

First Sunday after Pentecost

May 22nd, 2016

Gospel: John 8:48-59

Epistle: 2:14a, 22-36

Lesson: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm: Psalm 8

CLB Commentary by Pastor Gary Witkop

John 8:48 – 59

Sometimes from the pulpit you explain life as a Christian, sometimes you get to talk about coming to faith and sometimes you need to deal with the deeper things of theology. A message from this text is a walk, or slog, through the theology of the trinity.

First: Jesus wasn't always well liked. In this text he is accused of being a half breed and demon possessed, of being crazy and finally the people attempt to kill him thinking he was guilty of blasphemy. Sometimes we aren't liked either and if it is because we have done something of our own to hurt others we should own that, but if it is because of Christ, we are in good company.

Secondly: Jesus allows the Jewish leaders to say these things against him until they finally drill down to the real issue. Who is Jesus? This text follows where Jesus tells those who believed in him that they would know the truth and the truth would set them free. Jesus was here telling the Jewish leaders the truth about who he was but it would end up leading to his death. The truth about who Jesus was would set him and us free, but it does so through the cross. For the Christian there is no ultimate freedom except through the cross.

Often there is no freedom without great cost. Our freedom cost Jesus his life and sometimes it costs us some personal pain as well. Don't run from the pain, sometimes we have to go straight through it as Jesus did.

In verse 51 Jesus says, he who keeps His word shall never die. Lenski says of this, "If anyone' is universal and opens the door to all the sinners of the world. At the same time it is personal: each sinner must enter for himself."

So again, who is Jesus that he can offer heaven to anyone and everyone? We today know about the trinity, but imagine trying to explain who Jesus was to people who had no concept of the trinity, of a God who was three and yet one? It is no wonder the Jews picked up stones to kill him.

The obvious answer to the question of who Jesus was is that he is Very God of Very God. This text is one place we go to, to verify that. It is often where I go to for that. In this text the Jews try and discredit Jesus by saying all sorts of negative things against him, questioning his heritage, insulting his parents, and questioning his sanity. But in the end Jesus brings them to Abraham, the one the Jews claim as their ancestral father. Jesus says that he existed before Abraham was born. Not only that but

he used the ancient phrase for God, I AM.

What makes this statement so remarkable is the reaction of the Jews. They didn't laugh, they didn't continue to call him crazy or question who his real father was. They picked up stones to kill him. Why? Because they recognized that Jesus was claiming to be God, the great I AM of their ancestors. Jesus brought the Jews not only back to Abraham also to Moses at the burning bush. Moses asked God what his name was and God gave to Moses and all of Israel the name I AM as his official name. It was a name every Jew recognized. And because of that they felt that Jesus had committed blasphemy. But claiming to be God is only blasphemy if you aren't actually God. What Jesus claimed to be proved to be true.

At this point Jesus could not reveal the fullness of his power to show his claim of being God to be true, so instead of doing some awe inspiring thing like part the Red Sea, Jesus just walks away. That may indeed have been a miracle in itself as the Jews were intent on finding him and killing him but somehow Jesus just walks out of their midst and out of the temple.

Often instead of arguing or fighting we too should learn to be like Jesus and walk away.

The proof of who Jesus was would come some time later in two places. First on the cross and then in the Tomb. Jesus would die on the cross and then rise from the grave forever proving that He is God, not just some good man or prophet. No mere man could rise from the dead. And in this case, no God could die. So Jesus, the God/Man died on the cross for our sins and rose from the grave defeating death forever opening the door to heaven. Only God could do that. Jesus is God, part of the trinity, of which the followers of Jesus would not yet understand.