

John 8:46-59 (Judica)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
April 3, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

There are two kinds of wisdom: there is the wisdom of this world, earthly, unspiritual and demonic, a wisdom according to the flesh. And there is the wisdom from above, which as St. James tells us is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. There are two kinds of wisdom, which lead to two different ways of looking at the world. There is the wisdom from above and the wisdom from below, the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the Devil. This morning we see how the unbelieving Jews use the wisdom of this world in an attempt to trap Jesus. On the other hand, we see Jesus, the true Wisdom from above, arguing for the truth because He is the Truth. We hear our Lord's message of eternal life in the midst of intense cynicism from His opponents. We hear our Lord's message of walking by faith, not sight, walking according to the wisdom from above, not the wisdom from below. With the eyes of faith we, like Abraham, recognize God at work even when it seems like the Devil has control.

Our Lord's tussle with the Jews in this morning's Gospel Lesson takes place during the Feast of Booths, the harvest festival of Israel. Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem to celebrate. Jesus went up to the Temple to teach and to defend His teaching. He pointed out repeatedly that anyone aligned with the Father will recognize Jesus and anyone who comes to Jesus will come to God the Father. Jesus teaches us not to judge by appearances but with the right judgment that only comes from God (7:24). This is the wisdom from above. St. John then tells us there was a division among the people over Him (7:43). Many believed in Jesus, but

many more sought to kill Jesus because of His teachings and miracles. This is the wisdom from below, a wisdom that tries to ignore or destroy what it cannot comprehend. But Jesus's hour had not yet come.

In our Lord's open conflicts with the Jews, He stresses a difference in perception. Jesus says: "You judge according to the flesh . . . You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (8:15, 23). Jesus is saying that the Jews are acting according to worldly wisdom, but the message Jesus brings is wisdom from above. In the end, Jesus says flat out what the difference is. To the Jews who consider Abraham their Father, Jesus says: "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did . . . If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here . . . You are of your father the devil" (8:39, 42, 44). Those who are of this world, those who are of the Devil, cannot understand the things from above; they cannot understand the things of God. Wisdom from below cannot comprehend the wisdom from above.

Jesus cannot be any clearer. Those who receive Jesus receive the Father and are children of God. Those who reject Jesus reject the Father and are instead children of the Devil. Whoever is of God hears the words of God; whoever does not hear the Word of God proves that he is of the Devil. Jesus says to these Jews who do not believe in Him: "The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." Jesus is saying to these Jews that because of their unbelief, they are of the Devil. Harsh words. And they respond in kind: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" They have nothing left but to insult Jesus, calling Him a half-breed who works by the power of demons. It's just like when they accused Jesus of casting out Satan by the power of Satan. The Jews have everything turned around. Jesus comes from God

yet they say He has a demon. They are of their Father the Devil, yet they claim to be children of Abraham and children of God.

Jesus continues with His message: “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” This settled the matter for the unbelieving Jews. “Now we know you have a demon!” they cried. Abraham and the prophets died. Does Jesus think He’s better than the patriarchs and prophets of Israel? They are thinking with the wisdom from below. They have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. They don’t truly understand what it means to keep God’s Word, to die, to live. They only understand these concepts on the surface, with a wisdom from this world. But the wisdom from above, the wisdom of God teaches us to see things differently. Yes, Abraham died. Yes, the prophets died. Yes, we will die. But Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Him live even though they die (John 11:25). And as Jesus teaches elsewhere: When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush, He said “I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! Abraham trusted in God’s promises and so He lives even though He died. You trust in Jesus, and so you will live, even when you die.

Jesus responds to the unbelieving Jews: “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Abraham had the wisdom that only comes from God, the wisdom that trusts God’s promises despite all evidence to the contrary. Take for example our Old Testament Lesson this morning. God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham passed the test by trusting God’s promise and not withholding his son, the one through whom all the families of the world would be blessed. The writer to the Hebrews explains to us that Abraham trusted that God was able even to raise Issac from the dead (Heb 11:19). Wisdom from below would say that’s crazy. The wisdom of this world says that what’s dead is

dead and it will stay that way. But faith is the wisdom from above and faith is certain of what is hoped for, convinced of what remains unseen (Heb 11:1). Faith trusts in God's promises despite all evidence to the contrary. By faith Abraham obeyed God, trusting that God would remain true to His promise of offspring through Isaac. Faith is the wisdom from above that understands God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus commends the faith of Abraham, his wisdom from above: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." Abraham did not just see things with his fleshly eyes. He beheld reality as it actually is, trusting that God could raise his son Isaac from the dead, and trusting that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. In faith, Abraham trusted not only that God could raise the dead, Abraham trusted that God would become man for the life of the world. Abraham trusted in God's promises even though the fulfillment of those promises did not come until thousands of years later. Abraham rejoiced that he would see the coming Christ and in faith Abraham did see Him, and was glad. Abraham was granted wisdom from above to see what few others could see: the promised Messiah.

Again, the Jews don't understand. They are not like their earthly father Abraham. They see only with the eyes of flesh and not with the eyes of faith. They operate with the wisdom from below rather than the wisdom from above. "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" How could this man under 50 know anything about Abraham, who lived thousands of years earlier? The Jews only look at the outward appearance. They don't understand who they are actually talking to. Jesus then reveals His divine nature: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Jesus uses the divine name revealed to Moses in the burning bush: "I am who I am." These unbelieving Jews aren't just dealing with a man. They are dealing with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the living, not the dead. Jesus makes it perfectly

clear here that He is both God and man. That's why He could say earlier: "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Jesus's Word is God's Word. Jesus is God. And we know this is what the Jews understood Jesus to be saying because they picked up stones to stone him. The Levitical punishment for blasphemy is stoning (Lev 24:16). The unbelieving Jews only saw a man claiming to be God. They operated with the wisdom from below, and so they did not have faith to see that this man actually is God, the God of their fathers. The wisdom from above recognizes that this man, Jesus, truly is the God of Israel, the God of all creation. Faith sees this, but unbelief, the wisdom of the world tries to stamp it out and avoid reality.

But Jesus miraculously hid Himself and left His temple. His hour to die for the sins of the world had not yet come. That hour would come later, when Jesus entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week and was crucified on Good Friday for blasphemy. The rulers of the people handed Jesus over to the Romans with the charge that He claimed to be God. Jesus was handed over to death because of assumptions based on the wisdom of this world. The unbelieving Jews only saw a man claiming to be God. They did not see with the eyes of faith, with the wisdom from above, that this man who claims to be God actually is God. And so they crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8), who lives even though He died. Jesus rose from the dead and in faith we behold Him, in His word and in His sacraments. Not according to the wisdom of this world, which tells us if something is dead it remains dead. No, we behold Christ according to the wisdom of God, with the eyes of faith. We recognize that our Lord lives and reigns to all eternity and that even though we, too, die, yet will we live. Christ will return and raise us and all the dead. Just as Abraham looked ahead thousands of years and beheld Christ in faith, so do we look back thousands of years and behold Christ in faith. By faith, we, like Abraham, cling to Christ here and now.

As we draw closer to Holy Week, may our heavenly Father grant us that wisdom from above, the eyes of faith, to recognize our Lord's suffering and death for what it is: not an accident of history, or a tragedy at the hands of wicked men, but as the sacrifice that atones for our sin and makes us right in the eyes of God. May we enter this Passiontide not with worldly wisdom, but with the wisdom from above, with the wisdom that sees the suffering and death of Christ in light of His resurrection from the dead. There we understand that His death is our salvation. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.