

Judica

17 March, Anno Domini 2013

St. John 8:46-59

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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What is an almost sure sign that someone knows they have lost a discussion or argument? They begin throwing around insults and attacking the person rather than using reason or logic or facts to talk about the idea. I imagine you've been on the receiving end of one of these conversations and if we're all honest, we've also been the one slinging the mud at times, because we know we are wrong but our pride simply won't let us admit it. We see it all the time in politics – candidates resorting to character assassination when they are afraid to operate in the arena of ideas. Teenagers are extremely good at this art – making personal attacks rather dealing with whatever it is that is bothering them. How many parents have heard “You just don't understand” or “You don't care” when their children know they have lost the argument and can't punch holes in the facts. Pride is more interested in victory than in truth – especially when that truth has consequences for us.

“Which one of you accuses me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?” It was a simple question but the reaction it drew showed that Jesus' opponents knew that they were trapped, they had lost the debate. They couldn't accuse Jesus of sin because He didn't have any. They had tried time and again to trip up Jesus and use his own words against Him. But it never worked. They tried to argue with His teaching but they couldn't. It wasn't because they were dumb. These were some of the wisest and most learned men of the Jewish faith. The problem was that Jesus spoke the truth – about everything – and they couldn't refute it. He was right. There were no holes in His arguments. There was nothing Jesus said that they could point to and say “See, that is not what God said!” That's why the only response the Jews had that day was to call Jesus names. To call Jesus a Samaritan was to say that He was not one of God's people, that He was one of those half-breeds who had messed up the true worship of God. And if that weren't insulting enough, they decided to go one step further and accuse Him of actually being in league with Satan.

The REAL problem is that the truth has consequences. If what Jesus had done and taught didn't have any consequences, if believing in Jesus meant that you still go about things as you always have then no one would ever have been upset with Jesus. The Pharisees and Sadducees wouldn't have worked so hard to prove Jesus

wrong. They wouldn't have been so filled with rage and hatred that they picked up stones in order to kill Him.

But Jesus' words DO have consequences – primarily two. The first consequence is that we cannot save ourselves. We are so lost in our sin and jaded by selfishness that we could never hope to love God or our neighbor as we should – perfectly. Day after day we are confronted with thoughts that would cause us so much shame if anyone found out about them. God knows. Every decision finds us wrestling with our desire to protect ourselves and make sure that we get what we think we deserve, as though God our Father is a liar when He promises to take care of all our needs. Like the daily sacrifices of the old covenant, Jesus' words hold up to our eyes the hard reality that we are not as good as we want to believe and that no matter how hard we try it will never be enough to pay for the guilt of our sin. No amount of volunteering, no amount of self-loathing, no amount of serving could ever make God love us. Or as St. Paul said “By works of the Law will no man living be justified.” You cannot do your way to heaven. That's not what the Jews wanted to hear, because that was the heart of their butchering of the true faith. And it's not what we want to hear because the idea that we can and must contribute to our salvation is second nature to our sinful Old Adam. So the first consequence of believing what Jesus says is to believe “I cannot do it. I can't earn God's love. I can't be good enough. What I deserve is God's punishment. If I am going to be saved, God is going to have to do ALL of the work. He is going to have to earn my salvation and He is going to have to bring me to believe that He's done it. I need mercy.”

But that isn't the only consequence of Jesus' teaching. The second and truly wonderful consequence of Jesus' teaching is found in Abraham's words to his son Isaac as they made their way up the mountain – “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” God will provide the sacrifice for sin. Can you imagine the excruciating agony and doubt that must have been flooding Abraham's heart and mind? Isaac was a miracle baby. And God had promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Isaac. That was God's promise and now Abraham is carrying the knife that would end Isaac's life and the fire that would consume Isaac's body and dear Isaac is carrying the very wood that he would have to lie on and be slain. “But you promised God! How can you ask this of me?” And then Isaac's question “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” That had to be like a searing hot knife in Abraham's own heart. The only lamb Abraham knew of was the one walking beside him. And while it may have only been by it's fingernails, Abraham's faith in God's promise drove his steps up the mountain of sacrifice.

“God will provide for himself the lamb...” At the moment, Abraham didn’t understand just how true those words were. In the last second, when the knife was in the air, God DID provide himself a different lamb. Abraham’s beloved son was spared. And in that day Abraham saw the day of Jesus’, when God the Father would take His only Son up what many believe to be the same mountain, and not spare Him but offer Him up as a sacrifice – for Abraham, for Isaac, for you, for me, for all of humanity. There was no “other” lamb. This time the Son, the only-begotten, sinless Son of God was laid on the altar of the cross and offered His life for ours in payment for our sins. That is the second and truly wonderful consequence of believing Jesus’ teaching - knowing that your life has been spared. God has provided His dear Lamb to take your place in death. The first consequence, the punishment that you deserve for your disobedience and the times that you closed your ears to God’s word because it cost you what you wanted, has been laid on Jesus. Everything that Jesus taught, every demon he drove out, every disease He healed, every dead body He raised to life were to show us this glorious truth – God has come to have mercy on sinners and to save us from eternal judgment. God provided the only truly acceptable Lamb to take your place under His righteous judgment and you have been set free. God knew that you couldn’t carry the weight of your sin so He took from you and carried it Himself to Golgotha.

Jesus’ always speaks the truth – the truth that brings you eternal life. He speaks that truth again today in your hearing. He spoke that truth at your Baptism when He washed you clean and proclaimed before heaven and earth that you are a forgiven and dear child of the heavenly Father. He speaks that truth every time you confess your sins and He gladly and without an ounce of hesitation says “Your sins are forgiven.” He speaks that truth today when He offers to you the very Body and Blood that were given and shed on Mt. Golgotha for the forgiveness of all your sins. Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away your sin.

There are consequences to believing Jesus. I pray those consequences are yours each and every day.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.