

## Lent Day 16

Saturday March 3, 2018

### Reading: John 8:31-59

<sup>57</sup> “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

<sup>58</sup> “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” <sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

### Reflection

Earlier we talked about the importance of knowing who Jesus was and is. This theme carries on in today’s passage. Jesus is continuing to sift Israel, ensuring that her faith is pure. So after loosing many disciples he begins to stir up the remaining one. He uses a word which they take offence to: free, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, **and the truth will set you free.**” They are children of Abraham, chosen by God, so they understand themselves to be free already — why would they need Jesus’s word to be free? They are with him because he is a good teacher (rabbi), he seems to be revolutionary (remember the temple?) so they want to be near by, and he has God’s anointing on him to do miraculous works so they want to be with the prophet. Yet, that’s all their choice and they have that within their current system — they are the chosen people of Abraham.

Actually, says Jesus, you’re not children of Abraham. Instead, you are slaves of sin. Paul echoes Jesus’s teaching in Romans one and two when he describes Gentiles being bound up in sin and then turns to Israel and says, you’re in the same boat. There Paul uses legal language saying the whole world (Jew and Gentile) stand in the dock, guilty and with no defence left. Of course, Israel, and the rest of the world, are not meant to be slaves, particularly to sin, but to be the free children and heirs. Jesus says that’s why I have come: to make you free. As he unpacks this it becomes more and more clear that the understanding of Jesus and the understanding of the people are quite divergent.

Finally, Jesus says if you are children of Abraham then act like him. After all children ought to reflect their parents, i.e. family resemblance. He also says there’s a resemblance but not to Abraham. The he tells them that Abraham looked forward to the Messiah’s day (he says his day), he saw it and was glad. This raises an appropriate question of how Abraham who lived so long ago could have seen Jesus’s day — Abraham has been long dead. Then Jesus turns the whole world right upside down and he says, “Before Abraham was, I am.” I AM is (one of) the translations of God’s proper name that he revealed to Moses at the burning bush when sending him to Egypt to *free* his people. In other words, Jesus is not only the deliverer (Moses), but he is also the sender (Israel’s God). Little wonder they pick up stones on the spot to kill him.

The more important thing to note is what this claim does for the conversation. If Jesus is the I AM, then he is the covenant maker so if he says you must continue in my word it has the force, you must continue in my Law (they are slaves to sin and sin is violation of God’s Law). This mean every word from Jesus’s mouth is true (truth shall set you free) and there is not divergent paths, but only one path.

How this all lands for us is, we are in the same boat as Israel. We are slaves to sin. Now some of us have been in church for a long time. Maybe we were baptized as infants, we were good boys and girls, and while we’ve sinned some small sin there hasn’t been anything outlandish. Jesus confronts us and our

system of why we should already be counted as free. You need to continue in my word, then you will know the truth (Jesus), and the truth shall set you free. As Paul did, we need to let go of anything we count in our favour as righteousness to hold onto the greater righteousness of Christ. Only this way can we be moved from slaves to children of God.

### **Prayer**

The great I AM, thank you for coming in our sinful human flesh to deliver us and to deliver to us your living word of life. Help us to shed our dependance on our own righteousness and to grasp onto the salvation that comes only from your son Jesus. Amen.