

Sermon for Lent 5 – John 8:46-59

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It truly matters who your father is. This past Wednesday, the Roman Catholic Church consecrated an Argentine Cardinal as Pope Francis I. Rome's new Holy Father is said to be a humble man: during his time in Argentina, he chose to live in a common apartment rather than the grandiose palace reserved for the ecclesial elites. He would take the public bus to and from the basilica in Buenos Aires. Even the name he chose, Francis, was in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, who was known for his simplicity of life and charity to the poor. The media's general consensus was that this pontiff would set a new tone for the papacy and those underneath it – by doing away with lavish excesses and extolling the virtue of humility. Will Rome's new bishop bring this tone to fruition in the world's largest church body? Will he extend relief to all the poor? Will this Holy Father renounce the Roman church's false teaching and proclaim salvation solely through the merits of Jesus Christ alone? That last one is most certainly a stretch, but hey, even a Lutheran can have high hopes!

It truly matters who your father is. That's what Jesus said. He told the Jews, "I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." The second half of John chapter 8 is the dialogue between Jesus and the Jews regarding matters paternal. The Jews claim Abraham as their father. Biologically this is true. However, the Jews did not follow in the tradition of Abraham: "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did..." So the question is "What would Abraham do?" Perhaps the most famous story of Abraham was the sacrifice of Isaac. God's command to Abraham was to do an unthinkable act: to sacrifice Isaac, his son whom he loved, upon a mountain. As they ascended the mountain, Isaac carried the wood and Abraham carried the knife and fire. He bound Isaac with the wood upon an altar and lifted the knife to slay him, but the Angel of the Lord intervened. "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him..."

So what did Abraham do? That's just it! He didn't do anything! The work of his hands could only reap death, destruction, and sin. All the "doing" would be done by God. God provided the ram to sacrifice. After this event, Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide," and not "the Lord provided." The sacrifice of that ram was only temporary; Abraham looked to the future when God would provide a fully-atonement sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. Abraham knew he would be a passive recipient of God's undeserved mercy and grace! So Jesus told the Jews, "...now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did." And in this regard, the Jews were no true sons of Abraham.

We also are no true sons of Abraham. I would venture to say that no one here this morning is even a biological descendent of Abraham. But we are sons of Adam. Each and every one of us. And as sons of our biological father, we also inherit his sin.

Adam's sin was not merely a breaking of this or that commandment, but it was His attempt to take the place of his Creator. His was the ultimate act of "unfaith." He believed the promise of the serpent's gospel that he and his wife would be like gods. He inverted the image of God in which he was created so that he, and not God, defined the relationship between them. Soon enough, Adam discovered that Satan was the father of lies and had become his own father. It truly matters who your father is.

Everyone who is descended from Adam, which covers, well... everyone, is born in sin and begotten of the father of lies: We all stand rightly condemned by Jesus words, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." Like Adam, we have believed the devil's gospel. Like the Jews, we don't "do" as Abraham did. We seek God with our hands. We do good things hoping to win God's favor—scratching God's back so he'll scratch ours. We seek God in our emotions. If we feel good enough, God is truly there! After all, God wouldn't want us to be unhappy! We seek God in our experiences. If it turns out well, God has blessed the outcome! Yes, we seek God anywhere and everywhere, except in the place where He promises to be: in His Word. Jesus said it this way: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

So what must one do to become a son of God? How does one make God to be his father? That's just it: you can't do! But He chooses you! He adopts you! "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, than an heir through God." How can this be? The author of the book of Hebrews said: "Because Christ ... entered once for all into the holy places... by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." That holy place turned out to be a hill shaped like a skull. The altar was 2 beams of timber joined together in a cross. God's wrath strikes out at the Man made into a worm. Christ becomes the sacrifice. He is the scapegoat, the peace offering, the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, and the guilt offering. He clothes Himself with your sins as with a garment. The Holy One has become sin and a curse for the sake of His guilty brothers. And that's you. But the Father's Son died for you, so you are a son of your Heavenly Father.

So rejoice with Abraham to see this day! Today our Lord forgives sinners! Today our Lord kills sons of the father of lies and raises sons of the Father of Truth. It truly matter who your father is! Today the Lord forgives you. Your sins are forgiven! Cling to this word because in it, you have eternal life. Or as Jesus put it, "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠