

# “Who’s Your Father?”

John 8:48-59

May 26, 2013

The Holy Trinity

My son, Andrew, is preaching on this same Gospel lesson at his vicarage congregation in Illinois this morning. (In fact, my other son, Tom, is preaching on this text at his field work congregation, too.) When I saw Andrew last week, we talked about it. He had one concern about the text and that was using the theme he had come up with for the text. I asked him what it was. He said, “Who’s your daddy?” He felt, as a vicar, that he probably couldn’t get away with saying something like that. As a pastor for the past 30 years, I think I *can* get away with using that phrase. It’s an accurate, albeit flippant, way of expressing the main question this text. We might change it to be: “Who’s your Father?”

The text, as we have it today, is unfortunately only the very end of a conflict between the Jews and Jesus which has been escalating over the past couple of chapters in the Gospel of John. The questions being asked were: Who is Jesus and who is His Father? Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths. This was a major Jewish holiday commemorating God leading the Israelites through the wilderness after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. For eight days, Jews would leave their houses and live in tents to remember this great event. The festival emphasized God’s providence of food, water, and shelter. In chapter 7, it says, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him *come to me* and drink. Whoever believes *in me*, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.”(John 7:37-39) These are some big claims. Jesus is putting Himself in God’s place and promising to do now what God had done for the Israelites long ago.

Another emphasis of this festival was the great night of lights when many torches were lit in Jerusalem and the light shone out on the pilgrims camping in tents outside the city walls. In doing so,

the people remembered how God had led them by a pillar of fire at night. What does Jesus do in response to this divine light? He says, “*I am* the light of the world. Whoever *follows me* will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) This is another huge claim made by Jesus about His true identity. God is light. Jesus claims to be light. This means Jesus is....well, you can connect the dots.

When asked about His claim, Jesus brings up God the Father. He says, “I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” (John 8:18) When the Jews ask where his Father is, Jesus says something about them – “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” The Jews understood this as a reference to God, but in a very unique way. Whereas the Jews would refer to God as “our Father”, Jesus calls Him, “my Father.” Hmmmmm!

Jesus then ups the ante. He makes claims about what He is there to do. To the Jews who had always relied upon the words of Moses to save them, Jesus says, “If you abide in *my word*, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31) He goes on to say, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” So Jesus is saying He is the Son of the Father who has the message and the power to save people. Wow!

The Jews have a response, “We have Abraham as our father.” Jesus replies, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did (trusting God’s promises), but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.” (John 8:39-40)

The Jews try to zing him by saying, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God.” This was a slur aimed at the fact (apparently common knowledge) that Joseph was not Jesus’ natural father. In response to their claim that God was their Father, Jesus says, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here...Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the

devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, had 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."

(John 8:42-45) Ouch!

The Jews fire back in the beginning of our text: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48) In other words, you're a heretic like the Samaritans. And we are not the ones who serve the devil. You are demon possessed!

Jesus cuts right to the chase. He says that He is only honoring the Father who sent Him. He is not seeking His own glory. The Father would glorify him and in a most unusual way which neither Jesus' enemies or His friends understood at the time. Right before leaving the Upper Room on that first Maundy Thursday to go to Gethsemane, the Jewish Council, Pilate's Praetorium, and finally to Golgotha, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him." (John 13:31) In His death on the cross, Jesus would be glorified by His Father for carrying out His will as the sacrifice for the sin of the world. Through that, something very special would happen. Jesus says in our text, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

The Jews just go nuts! They can't believe what they are hearing. "What? Not taste death? Are you greater than Abraham? He died! Are you greater than the prophets? They died!" Jesus says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." They reply, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" And here's where it all comes to a climax. Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus is using the Divine Name given to Moses at Sinai ("I AM has sent you!") and is saying very clearly and unambiguously, "I am God!" The Jews get what he is saying. They pick up stones to kill him for blasphemy. Jesus has called His Father, God. Jesus has called Himself, God. He has also claimed to be the one through whom the Holy Spirit is given and received. This is very radical stuff here.

Who is YOUR Father? Is he the Father of the Jews? Is He the Father of Jesus? The Jews were very religious and very moral, but Jesus said their Father was the devil. Why? They rejected God's action in sending Jesus Christ. They did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. By their sinful action and their lack of faith, it was evident that they did not possess the Holy Spirit.

Many people today live in the same way. They deny that God is Father who created everything and who holds everyone to a standard of conduct which is summarized in the Ten Commandments. They refuse to believe that God is the Son, Jesus Christ, who came into this world to make amends for their sins by dying on the cross and to become the only way for people to come to God. They will not accept that God is the Holy Spirit who alone brings them to faith in the only true God and helps them to live God pleasing lives. No matter how nice or even religious such people are, when they refuse to believe the truth of who God is and what He has done, they have only the devil, the father of lies, as their father. When they finally meet God on the Last Day it will not be pleasant.

But you are different. God the Holy Spirit has worked in your lives. In baptism, the Holy Spirit entered your life and claimed you for His own. He washed away your sins and gave you the gift of faith in your Savior, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In addition to having the forgiveness of all your sins, you have Christ's holiness and perfect obedience credited to your account. As Scripture says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). As such, you are able to stand before the Almighty God and face Him, not as angry Judge (which you deserve), but as kind loving Father (which you don't deserve). You have His grace and favor throughout your lives on earth. You will share His Paradise for all eternity in heaven.

On this Holy Trinity Sunday, we remember that there is only one God who is yet three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the unity of the trinity. But it is more than a dry doctrine to be confessed in a lengthy creed which we only use this day (the Athanasian Creed). It is a reality which we experience by the grace of God the Father, through the work of God the Son, Jesus Christ, in the

power of God the Holy Spirit. We are God's children. He is not only Jesus' Father, but He is our Father. Jesus is our Brother and Savior. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter and Helper. The Triune God lives in us and through us. He is ours and we are His forever. Amen.