

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
The Holy Trinity C
June 12, 2022
John 8:48-59

Jesus Is "I Am"

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58 ESV)

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

This is the name that was placed upon us in Baptism. It identifies who we are and Whose we are. We are sinners for whom Jesus died. We are sinners who are forgiven for Jesus' sake. We are children of God through faith in Christ and His redeeming work. We are made holy through the work of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Ps. 118:24).

Yes, this is a day to rejoice. For this is the day on which we hear and confess the most offensive teaching there is – the Holy Trinity. Perhaps YOU were offended by the words that began the Creed, "Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith." Some take offense at the words, "This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved." And then there are those who are offended by something else, or even everything else, in between. And yet, everything the Creed confesses is true. If we are offended by the Creed, the problem is not with the Creed, but with us. That's why it's good for us to celebrate the Festival of the Holy Trinity.

To be sure, we cannot understand the Holy Trinity. We cannot explain the Holy Trinity. We can only confess the Holy Trinity as He is revealed to us in Holy Writ. We can only rejoice and praise the Holy Trinity and thank Him for all His benefits, the chief of which is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And yet, even as we focus on the Holy Trinity, our attention turns to Jesus. For it is Jesus who reveals the Trinity to us. We can't know the Father except through the Son. We can't come to the Father, except through the Son He sent to be our Savior. Thus to give glory to God (or the Father) is to give glory to His Son, and vice versa. And if it seems the Holy Spirit gets forgotten, it's only because He directs us to Christ Jesus. For Jesus is the One who gave His life for us to restore us to life.

And as we hear about Jesus, we can't help but remember His humanity. Though conceived by the Holy Spirit, He's born of the Virgin Mary. He ate, He drank, He slept. He grew in size and knowledge. He had emotions – He exhibited anger, He mourned, He wept. He suffered, bled, and died. Yes, Jesus was fully human in every way, yet, without sin.

In today's Gospel, the Jews take offense at Jesus because they accept His humanity, and nothing more. They see Him standing right in front of them. That's why they don't like what He says. Throughout chapter 8 Jesus is conversing with the Jews, especially "the Jews who had believed in Him." (John 8:31). And in the course of that conversation, the Jews claim to be Abraham's children, as if that was something to brag about. Yet, Jesus tells them that they are the devil's children (John 8:44), and that's why they don't hear God's words (8:47). And the best they can say in response is to call Jesus a Samaritan and say that He has a demon. They don't have a good answer, so they call Him names.

What's their problem? They simply could not accept that Jesus is divine, that He is, in fact, God. It was beyond their ability to believe. And besides, if Jesus really was divine, if He really was God, then they would be left with no choice but to listen to Him and do what He says. And since they didn't want to do that, they, in effect, want to be their own god. And things are no different today. Many people are happy to accept Jesus the man. They may say He's a good, moral teacher, a prophet even, but they don't necessarily feel obligated to listen to Him. They're willing to use Him to promote whatever social cause they choose, even as they ignore other things He says. They too want to be god, and thus show themselves to also be children of the devil.

Yet, Jesus claims that before Abraham was, I AM. He thus claims to be eternal, without beginning and without end. He claimed for Himself the divine name that God had given to His covenant people as He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt. As Moses trembled with the prospect of his demanding the release of the Israelites, he had asked God to tell him the name of the God who would set them free. And God said, My name is "Yahweh," which is translated "I AM." And it is only those enlightened by the Spirit who believe Jesus' divinity and listen to Him.

In their unbelief, those Jews took up stones to throw at Him, to kill Him. But Jesus' time had not yet come. Today, people throw verbal stones of contempt at anyone who preaches the cross, resurrection, and eternal reign of our Lord. They ridicule those who claim that Jesus is the only Savior of the world and the only way to heaven. They despise anyone who would accuse them of sin against God and label them as bigoted, close-minded, mean-spirited, hateful, or worse. They refuse to believe what is confessed in the Creed.

But unbelief doesn't change the truth. Jesus is the Great I AM. He stands, even today, as the pivotal figure in all of history. And His Word continues to confront and confound the world, even as it did in that day. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is God Incarnate, God in the flesh. The Word who was in the beginning, who was with God, and who was God, became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14).

And as the Holy Spirit has led us to believe that, we have the greatest gift of all. For in Jesus, we have the one true God doing the unthinkable. He became one of us, one with us, to redeem us, to save us. The One in whom was life, gave up His life so that we who deserve nothing but death, might live. And He did all this in willing obedience to His Father and boundless love for

us, so that we, who are by nature children of wrath, might become the children of God. And so we are! Consider how beautifully this is stated in the Lenten hymn, "The sinless Son of God must die in sadness; The sinful child of man may live in gladness; Man forfeited his life and is acquitted; God is committed." (LSB 439.5).

What blessed grace! What blessed truth! We have a Savior who took our place under God's wrath, suffering all that we deserve because of our sin. We have a Savior who took our sin upon Himself and died in our place so that we may be brought from death to life. We have a Savior who rose from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity so that we too might live in the presence of God forever. Our blessedness knows no bounds!

And lest you think Jesus gets too much of the attention or the glory, know this: It is only through the Son that we know the Father. Even the disciples struggled with this. But Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). So if you want the Father, receive the Son. If you want to hear God's words, listen to the Son. Take His words to heart. Rejoice in His saving work and words.

And though we distinguish between the persons of the Trinity, they are one – one in essence, one in purpose – and they are for us and for our salvation. God is not and cannot be divided. He cannot be parceled out. Jesus, the Great I AM has redeemed your soul by suffering and dying on that cursed cross. And the Father sent the Spirit in Jesus' name to teach us these saving truths, and to give us faith in them. And this faith is no mere notion in our minds or hearts, but is a flesh and blood reality we taste and see in the bread and wine.

And the resurrection of our own bodies, and the face-to-face fellowship we will experience will be just as real, just as substantial as the name and doctrine of the triune God we worship and adore. God grant you such blessedness now and forever.

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

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener