**Before Abraham Was, I Am**

**John 8:42-59**

Judica – Lent V – 04.03.2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Near the end of our text, Jesus declares to those who are accusing Him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

Many 21st century Christians truly understand what an incredible statement this is. These words throw the Jews into a frenzy, they grab stones to put Jesus to death. Why? Because to them, His words are blasphemy.

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus meant by this statement. He used the word that no pious Jew would even dare speak aloud because it was such a sacred word: The Divine Name of God, that word which is translated into English as “I Am.” Remember that Moses, before the burning bush asked God what His name is. He wanted to know God’s name to give to the Israelites. God had declared, “I AM WHO I AM! Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I Am’ has sent me to you.’” To Jews, to say I AM, is to use God’s name.

In our text, not only did Jesus dare to speak the Divine Name out loud, but He dares to apply this Name to Himself. He was saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I was in existence before Abraham was even born, before he even existed, because I Am. I Am – Yahweh – ego eimi! I Am, God in the flesh."

These men in the temple heard and understood what Jesus was claiming. It was very clear to them, exactly what was at stake. If Jesus’ Word is true, then they are standing face to face with The Holy, Almighty, God – hidden in human flesh.

If this is indeed true, these men ought to fall down in fear and trembling before Him as sinners.

However, if Jesus’ Word is false, then He is taking God's name in vain. If He is lying, He is breaking the 2nd commandment in the most grievous fashion, for He is falsely setting Himself up as God. If that is the case, He is to be destroyed, just like any other idol.

Sad to say, these men in the temple, in their unbelief, drew the wrong conclusion. Christ, the very Word of God in human flesh, proclaimed the truth to them, and they made ready to destroy Him. They did not believe in God, religion was their “job,” their means of earning a living. But by this time, it was business, not faith. And Jesus, by making His claim was not good for business.

When the Word of God confronts sinners, we have two basic responses – belief or unbelief. Belief leads us to recognize that first, we are sinners. And secondly, that we must, in repentance, trust solely in God’s grace for forgiveness.

Unbelief responds in a much different way when confronted with the truth of God’s Word.

Why does unbelief rear its ugly head?

Sometimes, out of fear – fear of God’s wrath and eternal punishment because of sin.

Unbelief wants to believe there is no wrath or that there is no God. This form of unbelief leaves one free to continue in things God declares are sins – things which the unbeliever would rather not give up.

To escape the truth, sometimes unbelief simply tunes out truth, paying no attention to God’s truth whatsoever.

At other times, unbelief challenges God’s Word. Sometimes claiming that what is claimed as God’s truth may have been true for another time, another era, but it is no longer true today.

It can challenge truth by saying, “I know truth in my heart, I am a good Christian.”

Other times the challenge says to truth, “That is just your interpretation.”

Let us label all of these exactly what they are – unbelief.

Belief on the other hand, acknowledges truth and in repentance trusts in God’s grace for forgiveness.

Truth says, “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.”

Belief responds by rising early the next day, saddling a donkey, taking your young men and Isaac, and leaving toward the mountain to do just that.

Let’s be fair though, even fear creeps into the believer. Isaac knew of the pagan practice of those around them, where parents sacrificing children. “Father... Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

Belief responds. “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

Jesus refers to this faith in our text when He says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.”

Abraham’s faith trusted God’s promise – the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

He believed that although he was going to sacrifice his only son Isaac, God would raise him from the dead and he would take him home alive. From the moment God had told him to sacrifice Isaac, in Abraham’s mind, it was as if Isaac were already dead. It is on third day they arrive at Mount Horeb, and God sends Isaac home with his father alive. I pray you make the connection to Jesus, God’s Christ.

Today is Judica Sunday, Judgement Sunday. “Judge me, O God, and plead my cause.” This God has done. Paul explains it in our Epistle, “how much more will the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

Jesus told the Jews that day, “But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 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.”

Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God – the Sacrifice without sin or blemish. He offered Himself to God to purify us – and our consciences from dead works. He alone is different than anybody who has, who is, or who will walk this earth in human flesh. Unlike Him, sin corrupts us completely.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” From before the foundation of the world was laid, Jesus knew the task set before Him. He knew He would be judged guilty of sin – not His own sin, but the sins of the whole world. He who was without sin, became sin for us, bearing our sin in His own flesh - The Lamb sacrificed to free Isaac from death. He is the truth that sets you free from your sin and death.

After proclaiming Himself to be the great I AM, Jesus hid Himself for His time had not yet come. Jesus hid Himself, and not just that day in the temple – in our text. He hid Himself is a commentary on the entire earthly life of Jesus.

Jesus, the very Son of God, hid Himself to save and protect people. He hid His true identity, not fully revealing His divine majesty and glory in the world – for man cannot look upon God’s glory and live.

He hid Himself in our flesh so that as a man, He might fulfill Torah in our stead – and as the Divine-Man He might die in the stead of all men,

Jesus still continues to hide Himself in the world even among us and within you.

Jesus hides Himself in the Word you hear. He is the truth which convicts you of sin and leads you to repentance. He moves you to faith, believing His Word, that you are a sinner in need of His mercy. He is the truth that proclaims your sins forgiven, cleansed in the very flood of blood which flows from His riven side.

Jesus hides Himself in the water of baptism. He unites you to Himself. His death is the death of your sinfulness. His resurrection, raises you to new life – a life of faith that rejoices in hearing His Word. He lives His life in you, bringing glory to His name, and for the benefit of your neighbor. This new life Christ frees you from eternal death.

Jesus hides Himself in bread and wine. You eat and drink His Body and Blood, receiving all the benefits of forgiveness and life which He purchased with His death upon the cross. The great I AM comes to you Himself and blesses you, strengthening your faith to trust Him alone for salvation and life.

Unlike those in the temple that day, you do not need to fear the One who was before Abraham, the great I Am. He is truth, and His judgment is truth. That, dear friends is cause for rejoicing, for it is answer to youf Introit prayer, “Judge me, O God; and plead my cause,” for He is the Lord who has mercy.

“Truly, truly,” Jesus says to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Truer than your sins is the Blood of Christ, which speaks better things than the blood of bulls and goats and calves, for it speaks the truth of your forgiveness – it is your redemption and new life in Christ.

“Truly, truly,” Jesus says to you, “before Abraham was, I AM…” He who washes you clean and redeems you from dead works to serve the living God.

“Truly, truly,” Jesus says to you, “before Abraham was, I AM… and you are mine forever.” Amen.