

Sermon for Lent 5 Judica – John 8:46-59

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

Christ said to the Jews, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Abraham, looking forward into the future, rejoiced to see the day that the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world. He rejoiced to see the day when a Son would take the place of all sinful sons of men and die as a sacrifice upon a mountain.

In the Old Testament, sacrifices play a large role in religion. Their purpose was to make it possible for mortal man to stand before the eternal and holy God by covering his sin. The word which the Old Testament uses for “atonement” (in Hebrew, “Kippur”) means literally to “cover over” or “protect.” God had given sacrifice and offering to make atonement for souls. Also in the sacrifices, there was a constant reminder of the seriousness of sin. The sinner acknowledged that he had fallen short in keeping God’s law when he brought a sacrificial animal to die in his own place. The sinner bowed before God and accepted the help which God had offered him when He instituted sacrifices.

One of the Old Testament’s most famous stories of sacrifice happened in the life of Abraham. Father Abraham knew the sacrificial system. He knew it well. Heifers, goats, rams, turtle doves, pigeons—he’d sacrificed them all at the Lord’s command. It was probably disheartening to slaughter these animals that could be used for other purposes. Also, this was also a graphic reminder of how seriously offensive his sins were before God. Blood had to be shed. But there was also a tremendous amount of comfort for Abraham: seeing the blood flow from these beasts as a symbol of innocent blood covering him and cleansing him from the sins he had committed. Abraham’s blood would not have to be shed. These God-ordained sacrifices were a comfort to him.

But then the Word of the Lord called for another kind of sacrifice. Not of beasts or birds this time. Rather, his own son. Abraham’s son of the promise. “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” Through Abraham’s son would come many nations. But not now, it seems. His son was born to him and Sara in old age. It was miraculous! They named him “Isaac,” which means “laughter.” But sacrificing this son was no laughing matter. This sacrifice and the spilling of blood of his own son would seem to bring no comfort to Abraham.

Yet, Abraham remained faithful, even to this hard and almost unbelievable Word of the Lord. He had to sacrifice his own son! The son by which he would father many nations! Did God break His promise? Was He a liar? Perhaps Abraham doubted this word. But do we not also doubt? Unlike the Old Testament times, we don’t have the sacrifices constantly reminding us of the seriousness of sin. But the eternal Word still stands: God’s Ten Commandments still condemn us. How do our white lies and gossip stand up against “You shall not give false testimony?” How does our petty theft stand

up against, "You shall not steal?" How do our lustful fantasies stand up against, "You shall not commit adultery"? St. Paul said, "The wages of sin is death..." Sin and death go together. So how come my experience tells me that I've sinned and not died, in fact, I've gotten away with it?! What's worse, we've found our comfort not in God's Word of forgiveness, but in our experience of "cheating death" while our sin still clings to us. Repent! When you continue to live smugly in sin, death is closer to your doorstep than ever!

Abraham and Isaac marched up the mountain. They brought the fire, the wood, and the knife with them. But then came Isaac's heart-breaking question: "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." The father marched his son up the mountain to die. After all, God's Word says, "the soul who sins shall die." Isaac and all of humanity had sinned. This was justice. Abraham bound him and lifted the knife to slay him—but then God provided a way out. A ram caught by its horns in the thicket would take Isaac's place. So Abraham called the place "The Lord will provide." God provided a ram. But notice, Abraham did not call the place, "The Lord provided." The blood of that ram could not atone for Isaac's sins or Abraham's sins or anybody's sins. For that, the Lord would provide Someone else.

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The Lord would provide on a hill called Golgotha outside of Jerusalem. The Father's Son would be crucified and shed blood that truly atones for all sin. The high priest was right—it was better that one man should die for the people than that the whole nation should perish.

This sacrifice was made once and for all and need not be repeated. We, who before were far off, are now brought near in the blood of Christ. He has brought us atonement with God. Sin has been covered for all who have a part in this sacrifice. This is true for everyone who believes.

Abraham rejoiced to see that day. And so do we. For we stand in Isaac's shoes. The Lamb has been provided for us as well. Jesus poured out his life and we shall live forever. We are made sons of the promise by being plunged into Jesus' death in Baptism. We have been raised again in the gracious word of Absolution and forgiveness. We have tasted of the only real sacrifice there is: the Body and Blood of Christ and so have the forgiveness of our sins and life within us. God has provided. What Abraham had to look forward to, we can look back on and live in. The Great I AM who is the Lamb is here for us even today to fill us with the fruits of His sacrificial cross. The day of Jesus is now. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away our sins, and rejoice. Amen.

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