

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John, and it is the text appointed to be read on Trinity Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. The LSB three-year lectionary does not appoint this text to be read ever. Likely the 80s considered this incident to be too...edgy.

As was the case last week, where the reading begins with Jesus' answer to a question put to Him by the Good Judas, and we found ourselves looking to the question to better understand the answer to it, so here, in order to get the full effect of this exchange between Jesus as "The Jews," we must look at what was said and done leading up to what we have before us today.

Today's reading is the culmination of a full chapter of contentiousness between them and Jesus, and it begins with the Scribes and Pharisees sticking their noses into the classroom of Jesus, presenting to Him a woman caught in adultery, telling Him what Moses said to do with the woman, asking Him for His opinion on the matter. John tells us that these men were not seekers after a good theological discussion, but asked the question to "test" Jesus, because they hoped to bring a charge against Him.

If you've ever been a teacher, then you know how incredibly annoying it is to have somebody barge into your classroom, unannounced, and sort of disrupt your lesson. If this would have been me, I would have likely summarily booted these interlopers and gotten on with it. Jesus doesn't do that, but He had to have been just a little bit put off at the extreme rudeness of these religious leaders and their disrespect of Him.

He addresses the adultery issue in a masterful way, and then began preaching and teaching "them," whom seem to be a mixed audience of believers and others. He talks a lot about His Father, and the relationship of the Father to Him, the Son. He talks of going away and coming back, a theme that will come up occasionally for several chapters in John. As the conversation unfolds, it heats up, and has people discussing the parentage of others and calling them liars.

Abraham is very prominent in this exchange. In the thirty-third verse of this chapter, the Jews first mentioned his name, and the name "Abraham" is mentioned no fewer than eleven times between then and the end of this text, twenty-six verses later. Who was or was not a descendent of Abraham was important for the Jews of the time of Jesus, and in the modern Middle East we can see remnants – or maybe an escalation – of the import being able to claim Abraham as an ancestor.

We should talk briefly, but not extensively, about whom was a Samaritan. In order to do that, we need to know about the Samaritans in the time of Jesus, and if you want to make it more real for the hearer today, inform them that there are still Samaritans – but not very many of them – around today. You can read about them in books, or you can go to their web site. The

inclination of the preacher will be to learn about these people and then to tell the people in the pew everything you learned about them, and it may not be *only* to show them how smart you are.

The Samaritans are a part of the story, but actually only a small part of the story, so keep it that way. In like manner, since the subject of demons comes up in this text, people need to understand what a demon is, and if you remind them that demons are good angels gone bad, they will get that. Briefly talk about demons today, noting such basics as; they are still around, they actively assist Satan in targeting Christians, and they are in the U.S. It's hard to quantify such a thing, but it seems to me as if demonic activity is on the rise here, as Christianity wanes.

In preaching this text, we may want to note that this whole thing begins with the woman who the religious leaders want to execute by stoning. It might be a good idea to explain stoning; when I was a kid we threw rocks at each other all the time, and nobody died. Death by stoning was much more severe than the mere throwing of rocks, and the victim ended up on the ground with stone piled on, which eventually crushed him.

I'm going to watch the movie *The Stoning of Soyaya M*, from "a producer of The Passion of the Christ," to see how they depict a stoning. The story that begins with the imminent stoning of a woman ends with Jesus imminent stoning, a wonderful metaphor for the Vicarious Atonement; that He took our place in suffering, death and hell so that we would not have to do that ourselves.

Textual Notes

48. We have talked before about the term "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – the Jews" as it is used by John; it means those of His own who oppose Jesus, Who is a Jew. Here these men make two accusations against Jesus; that He is a Samaritan, and that He has a demon. It's not so much what they say, but how they say it. They call Him names, and they claim the moral high ground in the process, rhetorically asking "οὐ καλῶς – do we not rightly" say that you are those things? Okay, so it's what they said as well as the way that they said it.

The word "καλῶς" is an adverb that has connotations of a nobleness, excellence, and honor. They think very highly of themselves for resorting to the easiest of logical fallacy; name calling. Their beginning the sentence with "οὐ" means that they are expecting a positive answer to their question (FGG 281). They don't really expect Jesus to affirm that He is the one thing and that He has the other thing. Given what has taken place in the discussion leading up to this, they are just being really nasty.

If you look at the map, you will see that Galilee, the home of Jesus, borders Samaria, home of Samaritans. You might say that those who call Jesus a "Samaritan" are just geographically confused, sort of like my brother-in-law's Chicago family who say that he lives in Iowa, even though he lives on the Illinois side of The River, but much more likely, these men are calling Jesus that name for the same reason that boys call other boys the "n" word. Well, at least that's what some of the boys did when I was growing up. If they don't use that particular word anymore, then I'm sure they have another.

This is not the first time the subject of demons has come up. A short time previous to this (7:20), right after Jesus talks about authority and then says that people want to kill or destroy Him, “the people” said that Jesus had a demon. Just previous to this (44) Jesus has spoken to these men of their “father the devil.” While calling Him by an ethnic slur is simply insult, to say that one has a demon or has the devil for a father is a theological issue, and a pretty serious issue at that.

Nor will it be the last time Jesus is said to have a demon. Later on, John records two more times that people said that Jesus had a demon. John likes irony, and is there anything more ironic than the pure Son of God, the creator of angels, upon whom the Holy Spirit came at His Baptism, being accused of that? The synoptic writers, who are not as fond of irony, also record several instances where Jesus is accused of being on the other side or having a demon.

49. The man Who once said, “let your yes be yes and your no be no,” now responds to the accusation very simply; “ἐγὼ δαιμόνιον οὐκ ἔχω – I don’t have a demon,” because He doesn’t. Far from it (ἀλλὰ) He honors (τιμῶ) His Father, a point that He has been trying to hammer home to them, but to no avail. Using the same verb with a negator, He now points out the self-evident, that they are dishonoring Him, Jesus. What else would you call it when a person is called an ethnic slur and then say He has a demon?

Logically, their dishonoring of Him, who is the Son, is a dishonoring of the Father, and they have already had extensive discussion about who is whose father. Jesus has already asserted that He is the Son from the Father, and these people are from their “father the devil.” He does not respond to the charge of being a Samaritan for the same reason that one should not respond to being called an ethnic slur that one is clearly not. How would you respond, by saying “no, I’m not (ethnic slur),” and what would be the point?

50. To remain sufficiently humble must have been a problem for Jesus. I know people who are sinners, not very talented, not likeable people, or all of those things, and they still have a hard time staying humble. Jesus was sinless, talented, and I think likeable. Being all of those things would have inevitably brought charges of pride from people who are not Jesus, but who would have been proud had they been Jesus, so they naturally figure He must be too. Go figure.

Now He insists that it’s not about Him, but it’s about His Father, which is odd because I tell people that it’s about Jesus. He says that He does not “seek my glory – ζητῶ τὴν δόξαν μου,” and then says that there “is one who seeks and judges – ἐστὶν ὁ ζητῶν καὶ κρίνων.” That One has to be the Father, and by saying this, He is telling His accusers that He will not be judged by them, but by the Father, who “seeks” Him who has, I think, been accused of “seeking” glory for Himself.

51. He continues with a conditional statement about those who “should (subjunctive) keep my word – ἐὰν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήσῃ.” We have heard Him saying similar things in recent lectionary readings, and we note here that the things recorded in this text come before the things recorded in those readings. The best definition for the verb “τηρέω – to hold” is the one given by Pr. Vic Young at Winkel yesterday, “to hold something close to you; to treasure it.”

The concept is similar to such things as “read, mark, and inwardly digest” and “write these words on your doorposts, etc” that are said about The Word. The means by which your people will best be able to do that; hold the words of Jesus close to them, treasuring them, is if the pastor proclaims, teaches, and explains that Word to them. Give them something to hold on to, and maybe in preaching on this point talk about things that we hold close to us. The Law is that you hold the Word close to you. The Gospel is that the closely held Word proclaims to you the saving work of Jesus.

Doing that, holding that Word close to your bosom, “θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – you will never see eternal death.” The verb is in the third person singular, and is followed by a double negative to emphasize the complete absence of the Christian seeing death. We know that we are all going to die, and the conditional promise is not that you can avoid that, but that you will avoid the more permanent death that lasts for an eternity, and instead welcome eternal life.

52. Those who oppose Him misunderstand. Every once in a while somebody will caution me against saying something because of the possibility that people might misunderstand what I’m trying to say or even be led to believe something heretical. For example, one time I quoted Ignatius of Antioch, who liked to refer to the Sacrament as “the medicine of immortality,” a metaphor that I love, and when I quoted that metaphor another pastor cautioned me that such language could lead people to believe heretical things.

Tell that to Ignatius. Tell it to Jesus, who here speaks the truth about Jesus, and when He speaks the truth, His words confirm in the minds of His enemies that He indeed does have a demon, which is not true. Does that mean that Jesus shouldn’t have said that, or that He should have said it differently?

These men correct that silly Jesus, explaining that Abraham – who had been part of the earlier conversation – had, in fact, died, and so have all The Prophets, and then they quote the words of Jesus back to Him exactly. Well, almost exactly. What Jesus had said was that those who keep His word would not “see – θεωρήσῃ” death. They quote Him as saying that those people would not “taste – γεύσῃται” death.

53. We noted earlier that a question that begins with “οὐ” expects a positive answer. This question, which begins with “μὴ,” expects a negative answer. They ask “are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?” Taken at face value, most people – I for example – would indeed have to answer that question in the negative. On another level, when it comes to the subject of dying, we are all equal; we all equally die. Death is the great equalizer. (The Internet doesn’t know who first said that, so it’s not in quotations.)

Jesus, however, is throwing around passes to eternal life and telling people that they will never see death. Not waiting for Him to answer their first question, they ask another question, another one of their questions that’s actually a statement. That question, “τίνα σεαυτὸν ποιεῖς; – who do you make yourself?” sounds a lot like “just who do you think you are, anyway?” In their minds, and in the minds of most contemporaries, they were the alpha male, and Jesus was a guy from Nazareth who could preach and teach.

54. Another conditional sentence, this time Jesus talking about Jesus, using the word “if” and the subjunctive mood, saying that, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing – ἐὰν ἐγὼ δοξάσω ἑμαυτόν, ἡ δόξα μου οὐδὲν ἐστίν.” When Jesus glorifies Himself, He is only speaking the truth, and it does mean something, but not everybody sees it that way. To these men, when Jesus glorifies Himself, “it is nothing,” i.e. they aren’t buying it.

On one level, nobody likes to hear anybody toot their own horn, but on a more basic level, they just don’t believe the Jesus is who Jesus thinks and says He is. On yet another level, Jesus is recognizing those things, and that His words are about self are not going to make a dent in this scribal, pharisaical armor. They are not His sheep (chapter ten), they don’t recognize His voice, and they will not listen to what He has to say about Himself.

So He uses logic, which appeals to the brain, which God created, which likes to think, which thinks all the time, to make the argument that if they aren’t going to listen to Him, Whom they hate, then they ought to listen to His Father, Whom Jesus says that He is their God, and Whom they have recently claimed is their Father. “My Father glorifies me, whom y’all say that He is our God – ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι θεὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν,”

A recent trip to Alabama and the viewing of *America’s Secret Slang*, a show about idioms, on *History* have caused me to consider making “y’all” part of my vocabulary. The English language used to distinguish between the singular “you – thou” and the plural “you – ye,” but no more, and the last vestiges of the distinction died with the King Jimmy Bible, so unless you know Greek, English readers can’t tell whether the “you” they are looking at is singular or plural.

When the show did mini-interviews with Southerners about the idiom “y’all,” they were all extremely insistent that the word is always used in the plural number and never in the singular. So in this regard, Southern English is more clear than Yankee English, and I am of the opinion that clear is better than muddled when it comes to language. Northerners, this may be the only thing we can learn from Southerners – well, there’s also pulled pork and fried chicken – but we should be open to instruction.

When we’re on the road, we like to find the local channel and watch the local news on the TV in the evening or morning, and when we turned on Fox, Montgomery, AL a couple of weeks ago. I noticed that the local news people were talking normal. Now I get it, that the national news people talk normal as a matter of course, but the locals have always talked with the local dialect – Wisconsinites are very aware of this.

Bottom line; Southerners seem to be trying, at least at Fox, Montgomery, to come into the mainstream of American English, and even though we won the war, maybe we can see ourselves clear to adapt good things from them; good manners, a generally more chilled and less frenzied demeanor, a general non-hatred of our religion, and the term “y’all,” which is always used in the plural, and never in the singular.

55. They may make the claim that God is their God, “but y’all have not known Him – καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν.” The verb is in the perfect tense, indicating that their non-knowledge about God goes back some ways, and continues to the present. Using the same perfect tense, claiming the opposite for Himself from them, He says that “ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν – I know Him.”

Throughout this conversation, they have clearly wanted Jesus to stop saying what He was saying about Himself, in much the same way as people these days want you Christians to stop saying what you say about Him, in much the same way as Christian people want their pastor to stop saying certain things. We can’t do that, and neither could Jesus, and this is where the rubber hits the road for Absolutists like us. We have to say what we have to say, because what we say is true. We take our lead from Jesus.

Still using Logic, the science of correct thinking, He points out that if He should say that He does not know the Father, then “I would be, like you, a liar – ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης.” When one is speaking to another, he may insult him, he may hit him with an ethnic slur, and he may call him a name. What we have here is a man very bluntly calling a spade a spade, telling these people that they are liars, which they are, and that he is not, and He’s not.

Using the emphatic “but” to emphatically separate Himself and His beliefs from theirs and them, He says “ἀλλὰ οἶδα αὐτόν καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ – but I know Him, and I treasure his Word.” Jesus, Whom John calls “the Word,” learns the Word, teaches the Word, and treasures the Word, understanding the Word to be from God the Father, and therefore a thing that merits all of those things.

56. Earlier, these men had boasted in their descent from Abraham, and to be sure, they were biological descendants of him, even though having him as their “father” did not have the spiritual implications that they thought it did. Here Jesus acknowledges their pedigree, and points out that Abraham “rejoiced greatly to see my day, and seeing it, he rejoiced – ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη.” Abraham knew of the coming Christ, and Jesus is He.

57. Because of that statement, “The Jews” point out to Jesus that Abraham has not been around for quite some time, and that Jesus is younger than fifty years old. You would expect them to then ask how it is that Abraham knew Jesus, but they don’t. Instead, they ask how Jesus has seen (perfect tense) Abraham “Ἀβραὰμ ἐώρακας – Abraham you have seen?” a very different question.

58. He escalates the conflict by claiming that, “before Abraham was (had become), I am – πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί.” It is, of course, the double entendre, another favorite figure of John, that cause these men conclude that Jesus needs to be stoned. The phrase “ἐγὼ εἰμί – I am,” is a pronoun and the present tense form of the verb “to be,” and it is also that “personal name” of God, the one first revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Moses asked who He should say was sending him, and God answered “tell them ‘I am’ has sent you.”

59. We have talked before about the cults who teach that Jesus is not God, and that Jesus did not think Himself to be God, but that His followers made that stuff up after the fact. Clearly, Jesus

thinks that He is God, and clearly these men think that Jesus thinks that He is God, because they want to execute Him by stoning, which is what you do with a blasphemer. Do not think it a small thing to execute a man by stoning.

What He does next sort of validates everything that He has been saying. “Being hidden, He went out of the Temple, through their midst, and was passing by them – ἐκρύβη, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν, καὶ παρῆγεν οὕτως.” In a manner reminiscent of what happened when the hometown folks went to throw Him off of a cliff, Jesus walks in a miraculous manner through their midst and on His merry way.

It is not yet “time,” but later on, when the “time” is right, they will arrest Him, put Him on trial, accuse Him of blasphemy for saying that He is God, and make the charges stick. His punishment will not be execution by stoning, but by crucifixion, a much more cruel way to die. And in that death and resurrection, He will be glorified.

Law/Gospel

Jews/True Jews - Getting to heaven by one's pedigree has never worked. Nor has obeying the Ten Commandments been an effective way to gain salvation. And yet it was this very formula that those in the day of Jesus were using toward that end. We don't have as much of that in our church body as we used to, but it's still there. The good news is that the “true Jew,” according to Jesus and the writers of the Epistles, is the one who receives the gifts that Messiah has to offer. This is good news for the non-Jews in your congregation, i.e. almost all, if not all of them. Promise/Fulfilled - The Incarnation of the eternal Second Person of the Trinity has been looked forward to for the entire Old Testament. He is now here.

gods/God - Man is by nature religious. It's why all people, historically as well as currently, have religion. It goes against human nature not to have a religion, to be an atheist. With the presence of the Protestants, besides the Lutherans and Roman Catholics, America has always been a place of religious diversity. We are now more diversified now than we have ever been. Perhaps the most alarming religion - and there are lots of them - is what I call the “Generic Christian,” who sort of has his or her individualized religion. In that sort of religion, who is your god? The Good News is that we know the true God, who “predestined (us) before the foundations of the earth” to be His own. We don't know why He chose us, no more than we know why He chose Abraham or any of the rest, but we can be comforted in that knowledge and rejoice in it.

stoned/stoned - The woman caught in adultery is about to be killed by stoning. Jesus steps in and she is saved from death. After some conversation the same people want to kill Jesus by stoning. They do not succeed because His time has not yet come, but they will succeed, but not by stoning. His death will be much worse than death by stoning; death by crucifixion.

ignorance/knowledge - The natural man has a natural knowledge of God. The new man has a special knowledge of God, one communicated through Jesus the Word in Word and Sacrament.

Sermon Titles

Why is Jesus Getting Stoned?

He Is

Hymns

Rev. Steven L. Anderson, Pastor
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

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