

✠ John 8:48-59 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

We've just heard read the end of a rather volatile and stark discussion between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders are trying desperately to show that their religious ancestry and lineage proves that they are of God. Jesus, on the other hand, does not judge them by who they came from, but by whose work they are doing. One is only of God when one does the things of God: that is, to love the Son of God and obey His word.

The Jewish leaders first appeal to their human ancestry, claiming to have Abraham as their father. To which Jesus replies that if Abraham was their father, that is, the father of their religion, then they would do as Abraham did: love God and obey His Word. But they do not. They lie and murder, showing who their real father is even as they pick up stones to kill Jesus.

But it is the nature of humanity, steeped and drowning in sin, to always try and justify itself. So the Jewish leaders do not rebuke or counter Jesus' words, for they cannot, but instead try to supercede them by appealing to the highest power claiming God Himself as their father. To this Jesus replies, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here" (John 8:42). God cannot be their Father because they do not believe nor love the Son of God. "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44).

And, like us all, having been striped of their dignity and pride, realizing that they cannot win an argument with this Man, they do not submit to His superior word and authority, for sinful man can never submit himself to God, but instead they do as man does: they resort to name calling.

Like bullies who are not wise enough to admit when they are wrong, and so continue to elude wisdom, these leaders, these men who are supposed to be refined and dignified, who are supposed to be those who have knowledge of God, become uncouth potty-mouths. "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" In their minds and culture it was tantamount to calling Jesus a blithering idiot and having the mind of an invalid. All too often when things do not go our way we do not reason together as God would have us do, but we mock and ridicule, spread rumors and lies, thinking our opponent will be bullied into giving up.

But Jesus turns their insult in on themselves, not as we would, saying, "I'm rubber your glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you." But Jesus takes their filth and holds it up as a mirror so that they see how truly filthy they are.

He does not respond to the charge of being called a Samaritan as Samaritan means guardian and He is indeed the guardian of all truth – something they claim to be but are not. And He does not argue the finer points of what it means to have a demon, but simply says that by saying He has a demon, the Temple leaders show their true colors in calling God a liar.

The father of lies is Satan. When we lie, cheat, and steal, when we gossip, spread rumors,

and hurt our neighbor's reputation, when we comfort sinners with pop-Christian psychobabble and heart-warming, heretical emails, instead of showing them their sin and bringing them to repentance, then we follow the father of lies and are his children.

When, like these Temple leaders, someone says they know God, but they do not listen to His Son, then they are liars. That is what it means to know God: to listen to the Son of God. For the Son reveals the Father and gives His Spirit so that man will believe His Father's words concerning His Son.

But this is not abstract thinking. This is not the works and words of the scholastics and philosophers. For they, too, say they know God, but they chase after Him with their reason and proofs instead of listening to Jesus. And so instead of inheriting eternal life they merely inherit the wind, which sounds powerful and strong, but is empty of wisdom and understanding concerning the things of God.

We dare not let our hearts and minds become bogged down in trying to figure God out. Thinking to ourselves that God must want this or that because that is what I want. That is, we had better be careful when we try and approach God from any direction other than the one direction He has given to us. For when we think we have Him figured out, His depth and height, width and breadth, then we will be no better off than those Temple leaders. They thought they had God contained in Abraham and their religious codes and laws. But God was rather contained in His Son, whom they did not know.

God does not reveal Himself through logic and theological discourse. He does not reveal Himself in council meetings and voter assemblies. He does not reveal Himself in member transfers, confirmation rites, or arbitrary rituals. God is not the abstract god of the philosophers or the spiritual, guru god of the New Agers. Nor is He merely the god of good morals and homespun remedies and common sense. For you will not find God in these things.

Rather, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals Himself through the man, Jesus, through flesh and blood. The words of Jesus sum up the whole of Christian doctrine: "I know [the Father] and I keep His word. [Therefore] if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." In our sin we do not understand nor believe this. Of ourselves we cannot believe that Jesus' words are so powerful that they even reverse the curse of death.

And so we look for salvation elsewhere. We do not look at preaching and the sacraments for salvation, but instead we look at our kindly dispositions and good works. We count how many years we've belonged to this church and how often and how much we put into the offering plates. We glory in our faithfulness in our daily devotions, thinking ourselves good Christians because we do such holy things. We are quick to point out what sin is and that we are sinners, but we are painstakingly slow to confess actual sins.

Actual sins like gossiping and thinking hateful thoughts of our neighbors. Actual sins like badmouthing our mother-in-law or belittling our daughter-in-law. Actual sins such as neglecting to teach our children the oracles of God, while letting them learn the wiles of the devil in movies and television that glorify free sex, violence and murder.

And the longer we sweep the sins of our lives under the rug of our good-looking façade of perfect church attendance and hallowed lives, the more our hearts will grow cold and callous. The years of believing that our sins are small and common to all and will not really damn us harden our hearts so that we no longer even realize that what we are doing is sinful.

Eventually we, like the Temple leaders, will say that we know God, but since we do no longer listen to His Son, then we will have become liars.

Repent. For the Son of Man did not say that salvation is found in your faith or church attendance, but that salvation is found in His death and resurrection.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠