

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. John 8:46-59: “Jesus Gives the Inheritance That Lasts Eternally.”
March 21/22, 2026 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, our High Priest and our victorious King, wash us by Your blood, and plead for us with the Father, showing Him Your opened side and Your pierced hands. Preserve us in Your kingdom to serve You in true faith and piety. Restrain the enemies of Your Church, both visible and invisible, and keep us unto eternal life. Amen. (*Reading the Psalms with Luther*, CPH, Psa. 21, p. 55)

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 written in 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, the sinless Man, the Truth-teller, the Son of God, who was despised and rejected by the world of sinners, but who still went forward through suffering and death out of love for us to redeem our souls, dear fellow redeemed:

Do you ever think about what it would be like to be related to someone famous? Imagine if you were the child of someone whose name everyone knew. Is that something you would want or not want? On the one hand, it would mean you grew up having whatever you dreamed of, having doors open to you that most people don't even know exist. On the other hand, you would constantly be in the shadow of that famous father or mother, and you might find it difficult to make your own way in life.

One thing we would all agree on is that it is annoying when someone plays a “name card.” This happens even in our small communities: “You should pay attention to me because I am connected to so-and-so. I deserve to have certain privileges because I am this person’s child or grandchild.” As much of a blessing as it is to be related to someone successful, this can become a crutch which keeps that person from taking responsibility for his own life and future.

The same principle applies in spiritual matters. We give thanks to God if we are part of a long line of faithful Christians who have been active in the Christian Church. Our cemeteries are full of faithful people and good names that still stand as an example for us all. But we are not right with God and destined for heaven simply because we belong to the right family or have our membership in the right church.

In Jesus’ exchange with the Jews in today’s Gospel account, He made it clear that lineage alone does not make anyone right with God. The conflict intensified when Jesus said this: *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (Joh. 8:31-32). How could that be controversial? We find these words to be very comforting! But the Jews responded, *“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”* (v. 33).

Never mind the fact that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for the better part of four hundred years, that they spent seventy years as captives in Babylon, and that they were now ruled by the Romans. They said they had never really been slaves because they were descendants of Abraham. No one could take away their glory, they thought, since they were connected by blood to that famous man. As long as they could trace their lineage to Abraham and lived according to God’s law, then God must be pleased with them.

But what made Abraham so great in the first place? He was not great because of what he did but because of what God did through him. Abraham did not build up a nation of people as many as the stars in the heavens by his own will and determination. God waited until he was ninety-nine years old and his wife Sarah was ninety before He gave them the son of promise. Abraham knew where His glory and success came from—it was all from the LORD. Genesis 15 says that *“he believed the LORD, and [the LORD] counted it to him as righteousness”* (v. 6).

That is Abraham’s legacy — not what He did for himself or for God, but what God did for him. By the grace of God, Abraham believed the promise God made. Anyone who claimed a connection to Abraham should be focused on the same thing, but that was not the case with those contending against Jesus. He said to them, *“If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did”* (Joh. 8:39), that is, the works of faith built upon the promise. He told them, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.”* Abraham looked in faith to the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a Savior through his line. Jesus was that Savior.

But many of the Jews, descendants of Abraham, rejected Jesus. This showed that while they may have been physical descendants of Abraham, they were not his spiritual heirs. A rich inheritance had been handed down to them, but they were squandering it. They thought they still had it, but all they had was fool’s gold.

I recently heard that the vast wealth of a rich person is often gone by the third generation, wasted by their grandkids if it even makes it that far. We do not want the same to be said for the great treasure of faith that we have received. Our desire and aim as Christians is faithfully to pass along the holy teaching that has been handed down to us. Just as the management of wealth requires diligence and wisdom, so it is with the riches of God's grace.

We cannot assume that the faith given at our Baptism will always be ours no matter what. We can lose this gift by intentional sinning and a proud attitude that minimizes repentance and the humble receiving of Christ's Word and Sacrament. We can also send the message to our children and grandchildren that other things can take priority over the Word of God, that God and the Church will be there if they need them.

We must "count the cost" of what it means to follow Jesus. Following Jesus does not mean "family first" or "finances first" or "fun first." He does not set the bar low. He says that nothing should come before Him and His Word. That's His requirement. He says: "*any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple*" (Luk. 14:33). He is certainly asking a lot! But He does not ask from us anything He is not prepared to give us.

Think of Abraham: God told him to move away from his family to a strange land and promised to make him into a great nation. But after Abraham moved to Canaan, God made him wait – five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years – until finally He gave him the son of promise. He did not make Abraham wait to torment him. He made Abraham wait to strengthen his faith. That is His plan for you too. He does not promise that trusting His Word will make everything easy for you. He does promise that His Word will not return to Him empty (Isa. 55:11), and that it will bring blessings that continue into eternity.

His Word knocks off the rough edges of your sin that harm yourself and others, it softens your heart to hear the truth, and it guides you from suffering to endurance to character to hope (Rom. 5:3-4). His Word works contrition and repentance in you over your sin, and it increases your desire to do better. His Word comforts you, encourages you, strengthens you. His Word brings you the gifts Jesus won for you – His forgiveness, righteousness, and life. As Jesus told the Jews, His Word of truth sets you free.

He said the same thing in today's reading: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.*" By doubling the word "truly," He wants you to know that what He says is absolutely certain, beyond any doubt. Those who keep His Word – pay attention to it, hold onto it, treasure it above else – will never see death. But how can you know if you have "kept" it well enough? How can you know if your faith and devotion are pure enough?

The key is not to look at yourself or trust what you have done. The key is to trust what Jesus did in your place. He asked the Jews: "*Which one of you convicts Me of sin?*" No one could rightly accuse Him because He never sinned. He never disobeyed the will of His Father. He never used His status before God for selfish reasons. He never took His eye off the goal, which was the salvation of every soul by His atoning death and resurrection.

He came to do for you what you could not do. The Jews in our reading rejected Him because they thought they could do what God required. They thought they were good enough for God. They

thought He was pleased with them because of who they were. By glorifying themselves, they failed to give honor and glory to the One sent by God to save them.

Abraham, whom they were so proud to be connected to, could not have saved them if God sent him back to earth. The same is true of our faithful forefathers. Only the eternal Son of God could save us. God the Father sent His Son to take on the flesh of man, so that He could redeem the world of sinners. He was a blood descendant of Abraham according to His human nature, but He was also infinitely before Abraham as the eternally-begotten Son of the Father. This is why He could declare without any hesitation or exaggeration: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*

Jesus is the great *"I AM,"* the Lord of all creation, the Conqueror of sin, death, and devil. It was His plan from eternity to offer Himself for you, to save your soul. In the waters of Holy Baptism, He joined Himself to you and attached His name to you, so that you became an heir of His eternal riches. You are a dear child of God, not because you have the right human connections or belong to the right family tree. You are His dear child because Jesus died for you and rose again for you, and the Holy Spirit worked faith in you to believe in Him.

This faith comes through His powerful Word. Jesus says, *"Whoever is of God hears the words of God."* Hearing and believing the promises of God is what makes you a spiritual descendant of Abraham. St. Paul writes, *"Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham... [they] are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal. 3:7,9).* You might not ever be connected by blood to someone famous or enjoy earthly wealth in this lifetime, but you already have something far better. You are connected to Jesus by faith, and **Jesus Gives the Inheritance That Lasts Eternally.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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