

Lent 5 - Judica

March 28 - 29, 2009

John 8:42-59

Before Abraham Was, I AM”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is from the Gospel lesson just read from John chapter 8. We focus particularly on Jesus’ words, **Before Abraham was, I AM.**

The time of Jesus’ passion and death grows nearer. This Sunday is traditionally called Passion Sunday, for it is on this day that we hear of the people’s rejection of Jesus as the only Messiah, and how they sought to kill Him. We drape all the crosses in the church to remind us that the price for our Lord’s passion is great, and so that when we next view the cross, it will be with new eyes.

Jesus properly points out to the Jews that if they truly were from God, they would love Him, for He proceeds from the Father and goes back to the Father. He then goes on to say that they, the people, are of their father, the devil. For the devil is the father of lies and is at the root of all sin and evil in the world.

This is how our Lutheran Confessions treat this text about the devil. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* writes: **“Nevertheless, the cause of sin is the will of the devil and of men turning away from God, as Christ said about the devil (John 8:44), ‘When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature.’”**

In times of great evil and distress in the world, it is quite common to ask the question of why. Why is there so much evil in the world? Why is there so much hatred and violence? But if you dig even deeper, the question may even be asked of yourself: ***why do I do these things? Why am I so torn and possessed by sin?*** Saint Paul himself struggled with this very same question when he wrote: **For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.**
[Romans 7:18-20 \(ESV\)](#)

This is the slavery to sin which we all are bound under and which we all struggle with every day of our lives. If you do not struggle and fight against sin, it is not a sign that you don't sin. It is a sign that you are blind to sin and do not realize its stranglehold on you.

This is the message which so incensed and infuriated the Jews in Jesus' day. He had the audacity and sheer gall to suggest to them that they were not going to be automatically saved because they were Jews. But even more, Jesus knows and understands the connection between sin and the devil. For the two *always* go together.

Now let's step back and stop talking history for a minute. For Jesus isn't talking about the Jews in this text finally; *he's talking about you*. He's talking about your desire to cling to pet sins. He's talking about your wanting to always hold back on God. You know what I mean. I'll go to church and be a Christian and all, but there are just some things that are too good to give up. There are certain sins which are mine, and I'm not going to let anything or anyone get in the way of doing what I want to do.

This is the trial Abraham faced in the sacrifice of his son. God had given him a son in his old age, and now God asked him to go and sacrifice his son, to prove his great love for the Lord. It didn't make sense, and Abraham was sorely tempted to simply refuse. After all, this was *his son*, no one could take him away. He loved Isaac like no one else in the world. And yet it is precisely that love for his son which God tested. What are you willing to give up for me, the Lord asked. **Your livelihood, your friends, your life, or even your son's life?**

Abraham walked by faith not by sight. He passed the test, because God gave him the faith to pass the test. But Abraham is not the only one God ever tested.

Every day of your life your faith is tried and tested in the furnace of the cross. There are constantly temptations for you to overcome, trials to face, and crosses to bear. But you know the dilemma: *you fail at these every day*. Like the Jews of Jesus' day, you just can't see past your own selfish nature and self-righteous judgment about the rest of the world.

So where is the Gospel? Where does the hope lie? The hope lies in those great words of Jesus: **Before Abraham was, I AM**. Those may sound like easy words to say, but those are words of sweet comfort for the hurting sinner. Those words draw you outside of

yourself and your own failures and shortcomings, and draw you into His loving embrace and His everlasting comfort.

Let me explain. As long as you look at sin as something you can conquer like a bad habit, you will fail. We have a hard enough time conquering bad habits. Sin goes much, much deeper. Being a Christian is not like a diet program to get rid of sin. Sin is a part of your very nature as a human being since the Fall. You cannot simply reform your way of life. That is putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound. You must be reborn. You must be made anew. No set of laws or regulations or steps for living will cure this disease. It must come from outside of you.

Before Abraham was, I AM. What this means is that this Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has had your salvation planned before the foundation of the world. God knew you would fail, and His love for you is so great, so strong and powerful, that He ordained His only-begotten Son to come into your flesh and die so that the price would be paid for your failure.

The author to Hebrews put it this way: **Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.** Jesus enters into that most holy place and paid the price, the ultimate price of His very life for you. It is that body and blood which you eat and drink this day. It is that body and blood which will cleanse you and remake you into the image of God once again.

This message is offensive. It forces you to put aside all of your silly and pathetic ideas about yourself, about your worth and status, and strips away the layers of sin and death which infect us all. And in their place the very image of God is put upon you with water and the Word of God.

So it is in that message of life through death and salvation through suffering that brings hope and peace to you this day. Abraham rejoiced to see this day, and he saw it and was glad. For all of heaven rejoice when one sinner comes to realize their sinfulness and turns in faith to the only one who can save them, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

As we prepare for our Lord's Passion, death and resurrection once again, may this ever be your song: **Jesus, sinners does receive.** Believe it for His sake. Amen.