



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Third Sunday After Easter, May 3rd, 2009

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

I guess most people, at one time or another, have wondered what God looks like. Judged by the way cartoonists generally portray him, a majority of us probably imagine him as an old man with a beard. Certainly, that's the way Michelangelo depicted him on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel – a muscular old guy with longish grey hair and a beard, and none too many clothes.

No matter how we picture him, we tend to get very upset when he is portrayed in a way that clashes with the picture we have formed in our mind's eye – especially when folks like feminists refer to God as “SHE.” On the other hand, feminists are plainly outraged by folks who refer to God as “HE.”

Nothing, of course, compares with the outrage comedian George Burns aroused when he played God in a movie as a little wrinkly old geezer in a baseball cap and sneakers. People were beside themselves with fury at what they believed to be sacrilege and blasphemy.

But, actually, there is absolutely no need for all this speculation about what God is like. All you need is pick up the New Testament. You'll discover Jesus has given us a very precise description of what God is like. You'll find it in the 14th Chapter of St. John's Gospel – the portion appointed for today's Morning Office.

In it, Jesus tells his disciples: “If you knew me you would know my father too. From now on you do know him; you have seen him.” The Apostle Phillip, who seems to

have been a bit slow on the uptake, doesn't seem to have grasped what Jesus was telling him. "Lord, show us the father," he said, "We ask no more . . ."

Jesus replied: "Have I been all this time with you, Philip, and still you do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Then how can you say: 'Show us the Father'?"

Consider the implications of this: If you want to know how God appears in human eyes: if you want to know what God is like; how God thinks; how God behaves; God's likes and dislikes – you need look no further than the person of Jesus Christ. In other words, feminist ladies and little old geezers in baseball caps and sneakers need not apply. God looks rather like the man whose image appears on the Shroud of Turin

However the really important thing for human beings to come to terms with is not what God looks like, but, rather, what he thinks – and in particular what he thinks about us. What we really need to know is how to stay on his right side. After all, there's no point in upsetting him if we can avoid it. And , in this regard, the New Testament gives us a an excellent picture of how God's mind works – up close and personal.

In his Summary of God's Law, Jesus tells us to demonstrate our love for God by loving our neighbors just as much as we love ourselves. That's fine as far as it goes, but how does this translate into practical daily living? Again, we can get a very good idea of what he's driving at by delving into the New Testament.

In 13th chapter of his gospel, St. John tells us that before the disciples sat down for the Last Supper, the final act Jesus performed for his friends was to wash their feet – a menial and thoroughly unpleasant job. "If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet. I have set you an example: You are to do as I have done for you."

On an earlier occasion he had told them: " You know that, among the Gentiles, rulers lord it over their subjects, and the great make their authority felt. It shall not be so with

you. Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

These are just a couple examples of the detailed instructions Jesus laid down to enable us to translate faith into action. And the New Testament is replete with other examples. How come, then, Christians spend so much time speculating about what God is like and how he works?

Evidence indicates that we don't find God's ideas about himself and our relationship with him all that congenial. And it's been like that from the beginning. Adam and Eve met God face to face on a daily basis. They walked with him and talked with him and found him so unimpressive they decided they could do his job better than he can.

The problem has dogged us down the centuries. Great scriptural scholars like Caiaphas, the high priest who presided over Jesus' crucifixion, failed to recognize God when he met him face to face because Jesus in no way conformed to his idea of what God should be like.

But before we condemn Caiaphas, we need to remember that – unlike us – he didn't have the New Testament to go on. And as ball players will surely testify, it is easier to figure things out when you review the video after the game than to get things right at the time. Even so, it is reasonable to assume that, in all probability, even the New Testament wouldn't have helped Caiaphas come to terms with the reality of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. After all, we've had the book for two millennia and we still get things wrong. *AMEN.*

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