



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Feast of Christ the King

Being The Twenty First Sunday After Trinity, October 28th, 2007

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

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Christ the King and I'd like, for a moment, to reflect on the implications of this festival. For starters, it is not an ecclesiastical shindig celebrating the notion that Jesus is some sort of earthly monarch like the King of France, the King of England, the Sultan of Brunei or the Emperor of All the Russias.

It celebrates the concrete fact that Jesus is King and Creator of the entire Universe – in other words, that he is the author of everything around us; and that without his active acquiescence we would not so much as draw our next breath.

This, when you come to ponder it, is a pretty awesome thing to be celebrating. It is, in fact, the most awesome thing about our entire existence. The implications are utterly breathtaking. One implication, for instance, is that he is entirely above the Laws of Nature.

After all, what he invented, he can change. At any time he likes, and in any way he likes. He could – simply by thinking about it – reverse the rotation of the earth, or invert the Law of Gravity. Indeed, if he felt so inclined, he could overthrow the Laws of Nature altogether and come up with entirely new ones.

We don't have solely to rely upon logical deduction to reach such a conclusion.

We also have the evidence provided in the Bible. Pretty well all of the miracles recorded in the New Testament are instances of God intervening to suspend some aspect of the Laws of Nature. The same is true of some Old Testament miracles too – such as the healing of the Shunamite woman’s son.

Other Old Testament miracles, however, illustrate God’s ability to manipulate the Laws of Nature for his own purposes. The earthquake that flattened the walls of Jericho is just such an instance. The miracle lies not so much in the earthquake itself, but in its timing.

Yet despite all this, there are large numbers of professed Christians – laity, scholars and clergy – who find it difficult to accept the concept that God can, has and still does perform miracles. You can see this in its most egregious form in the so-called “Quest for the Historical Jesus.”

This quest involves poring over the New Testament and chucking out as a-historic every single event that involved a miracle – on the utterly illogical grounds that the Author of Creation is bound by the Laws of Nature he, himself, created. The New Testament is literally packed with miracles, thus the process doesn’t leave very much history for the searchers to go on.

It is, however, a curious modern conceit that our day and age is uniquely skeptical when it comes to God’s dominion over the Laws of Nature. This is utter nonsense. We have always doubted God’s almighty powers. We have always found it hard to believe that he can do what we cannot do.

Abraham refused to believe God could give his wife, Sarah, a child when she was long past childbearing. Moses didn’t believe God could make Pharaoh release the children of Israel. Elijah didn’t believe God could protect him from the wrath of Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of Baal.

And things were no different in Jesus’ day. Just take the Communion Gospel that is

appointed for the 20th Sunday after Trinity. It is St. John's account of an instance long-distance healing. It tells how a nobleman met Jesus at Cana of Galilee, where he turned the water into wine, and begged him to come to the city of Capernaum to cure his dying son. John records Jesus' reply as: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe . . ."

Some modern commentators claim remark is Jesus' insensitivity – a harsh and unnecessary criticism of the stricken boy's father. But this is not so. It was, rather, a perceptive observation about the human condition in general. If it is a criticism, it is one that applies all of mankind, except the truly simple-minded. The fact of the matter is that "except we see signs and wonders, we all will not believe."

The reason Jesus made the remark is easy to understand when we read on. The city of Capernaum was a least a day's journey from Cana, and Jesus was heading for Jerusalem for the Passover. And Jerusalem lies in precisely the opposite direction to Capernaum.

Thus the practical solution to the problem was for Jesus to heal the boy at a distance. The trouble with healing the child at such a great distance was that it wouldn't offer immediate comfort to his anxious father. Hence: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe . . ."

"Please come with me to heal my son," the nobleman begged. "Go home," replied Jesus, "Your son is going to live." To the nobleman's utter amazement, he found himself actually believing the words that Christ had spoken and set off for home.

Reading between the lines of the story, somewhere along the way he began to get cold feet, but by that time it was too late to turn back and he had no alternative but to continue his journey and hope for the best. While he was still a long way from home, he was met by some his servants who had dashed off to meet him with the joyful news that the boy had recovered.

“When did he start to get better?” he asked. “The fever broke at noon yesterday,” he was told. It was the exact time that Jesus had spoken the words: “Your son is going to live.” John records that upon learning this, the nobleman “and his whole household believed.”

One can reasonably infer from this statement that the nobleman in no way deserves a pat on the back for believing without witnessing signs and wonders. While he set off from Cana believing, he was soon plagued with doubts. Indeed, it wasn't until he had heard of his son's recovery – and checked the precise time it took place – that he believed.

There is no good reason to think that the untrusting nobleman was any different from the rest of us. Human beings have been less than impressed with God since the very beginning – even when we meet him face-to-face. Like Adam and Eve, we have always doubted God's ability to govern the affairs of the world without our help. In fact, like them, we always seem to think we can do God's job better than he can.

It is for this very reason we should give thanks that Jesus Christ is nothing like an earthly monarch. An earthly monarch would undoubtedly chop off our heads for treating him with such contempt. By contrast, our heavenly king laid down his own life to save us from the consequences of our inability to trust and obey him. Maybe that's hard to believe, but it's why we are celebrating the Feast of Christ the King today. *AMEN.*

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