesus up the road to Jerusalem. May we,



with Jesus, not skip over the cross, but head directly toward it. Let us continue in giving our lives to the mission of God's Kingdom here on earth, not to be served but to serve.

*Amen.*



## PROPER XXVII

*Mark 12.38-44*

12 October 2006

*And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."*

*And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."*

**I** thought we would begin this morning with an object lesson. I have in this hand a \$100 bill. And in this hand I have a penny. Now, which of these is more valuable? The \$100 bill, right?

Now let's say I, in my long, flowing robes, strut over to the offering plate and place my \$100 in it. And let's say Fr. Moquin goes over to the offering plate and places in it the penny. Who has given more money? I have of course.

But whose is the greater sacrifice?

Because \$100 is worth more than a penny, I think we're all tempted to say that my sacrifice was greater than Fr. Moquin's—because I gave more money.

But Jesus teaches us something very different today in Mark's gospel. Jesus teaches us that a sacrifice is not measured at face value. If sacrifices were measured at face value, then \$100 would be a greater sacrifice than a penny.

If sacrifices were measured at face value, then



Jesus probably would have said something more like this to his disciples, “Truly I say to you, God desires big bills and not pocket change. The large sums of money you see put in the treasury by wealthy people, are *clearly* more valuable than those two little copper coins given by the poor widow.

But what does Jesus say instead? “Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in *more* than all those who are contributing to the treasury.”

He doesn’t say that a penny is *less* than \$100. He doesn’t even say that a penny is *equal* to \$100. Jesus tells his disciples that this woman’s one penny is worth *more than*—not only \$100—but all those who contributed to the treasury.

For Jesus, sacrifice is not measured at face value.

How then can we determine the true value of a sacrifice?

Jesus explains to his disciples that those who were wealthy “contributed out of their abundance, but the poor widow, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, her whole living.”

The *true* value of a sacrifice lies in the worth

it holds for the giver. How precious, how dear, how important is the thing being sacrificed, to the one who is making that sacrifice?

\$100 is a lot of money to give away. What if I make three times that each day? That changes its sacrificial value to me. I can afford to part with that \$100.

A penny doesn’t seem like much money at all. But what if it is all I have? What if it’s really all the money the poor widow had and she gave it away? Even though the face value is next to nothing, the sacrificial value is immense. The sacrificial value is complete; that is, there’s nothing left for the widow give. Not only can she not afford to part with her penny, but it represents, as Jesus says, her *whole* living.

This is why Jesus can say that the poor widow gave more than all the rest. Everyone else had made partial sacrifices, but this woman’s sacrifice was complete.

What Jesus disciples didn’t know, but what we do know, is that this observation of the widow’s sacrifice is a vivid foreshadowing of another complete sacrifice that is about to be made. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Like the widow and her copper coins, Almighty God has poured all of Himself—all of His



being—into the person of Jesus. The offering is complete.

And as we read from the letter to the Hebrews, and pray every week in our Eucharistic prayer:

*Jesus on the cross offered himself once and for all, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.*

A perfect and complete sacrifice.

What is more precious than life itself?

What more can one sacrifice than their life?

The definition of a sacrifice is “something valuable or important given up for something or someone else considered to be of more value or importance. Because he loves us, because he loves you, Jesus gave up his own life. Why? So that we, in turn, might live.

And so with the poor widow, Jesus bids us to do the same. To sacrifice all that we have and all that we are; to die to ourselves that we might have new and unending life in him.

And so we proceed to the altar,

*Where we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, living, and complete sacrifice unto thee.*

*Amen.*



## PROPER XXVIII

*Mark 13.14-23*

19 October 2006

*[Jesus said,] “But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything away; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if any one says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand.”*

**I**t’s sometimes tempting for us to think that the Christian faith is only 2,000 years old.

But our faith reaches clear back through the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Our faith began at the beginning, with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the maker of heaven and earth. If we don’t understand the foundation of our faith it is easy to lose the significance of just who Jesus is, and what God

has done for us through him.

In an effort to understand a little bit more about who we are *today in Christ*, I want to focus on just one of the many ancient roots of our faith— the Temple.

The word Temple actually means a “sacred place,” or more specifically, “a section carved out of the heavens.” The ancient Israelites



believed just that. They believed that the Temple was the one place where the spheres of heaven and earth overlapped.

The Israelites didn't always have a Temple though. In fact they began with a tent. Remember when Moses received the two stone tablets containing God's law, the Ten Commandments? Those tablets were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. And that Ark traveled through the wilderness with the Israelites in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a portable shrine where Almighty God would dwell in the midst of his people. In fact it was called the "Tent of Meeting"—the place where heaven and earth met and merged.

Arriving in the Promised Land, the tent became a Temple. The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by King David, and built by his son Solomon. This great Temple became the single sanctuary for the whole nation. Not only was it a place of sacrifice, but it was the place where Israel's God would now make his home forever—the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth.

Going to the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Israelites would have said they were going to the place where heaven and earth overlapped and interlocked. The Temple

was the most important, most holy place for the Israelites. As such, it was an obvious target for enemies. About 600 years before Jesus, the Temple was destroyed by Babylon. It took almost 70 years to rebuild.

Around the time Jesus walked the earth, Herod the Great decided to refurbish and beautify the Temple (all for his own popularity). But shortly after the work was completed in 63 AD, a war broke out: the first of three Jewish-Roman Wars. This war raged for four years, from 66-70 AD culminating in the horrific siege of Jerusalem. Some reports estimate that more than one million Jews lost their lives in this massacre. And in the end, the great Temple was completely destroyed and burned to the ground.

Which brings us to today's gospel passage from Mark. The 13th chapter of Mark begins like this:

*And as he came out of the **temple**, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James*



*and John and Andrew asked him privately. "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?"*

Jesus goes on to talk about false prophets, famines, and earthquakes; wars and rumors of wars and persecutions. He describes all these as birth pangs, like these things will anticipate what is to come. Then in verse 14 the mood changes. Up until this point the disciples are to stand firm; but when they see the signal, the desolating sacrilege, Jesus tells them to take to their heels—to run without looking back and flee to the mountains.

Now this passage from Mark 13 is often read as a reference to the end of the world—to the second coming of Christ. Yes we do believe that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. The second coming of Christ is a part of both the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. It is fundamental to our faith as Christians. It has been prophesied and alluded to in many biblical passages. In fact, the end of Mark chapter 13 may contain some allusions to Christ's coming again.

But if Jesus foretold the end of the world, he wouldn't have warned his disciples to run to the hills would he? Running to the hills isn't going to save anyone from the final judgment. No,

Jesus was first and foremost prophesying the final destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the terrible massacre that would take place there. And 40 years later, in 70AD, it did!

The historian Josephus describes in great detail how people starved, ate their own babies to stay alive, fought each other for scraps of food, how more Jews were being killed by other Jews than by the invading Romans. He tells of false prophets leading people astray for their own survival. I was going to read some excerpts from Josephus' work, but frankly, the accounts are so gruesome that it is hardly fit to be read in church. The Romans basically sealed off the city as hundreds of thousands of people trapped inside either starved to death or killed each other.

Jesus foretold this massacre, clearly indicating to his disciples that the time would come when they should get out of the city as fast as possible. Jesus didn't want his followers to suffer and die in this awful tragedy.

What happened to Jerusalem in 70 AD was catastrophic on many levels.

The destruction and loss of life was astonishing; Josephus describes it as unequalled.

But what about the Temple? As Jesus



predicted, the place where heaven and earth came together was destroyed. God's house was in ruins. How could this happen?

All along the Jews were anxiously awaiting a King, the Messiah of God. Part of the central task of this king would involve the proper reestablishment of the place where heaven and earth met.

Jesus' death would do what the Temple, with its sacrificial system, had pointed toward but had never actually accomplished. Jesus himself would be the place where heaven and earth met, as he hung on the cross, suspended between the two—the once and for all sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Jesus (in John's gospel) said that he would destroy the temple and in three days rebuild it—and he was speaking of his death and resurrection.

The destruction of the Temple building in Jerusalem in 70 AD points to the close of the Old age—the Old Covenant—and the beginning of the New Covenant. The new place where God abides has been established in Jesus Christ Our Lord.

The fall of the Temple would be the sure sign that God had vindicated Jesus as the true

representative of his people. As a prophet, Jesus had predicted its destruction. As Messiah, he had solemnly enacted it.

So what does this have to do with any of us? Actually, a lot more than is generally comfortable to admit.

Who are we, as the Church? We are the body of Christ. When we receive Holy Communion, what do we pray? We pray that we may be made one body with him; that he may dwell in us, and we in him. If Jesus referred to himself as the Temple, what does that make us? St. Paul tells the Corinthians that those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. You corporately, he says to the whole church, are God's Temple, and God's Spirit dwells within you

Amazing isn't it? From Moses and the stone tablets, to the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and the Tent of meeting, to the magnificent Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem, to the Temple Herod adorned in the first century, to Jesus Christ himself and now to us, the church, the body of Christ.

If we don't understand the foundation of our faith, it is easy for us to lose the significance of just who Jesus is, and what God has done



for us through him.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are the Temple, the place where heaven and earth meets, and where YHWH abides, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*





## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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