

John 8:46–59
Judica (Lent V)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
March 17, 2024

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,

As you are probably already aware, today is St. Patrick's Day, which ought not go unnoticed even if you don't think you have any connection to Ireland. St. Patrick was an important missionary to Ireland in the 5th century. Many people think of Leprechauns, Shamrocks, and Irish whiskey on this day. Fewer are familiar with St. Patrick's strong Trinitarian theology and the strong Christian influence he had. But St. Patrick is not just important for the Irish. Many people have never heard the rest of the story. After St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland, the Church flourished there and then sent missionaries to England and to continental Europe. Irish monks in Great Britain and then here on the continent established monasteries far and wide. The Irish monks retained their unique Christian culture and converted local pagans to the Christian faith, bringing them to the Triune God in the waters of Holy Baptism, to a life of learning everything our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us. For example, just 23 miles north of here in Odernheim are the ruins of cloister Disibodenberg, founded by an Irish monk in the 7th century. There are many such Irish monasteries scattered throughout Europe.

Today is also Judica Sunday, the beginning of "Passiontide," the time of Christ's Passion and death. This is the time when we really begin focusing on the upcoming Holy Week, which begins one week from today on Palm Sunday and will take us all the way through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday to the Resurrection of our LORD on Easter Sunday. This is the last leg of the journey we call Lent. Jesus is in the Temple at the Feast of Tabernacles,

arguing with the Jews who don't believe in Him. The Jews are seeking refuge in the fact that they are descendants of Abraham and followers of Abraham's God. Jesus responds that as unbelievers, they are actually not of God nor of Abraham, but they are the offspring of the Devil, the seed of the serpent. As the exchange continues, Jesus states quite clearly that He is the Son of God the Father, making Himself equal with God. He is God incarnate, the God who took on our human nature that He might redeem it. For this reason the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy. That's why they try to stone Him here and then later hand Him over for crucifixion.

Jesus has key things to say about who He is in relation to God the Father, which is important for how we think about the Triune God. Throughout the Gospel of John and throughout the entire Scriptures, the Holy Trinity is ever-present. And in Jesus Christ, the God-man, we know that one of the persons of the Holy Trinity suffered and died for our sins, and then rose again from the dead. We know that in the face of Jesus Christ we behold the very face of God. And we know that in Jesus Christ, we are united to the Godhead, to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit now and forever through Baptism. This is a profound mystery of our faith, proclaimed throughout the ages and down to our own day. Baptized into Jesus Christ, you are connected to the Triune God and in Him you will never die.

Jesus tells the Jews: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." To be of God is to be a child of God the Father, a brother of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be of God is to be the offspring of God. You can see this throughout the exchange Jesus has with the Jews. Jesus says: "I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father" (8:38). The Jews claim to be sons of God and sons of Abraham (8:41), but Jesus tells them they are not of God but of their father, the devil. Unbelief makes someone a child of the Devil. Faith, that is,

believing and trusting in the promises of God makes someone a child of God. And this faith is given to us in Baptism. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again (that is, born from above, born of God), “he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” To be “of God” is to believe and be baptized, to be born of God in Baptism and to hold to those promises for dear life.

And when a person is “of God,” when a person believes and is baptized, he hears the words of God. He understands the scriptures and the power of God therein. The “hearing” here is to hear God’s Word and to believe His Word. Many people hear God’s Word but they don’t believe it. God’s Word comes across as nonsense to them, as a fairy tale, as wishful thinking. Or they hear God’s Word and it means nothing to them. They think it’s not important. They want to hold onto something else besides God’s Word. That’s where the Jews are at in this exchange with Jesus. They want to hold onto their ancestry and their own way of worshiping God rather than to the Word of God. They don’t hear God’s Word because they are not of God. And so they attack our Lord and His Word.

Those who are of God hear God’s Word and keep it. They hold to it and they draw life from it. Jesus says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my Word, he will never see death.” To be born of God in Baptism opens our ears to hear and understand God’s Word, to hold onto it. And to keep God’s Word, to hold onto it, means we will never see death. As Jesus said earlier, in John 5:24: “whoever hears my Word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” In Baptism you already died. You were baptized into the death of Christ, buried with Him by baptism into death. And if you’ve been united to Him in a death like His, you will certainly also be united with Him in a

resurrection like His. To believe and be baptized is to have eternal life already right now. Your death has been turned into sleep, a passage from this life into the next. It's no longer something to approach with dread, but with the sure and certain hope of resurrection in Jesus Christ. Jesus is *the* Resurrection and *the* life. Whoever believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live (11:25).

The unbelieving Jews don't have the ears to hear this Word of God, so they attack once again. "Now we know that you have a demon!" they say. "Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" Again, Jesus calls God His Father and says that He knows the Father and keeps His Word.

Jesus also says that Abraham, the father of Israel according to the flesh, rejoiced that He would see the day of Christ. He did see it and was glad. Like all the saints of the Old Testament, Abraham was well aware that God would become man to offer Himself as a sacrifice for all. Abraham believed in the resurrection of the dead. In the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham had everything He needed to comprehend the day of Jesus Christ. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up his son, Isaac, through whom the promised blessings were to come. Abraham considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:17). Isaac, then, became for Abraham a picture of Jesus Christ, the promised son to be sacrificed by the Father. God Himself really did provide the lamb to take away the sin of the world—our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham rejoices knowing that in His offspring, in Jesus Christ, the entire world would be blessed.

So the Jews said to Jesus: "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" What Jesus says next makes perfectly clear to the Jews that Jesus is claiming to be God. Jesus says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Jesus is using the name of God

revealed to Moses at the burning bush, where the LORD says His name is “I am.” God is the only one who perfectly is. He always was, always is, and always will be. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end without beginning and without end, the Eternal One. Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus’s day. He rejoiced to see the incarnation of the Son of God, His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. And Jesus knows this because as God, Jesus knows Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the patriarchs and all the prophets quite well. Jesus spoke with these people. He gave them the promises about this day and here He was to hold true to those promises.

We know the Jews heard and understood exactly what Jesus was saying, that He was claiming to be God, because they attempted to stone Him for blasphemy. But as God, Jesus could hide Himself and depart the Temple. His time had not yet come. The Jews would later accuse Jesus of blasphemy again and have Him executed on that charge, but it is Jesus who lays down His life that He might take it up again. No one takes His life from Him. He lays it down of His own accord and He has authority to take it up again in the resurrection of the dead (John 10:17–18). As God, Jesus has control over what happens to Him and how He would save the world in His sacrificial death. He has the power to lead us to His Father and our Father.

As we draw near to Holy Week, we are reminded again on this Sunday of who Jesus truly is. He’s the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He’s the same LORD who created all things, who spoke to Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets. He’s our LORD and our God who became man, that He might lay down His life on our behalf and lead us back to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you’re still wondering how this applies to your life today, then pay careful attention to our closing hymn, known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate.” The Holy Trinity is not an abstract principle of philosophy. The Holy Trinity is the God who creates, redeems, and

sanctifies you. In Baptism, His name was placed upon you. His name protects you as a breastplate protects a warrior in battle. Everytime you invoke the name of the Triune God, it's as if you're putting your armor on for protection. His name is strong, the name of the Three in One and One in Three. In that same 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.