

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
St. John 8:46-59: "Can You Handle the Truth?"
March 20/21, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God, heavenly Father, who, through Your Son our Lord and our Redeemer, promised: If a man keep My [Word], he shall never see death, we humbly ask You, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that, duly knowing Your Son, we may keep His Word, trust in it, comfort ourselves with it in the hour of departure, and enter into everlasting life; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 92)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? 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." / The Jews answered Him, "Are we not right in saying that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" / Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. Yet I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks it, and He is the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death." / The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! 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?" / Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known Him. I know Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know Him and I keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad." / So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" / Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who told the truth even when it was not welcome, so that some would hear it and believe, dear fellow redeemed:

In the iconic scene from the movie, *A Few Good Men*, the prosecuting attorney demands answers from the witness on the stand, a marine colonel. "I want the truth!" he shouts. And the marine colonel snaps back: "You can't handle the truth!" The truth is difficult to handle, as this colonel soon found out. The truth is so difficult to handle, that many today deny there even is such a thing. Instead of THE truth, a set of facts about which most everyone can agree, people dismiss long-held beliefs as YOUR truth. It may be true for you, they say, but it is not true for all. This is post-modernist thinking.

Jesus was no post-modernist. He spoke definitely. He pointed out right and wrong, and He stated His message clearly even when He knew people would struggle to accept it. We saw this last Sunday when Jesus called Himself *"the bread of life"* and said: *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"* (Joh. 6:35, 56). He spoke the truth, but it was a truth the people did not want to hear. It did not match up with the way they viewed Jesus and what they expected Him to do.

Later Jesus told the people that they would know the truth if they remained in His Word (8:31-32). What He spoke to them was *"the truth that [He] heard from God [the Father]"* (v. 40). But they did not want the truth. They could not bear to listen to His Word (v. 43). Why was that? Jesus stated it bluntly: *"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, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me"* (vv. 44-45).

Then He continued with the words of today's text, about truth, the Word of God, and eternal life. All of these topics are ones that our "enlightened" society ignores or rejects. Jesus still seems to be viewed favorably today, but it is not really the Jesus of the Gospels. The "Jesus" who is popular today is "Jesus the Social Activist," or "Jesus the Teacher of Morality," or "Jesus the Cheerleader."

The real Jesus says, *"Which one of you convicts Me of sin? 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."* Jesus does not leave room for anyone to stay neutral about Him. He called Himself the eternal Son of God who came down to bring life to the dying world. Was He telling the truth, or was He lying?

The Jews who opposed Him accused Him of having a demon. They had already shown their cards. They did not believe He was God in the flesh. If they believed this about Him, it would have revealed a truth about themselves, a truth they weren't prepared to consider. If Jesus was who He said He was, then they weren't who they thought they were. They thought they were holy. They thought they were right with God by the way they lived their life. They did not think they needed a Savior from sin.

Much of the world says the same thing: "I'm a good person," "I'm doing just fine on my own," "I'm not that bad," "I don't need a Savior." No one wants to face the hard truth that they are not as good as they think, that they are not fine on their own, that they deserve eternal punishment for their sins and will certainly have it if they don't have Jesus.

Even we who know this truth don't like it. We don't like the idea that no matter how hard we try to be good or how much good we do, we can't make up for the sins we have done. We don't like it that God has given us a standard for our moral conduct that is impossible for us to fulfill. We don't like it that as far as our eternal future is concerned, we are not the ones in control.

The truth that no matter what we do on this earth we all deserve to suffer eternally in hell, is too much for us. We can't imagine that our inherited condition is so dire, or that our sins should

require such punishment. We can't handle the truth. If God didn't tell us we needed a Savior, we would imagine there was some way we could overcome our sins, or some way that we could appease Him.

But only God could save us, and the only way for Him to do it was to send His eternal Son to take on our flesh. If nothing else shows us the bad shape we were in because of our sin, the Son of God becoming Man should. The Creator God didn't take on human flesh just to get a closer look at things on earth. He came because the world and every human heart were so broken, they could not be repaired. They had to be redeemed.

They had to be cleansed and purified from all their sins, and only Jesus could do it. He had to offer Himself in every sinner's place. He had to come among the prideful who thought they were holy on their own. He had to come among the liars who called *Him* a liar, when it was their hearts that were full of darkness. He had to come among the ungrateful who would never in this life fully appreciate what He came to do.

But knowing all this would happen, He still came. He came to substitute Himself for us and shed His blood for our sin. He came to suffer the unquenchable fires of hell on our behalf. He came to be slaughtered as our sacrificial Lamb on the cross. This was the only way our redemption could be accomplished. Jesus asked His Father if there might be some other way, but there wasn't. The divine requirement that Jesus must endure suffering, hell, and death for our salvation was a hard truth, but it was THE truth.

We can't handle the truth of what we deserve for our sins, but Jesus could. He could handle the truth of what our sins required. He could handle the hellish punishment. He could handle the cold dark of death. He did all of this willingly for the sins of the whole world. Because of what Jesus did, God the Father declares every sinner righteous, innocent of any wrongdoing. He says that heaven belongs to one person just as much as to another because Jesus paid for all sin.

But our sinful nature within us protests: "This can't be! It can't be that easy! There must be something I have to do to become right with God!" Just as we can't handle the truth of the Law, which tells us what we deserve for our sins, we can't handle the truth of the Gospel. The good news of what Jesus has done seems too good. His grace seems too free. The way we receive forgiveness and life through His Word seems too simple.

But how it seems to us does not matter. What matters is whether or not the Gospel message is true. St. Paul says it is, and he received his words from God. He wrote: "*[I]n Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation*" (2Co. 5:19). He said that God sent him to preach to everyone that Jesus brought us back together with God through His death and resurrection.

Paul was sent to preach "*Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1Co. 2:2). He was not sent to preach "Ten Secrets to a Having a Happier Life," or "Five Steps to Becoming a Better Person." He was sent to tell what Jesus had done to save us from sin, death, and hell. He was sent to tell everyone the truth, whether they wanted to hear it or not.

You and I have heard the truth, and we have believed it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Others have heard the truth, and they have ignored it because they prefer the devil's lies instead. The devil's lies are appealing. They agree with our sinful, self-centered thinking. They make us comfortable in our sin and glorify the bad choices we make. But as nice as the devil's lies sound, they all lead to death.

Only Jesus' Word of truth can bring us life. He declared, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death."* What a promise! He says that whoever pays attention to His Word, holds it tightly, guards it in his heart, shall never see death. What the believer has to look forward to is eternal life, life with Jesus, life in His heavenly kingdom with all the saints and angels. Can it really be? *"Truly, truly,"* said Jesus, *"Amen, Amen" – "Yes, yes, it shall be so."*

The unbelieving world will never stop peddling lies in the name of "truth." It will keep trying on new truths to see if the latest one will fit better than the last one. But there is no truth apart from God, and no way to know truth apart from His Word. By the grace of God, you have the truth. You can't handle it, because it is so far above you. But it is still yours.

Rejoice that you have it. Thank God for giving you the truth. Ask Him to help you share the truth with others. And take comfort that the truth of God's love for you in Christ stands today and will stand forever.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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