

03/29/20

*Judica*, (Passion Sunday) 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

**The Lamb without Spot or Blemish**

**John 8: 46-59**

“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?”

He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.

And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges.

Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon!

Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’

Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?”

Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God.

Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Then they took up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple,” going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is especially at such a time of uncertainty as this, when the coronavirus is spreading so rapidly, that we as Christ’s people of faith are reminded of the rock on which we stand—that Word of God to which Jesus calls attention in our text. Even as we pray for continued health for our loved ones and for people everywhere, and as we earnestly entreat our Lord that He would in His mercy grant recovery to those who have fallen ill, we

cling in faith to our Lord's unchangeable will and testament to us. To those who trust in the crucified and risen One for forgiveness and life He has given this promise, that nothing can separate us from His love, and that our heavenly Father will always do what is best for us. We will not always see how that can be. His ways and His thoughts, the prophet Isaiah reminds us, are high above ours—as high as the heavens are above the earth. We will not always understand His workings. Nevertheless, He has given His Word. As St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, the absolutely trustworthy proof of His promise to make all things work for the good of His people is the cross on the hill Golgotha. “He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all,” the apostle says, “how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” That is true also for you and me today, and the coronavirus does not change that promise one bit.

Among His own people, the response to Jesus' word of grace and forgiveness and life was mixed, to say the least. Some, John tells us, accepted Him as the Prophet of whom Moses had spoken. The Pharisees and the temple priests, on the other hand, were already to kill Him. Others were ready to welcome Him, but only if He would be the kind of Messiah that they wanted—the kind of earthly deliverer who would give them more bread and who would free them from their Roman overlords and restore to them the glory which belonged to Israel under King David.

But Jesus of Nazareth—He who is Immanuel, “God with us”—had not come to be an earthly ruler of any kind. He had come to be the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He had come to offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for your sin and for mine, and in that way to make peace between us and our Creator. In our text, Jesus outlines for us His qualifications to offer Himself as that sacrifice. He is the Lamb without spot or blemish, the sinless One who has fully obeyed the Law in our place—as our Substitute under that Law. And He is also the One whom Abraham rejoiced to see, the divine Son of God whose blood is therefore of infinite worth. That is why His Word is life-giving, and it is also why His promise is so reliable.

## I

“Which of you convicts Me of sin?” Jesus asks. The people with whom He was speaking would have loved nothing better than to be able to hold up to Jesus a list of all the things He had done or said for which they could condemn Him. They would have loved to point to this cruel action or to that thoughtless remark of His, to some failure in His worship practice or in His family duties or in His dealings with those around Him—anything at all that they could call a sin according to the Law. But they could find

nothing for which to convict Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, they resort to puerile insults—calling Him a “Samaritan” which they meant as a racist slur, and saying that He was possessed by a demon. Thus it is those who hated Him who give witness to His complete holiness, because they simply cannot “convict (Him) of sin.” Christ Jesus is indeed the spotless Lamb who offers Himself for us.

That utter sinlessness of our Savior is a mystery that goes far beyond our understanding. “He was tempted in every way like we are, yet without sin,” the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us. He is our Brother-in-the-flesh in every way and was subject to all the temptations of body and soul to which we are subject. He was tempted intensely by Satan. He was constantly provoked by those who hated Him. He was insulted, betrayed, falsely accused, belied, tortured. Yet He remained sinless. Yet He remained perfect in His self-giving love. Yet His concern was always for the physical and spiritual good of those around Him—to heal, to feed, to teach, to forgive, and to share the good news of the Father’s saving love.

That is not what we experience in ourselves. That is why we need Him, the spotless “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

## II

In St. John’s account, Jesus points to yet another of His qualifications to be the atoning sacrifice who truly can make peace between us and our Maker. He tells His listeners that their father Abraham, whom they professed to revere, was made glad to see the day of Jesus Christ. And when they angrily object that Abraham had died so many years before Jesus was born, our Savior replies, “Most assuredly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

“I AM”—this is one of the several times in St. John’s Gospel when our Savior uses this special designation for Himself. “I AM the Good Shepherd,” He tells us, and He says also, “I AM the Resurrection and the Life,” and again He says to us, “I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” And each time, it is clear from the original text that Jesus is applying to Himself the very name of the God of Israel as that name was revealed to Moses at the burning bush. There Moses had asked, “What is Your name, that I may tell the people?” And the Lord had answered, “I AM that I AM. Tell the people, ‘I AM’ has sent you.”

John tells us that those who were listening to Jesus were so enraged at His words that they picked up stones in order to lynch Him. They knew exactly what the Prophet from Nazareth meant. “Before Abraham was, I AM,” says Jesus. I AM the Eternal One who made heaven and earth. I AM

the God of Israel who spoke to Moses and who rescued My chosen people from Egypt.

And that, too, is what truly qualifies Him to be the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” It is the divine Son of God Himself who goes to the cross for us. It is the great I AM Himself who has become One of us in the womb of the holy Virgin and who pours out His blood for us there on Calvary’s hill. And therefore the blood He sheds is truly of infinite worth. It truly atones for the sins of the whole world—even for the likes of you and me.

### III

Because Jesus of Nazareth is the sinless One, and because He is the divine Son of God Himself, He can say of the Gospel-word which proclaims Him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.” The word that He has given us tells us of His redeeming love. That word announces to us that it was for us that He suffered, that it was for us that He gave Himself into death, and that it was for us that He smashed the power of the grave on Easter morning. Because He truly is “the (divine) Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” His word is filled with His Holy Spirit—the One whom we confess in the Nicene Creed to be “the Lord and Giver of Life.” To keep that word—to believe it and to cling to Christ Jesus as our Savior—is to be made truly alive for all eternity.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, and our Holy-Week contemplations will begin in which we specially commemorate our Savior’s sufferings and death for us. And then on Easter morning—whether we are gathered together in church or are with each other only in spirit as we worship in our homes—we will specially commemorate and rejoice in His resurrection-victory over death. It is the Church’s gift to us on this fifth Sunday of the Lenten season that we are given this Gospel-text from St. John’s Gospel—in which we meditate on His holiness and on His divinity—so that our faith may be strengthened in Him who is so completely qualified to be our Redeemer.

And thus also, as we face the difficulties and troubles of these times, our faith is strengthened in His promise that nothing can separate us from His love, and that He will cause all things to work for our good. That promise, too, comes from Christ Jesus, the sinless Son of God, and therefore it is absolutely trustworthy.

May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with such faith for Jesus’ sake. Amen