

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

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

It was yet another high stakes debate that had taken place. Mudslinging, insults, personal attacks, and some words on substantive issues and policies. And that's to say nothing of the GOP or the Democrats. I was talking about today's Gospel reading. The stage was set for Jesus against the Jews who did not believe in Him. It was a heated exchange that would rival anything you'd find on CNN or Fox News: "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" Jesus said, "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Christ asks them for the reason why they still do not believe, since they can find no fault either with His life or with His teaching. His life is innocent. He says it: "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" His teaching is also innocent: "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" He does what He says. Jesus acts as He teaches.

And then here come the attacks: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Oh Snap! It was a two-fold slam against Jesus, both personal, but also with some substance to it. "You're a Samaritan." It's a personal attack. For the Jews in Jesus' day it was the ultimate insult. However, one look at Jesus' lineage and attending stories will reveal that statement to be false. So how does He respond? When the insults go against His own self, Jesus just doesn't go there.

But then there was the other part of the accusation: "You have a demon." And while this was also insulting, there's a deeper falsehood here that must be addressed, and that is that what Jesus is teaching is no different than the devil's lies. This is a matter of God's word and truth – what we Christians call "doctrine." So our Lord responds to it: "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor Me. Yet I do not seek my won glory; there is One who seeks it, and He is the Judge." So, to sum it up, Jesus endures the personal attack. He is longsuffering when called a Samaritan. But, when it comes to God's Word, patience runs out. When it comes to attacking God's teaching and doctrine, Jesus will not tolerate it.

But how different it is for us! When someone attacks us personally, that's when we spring into action! When someone insults us, whether it's the way we look or the work that we did, "dem's fightin' words." If I'm attacked, you're gonna pay. There's no way I'm gonna let that one pass by me.

However, when it comes to God's Word and doctrine, well, that's another story. We're not so offended when the Bible's truths are mocked or ignored on the television, in the break room, at the water cooler, or around the school lunch table. As long as no one slanders me, it's fine. And the less they know about God's Word, all the better for me.

But I tell you, be offended when God's Word is defamed. And don't be ashamed of it. Be certain for yourself that what is in the Scriptures is the truth, and don't pay attention to how other people regard it. Our trust in God's Word has, is, and will be condemned and defamed by the most distinguished, smartest, and greatest people on the earth. Bitter, venomous, intolerable, shameless, and angry things will be said about us. We'll be condemned and judged. But what's really being rejected is God's Word. Our doctrine is not ours, but God's. We ought to risk all we have for it, even reputation and an easy

life, and suffer the cost. If we lose, no great harm is done. But if I let God's Word die while remaining silent, than I do harm to the whole world by keeping God out. Look, we can't silence scoffers or stop their hateful words, but that doesn't mean we should keep silent. Although they speak against us, God remains for us. Even though the whole world disgraces and dishonors us, God upholds our honor.

And when God is for us, we don't have to be offended when someone attacks us personally. When someone assails our self, we should tolerate it. Repay love for hate. Repay good for evil. Repay kind words for slander. Repay patience for intolerance. Why? Because Christ has a Word for them, too! One that we hold dear: "Truly, Truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

God sent Christ into the world in the Word. And so Jesus is spoken and presented to everyone. The Scriptures present Christ to us as the One who has overcome sin, death, and the devil. For that reason, whoever grasps hold on Christ through the Word is set free from death eternally. It's true: whoever keeps God's Word will not see death.

To be clear on this phrase "keeps God's Word," it's not a keeping of the law and works. Christ already did that. He spoke forth God's Word and suffered death for it. No, our keeping is clinging to God's Word when sin bites, death rears its ugly face, and hell pierces us. "Keeping" is holding onto the word and not being separated from it.

So how does this happen? How can we not see death? Abraham died. The prophets died. They certainly kept God's Word. So what is it? When these died and when Christians die, we do not see death. Why? Because all we see is the life of Christ in His Word. Sorry, Easter, but I've gotta steal your thunder: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." What a great thing it is to be a Christian! We are eternally redeemed from death and can never die! Sure, our death looks on the outside just like any other person, but inwardly we go through death and into life. Just like when somebody falls asleep and wakes up in the morning unexpectedly, so will we rise from death to life.

When the children of Israel marched out of Egypt, they were free—they didn't see death. But that fortune would not hold. Suddenly King Pharaoh and his army caught up to them. Now also the Red Sea was in front of them. Mountains flanked both their sides. They stood in the midst of death—no more life in sight! But Moses brought God's word to them, "Stand still and fear not, for you will see the great victory God will give, so that you shall never again see these Egyptians." And so it came to be. They passed through the Red Sea. They passed through death. Their enemies were destroyed. The trust in God's promise carried them though—it came to be as He spoke it.

And so it is for us. Passing through the waters of Baptism, we trust God's promise that eternal life is ours. When we pass through death, life is there waiting for us. How? Only by the power of Christ's Word. He is the living Son of God, the Bread of Life, the Prince of Life, and the Tree of Life. In the Word, we grasp Christ who Himself is Eternal Life. You eat the Bread of Life; you will live forever. You march under the banner of the Prince of Life; you will live forever. You are grafted into the Tree of Life; you shall not die, for Jesus said 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 in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠