

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. It is also the reading appointed for Lent 5 in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is not included in the LW three-year lectionary, and you wonder why, but it makes a reappearance in the LSB three-year on this Sunday, in this year only.

You wonder if the wrongly understood seeming anti-Semitism of Jesus – the Jewish man – had anything to do with that. This exchange is just a bit edgy, and it's actually the tail end of what has been an entire chapter of verbal knock-down, drag-out between Jesus and the theologians, including name-calling and various insults.

Textual Notes

48. We note again how the term “οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – the Jews” is used by John, who is himself a Jew. It means those of His own who oppose Jesus, who is also a Jew. Here they level two very distinct charges against Jesus; that He is a Samaritan and that He has a demon. To call Him a “Samaritan” is of grade-school vintage. Demon is bird of a different feather.

This question begins the reading, but it makes a lot more sense if you know what has happened right before this. Right before this, He called them liars, and He claims to have the truth, but He notes that they don't believe what He says. Then He notes that they don't convict Him of any sin, and He says they don't listen to His words, which are God's Word.

They then ask what seems to them a rhetorical question, one expecting a positive answer; “Οὐ καλῶς λέγομεν ἡμεῖς ὅτι Σαμαρεῖτης εἶ σὺ καὶ δαιμόνιον ἔχεις – are we not correct when we say that you are a Samaritan, and you have a demon?” The adverb “καλῶς” has connotations of nobleness, excellence, and honor. They think quite highly of themselves.

That high self-esteem is apparent from the question itself, which would be like saying to somebody, as a starting point, “well, we can all agree on a couple of things; you are a N word, and you have a demon.” Who does that, and where do you go from there? I think that by this point in their conversation they have concluded that common ground is little.

We would probably refer to their calling Him a “Samaritan” as a racial slur. The accusers would have worn their pedigree with pride, and they had nothing but scorn for their

mongrel relation to the north. God had allowed their racial purity to be exterminated, mingling them with Gentiles, while at the same time protecting them from the same fate.

But more than just a racial slur, they are attacking the truth of what He teaches. It was one thing for the northerners to have their blood mixed with the unclean, but the larger issue and the basis for that mixing was their heresy that led to it; punishment from God for their heresy, they had brought back the cows and built “high places” to worship the pagan gods.

When they call Jesus a “Samaritan,” it is therefore a theological issue as well as being a racial slur. The seat of orthodoxy was and always had been Jerusalem, and Jesus made no bones about the inadequacies of the teachings coming out of there. They were well aware of what He thought of their theology, and perceived His to be different, and therefore...

As for His having a demon, this is not the first time that subject has come up. Shortly before this (7:20), right after Jesus talks about authority and then says that people want to kill Him, “the people” said that Jesus had a demon. Nor will this be the last time Jesus is said to have a demon. John records two more times people state that Jesus has a demon.

The synoptics also include instances of the accusation, and if you google “Jesus accused having demon,” you get hits, and Naves Topical Bible has an article on the subject. In a day when black and white are increasingly being seen as grey areas, we note that in that day it was either true or false, right or wrong, black or white, with very few grey areas.

Especially when it came to theology and having a demon or not. More than just a racial slur, that got to the core of a person’s very being. Jesus is either from God or from Satan. John likes irony and is there anything more ironic than the pure Son of God, creator of angels and all things, proclaimed the Son of God at His Baptism, being accused like that.

49. The question asked is sort of a “have you stopped beating your wife” kind of a question, to which there appears to be no good answer, so He just goes with the truth, always a good move; “ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς Ἐγὼ δαιμόνιον οὐκ ἔχω – Jesus answered, ‘I don’t have a demon’” because He doesn’t, and it’s that simple; let your “yes” be yes and your “no” no.

The verb “to answer” is the same as in the previous verse; He is clearly speaking in response to the charge. Far from it, “ἀλλὰ τιμῶ τὸν Πατέρα μου, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀτιμάζετέ με – but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.” Rather than working for and being on the side of Satan, Jesus is on the side of God the Father, working and fighting against Satan.

Here we see the continuation of a long-running theme in John; the Father and the Son are one, and Jesus is connected at the hip with His Father. Building on what He has been saying up to this point and using logic, He points out the obvious; they are dishonoring Him, and not so obviously – to them – by doing Him wrong, they also do the Father wrong.

50. Do we detect a veiled accusation from Jesus to them when He says, “ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ ζητῶ τὴν δόξαν μου – I do not seek my (own) glory,” and maybe you people do. More likely, they think He thinks He’s all that. He is, but He knows His place within the Trinity; On the contrary, there is One “ἔστιν ὁ ζητῶν καὶ κρίνων – Who is seeking and Who is judging.”

That would be the Father. Included in this short, compound sentence is the idea that you earthly theologians don’t judge me, but the Father will judge the Son. This would have been news to them who were sort of in the business of judging people. They did it all the time, and practice does not always make perfect, and they weren’t very good at it.

51. He continues with a conditional statement, “ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐάν τις τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον τηρήσῃ, θάνατον οὐ μὴ θεωρήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – truly, truly, I say to you (plural), if any should keep my word, never will (you) see death until the close of the age.” The word “keep” is the word to exhort us to “guard” the Word yet again, and e does that a lot.

John does that a lot, has Jesus saying – because Jesus did say – to “guard” the Word. Last Sunday, I finally pointed out that I am aware that I have been talking a lot about guarding the Word; to hold it tightly and to value it highly. I have been talking about that a lot because Jesus has been talking about it a lot, and I follow the lead of Jesus in preaching.

If Jesus is talking about it a lot, then I’m going to be talking about it a lot, and it means “guard,” not “keep.” The word meant “guard” when the KJV was translated, but they used the word “keep” because that was the verb that would describe how you viewed and treated your most precious possession. The noun means the most secure location within the castle.

The modern translations retain the word even though it means something different 400 years after the KJV. Language, words, and the meaning of words are always evolving. So, every time Jesus tells us to guard the Word, American Christians think He’s telling us to “obey” the Word – which NIV et al have, and the law-oriented Reformed love to hear it.

For how many years did the Lutherans hear the NIV tell them to “obey the Word” every time Jesus told the Church to “guard the Word?” Go ahead and check out the meaning of the word “τηρέω – to guard” in any lexicon or at <https://biblehub.com/greek/5083.htm>. There, words like

continue (1), guard (1), guards (1), heed (2), heeds (1), held in custody (1), keep (27), keep watch over (1), keeping (1), keeping guard over (1), keeps (9), kept (12), kept in custody (3), observe (3), preserve (1), preserved (1), reserved (4), watching over (1).

are used. What word is missing from those words?

I never quite understood the avoidance of death for those who guarded the Word, or I understood it as we all die – no duh, but we do not die eternally. The Lutherans would probably say that nobody keeps the Word perfectly, and that’s why we all die, and in saying that, the Lutherans would not be wrong. But I don’t think that’s what’s going on here.

Rather than the individual, the reference may well be – it is – to the Church “guarding” the Word, and we observe it to be the case that when the Church keeps the Word in its truth and purity, then the Church does not die, but lives on for generation after generation, which is what we saw in the long run of “Christendom” experienced by our European ancestors.

We observe in our day that the congregations and church bodies who “keep” the Word generally have more life and live longer than the ones who have made a mess of it. The Enlightenment was the death of Christendom, and in America it is axiomatic that “conservative” churches survive and thrive, and the “liberals” keep shrinking and dying.

One of the things I’ve learned about liberal clergy is that they are true believers. So are many – but not all – of their followers. Their alleged attempts to “keep the youth” and to grow the church by being more open to the latest whims of The Culture bring only more shrinkage, which brings on a new push to be even more open, and in the end...

That’s assuming that all pastors and all Christians want the church to grow and thrive. If you don’t believe in the tenets of Christianity, then maybe you think it’s okay or even a good thing for Christian churches to go away. If you’re an Atheist or Agnostic, then maybe you are a part of the growing chorus contending that Christianity is actually a bad thing.

52. To the other side, these words of Jesus confirm their earlier accusation, and they blurt out triumphantly, “Νῦν ἐγνώκαμεν ὅτι δαιμόνιον ἔχεις – now we know that you have a demon.” It’s the “gotcha” moment, and they go on to point out how Abraham – he had earlier been part of the conversation – and other keepers of the Word had in fact died.

This confirms that when Jesus is talking about the Guardians of the Word living on forever, He’s talking about eternal life, but they can’t, or they won’t believe that. They seem like those people who, it doesn’t matter what you say to them or how clear it is that you are right, and he is wrong. Once that guy gets into argue mode, there’s no talking to him.

53. Using logic, they ask Him “μὴ σὺ μείζων εἶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀβραάμ, ὅστις ἀπέθανεν; καὶ οἱ προφῆται ἀπέθανον – Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead, and the prophets died.” The question begins with “μὴ,” which means it expects a negative answer, expecting Jesus to say, “no, I’m not greater than Abraham and the prophets.”

Their tag-on question does not expect a positive or negative answer but only information; and “τίνα σεαυτὸν ποιεῖς – who (do you) make yourself?” sounds a lot like “who do you

think you are?” It’s one thing for Jesus to think He has theological preeminence over them, but to think that in regard to Abraham and the Prophets? To them, it was pure hubris.

54. Well, actually, another conditional sentence; “ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς Ἐὰν ἐγὼ δοξάσω ἑμαυτόν, ἡ δόξα μου οὐδὲν ἐστίν – Jesus answered, ‘if I should glorify myself, my glory is nothing,’” just like the rest of us. To be “glorified” is like being “confessional;” it’s not something you call yourself, but others determine that about you and declare it of you.

But the glory is not from Himself, “ἔστιν ὁ Πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι Θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστίν – it is my Father who is glorifying me, of whom you say that ‘He is our God.’” The Father had in fact and indeed glorifies the Son, most notably at His Baptism and also through the miracles, including Cana, which “manifested His glory,” et al.

Going back to the well one more time, He uses logic to tell them that if they worship the Father, considering Him to be their God, then they also ought to worship Him, considering Him to be their God, but they don’t because they don’t. In fact, to worship Jesus would be anathema and place them into the same category as the Samaritans who worshiped idols.

55. He continues speaking of the Father, “καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώκατε αὐτόν, ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν – but you have not known Him; I know Him.” The verb is in the perfect tense, indicating that their non-knowledge about God goes back some ways, and continues to the present. For Him to talk to them about not knowing God would have cut them deeply.

He uses the same perfect tense to claim the opposite; He does know that Father, and “κἂν εἶπω ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα αὐτόν, ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης – if I should say that I don’t know Him, I will be a liar like you,” and that’s pretty direct, isn’t it, “ἀλλὰ οἶδα αὐτόν καὶ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ – but I know Him, and I guard His Word,” and He does.

56. Earlier, these men had boasted of their descent from Abraham, and to be sure they were biological descendants, even though having him as their “father” did not have the spiritual import for which they had hoped. Far from criticizing their pedigree, He acknowledges it and then He uses that pedigree as an object lesson to teach them how to regard Him.

Their common father Abraham “γαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη – rejoiced to see my day, and when he saw it, he rejoiced.” The verb “ὁράω” is one of several Greek verbs for “to see.” Look in Vine’s An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words to see the various nuances of those different words, all mostly translated “to see.”

The past tense verb here means to see with the eyes and to discern the meaning of what you are looking at. Grammatically, the sentence has Abraham seeing with his own eyes that glory of Jesus at the current center of this discussion. Theologically, Abraham is in heaven, from where he apparently has a birds-eye view of the goings on in the life of Jesus.

57. Which leads to another “gotcha” moment, as “the Jews” point out to Jesus that He is not even fifty years old, “καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἑώρακας – but you have seen Abraham,” which is not exactly what He had said. He had said that Abraham has seen Him, but not that He had seen Abraham. Perhaps they concluded that if Abraham saw Jesus, Jesus saw him.

58. I think He’s trying to help them understand how that could be, and He brings it down to a very understandable level, saying “πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί – before Abraham was, I am,” and we get that. But that really got their dander up. The “I am” is the personal name of God, the one articulated by God from the burning bush to Moses, who had asked.

It’s a double entendre, and we note the tenses; Abraham’s existence is an aorist (past tense), and the existence of Jesus is present tense, but more than that. There was a time when Abraham was not, but there has never been a time when that could be said about Jesus; He is the eternal, the one without beginning, with no end, equally God with the Father.

59. KJV and NKJV say, and most of the rest of them, including ESV, leave out the italicized “Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, *going through the midst of them*, and so passed by.” Textus Receptus (1550) includes it, but Nestle-Aland (1904) omits it, but the Byzantine (2005) puts it back in.

Unlike the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Jews understood the meaning of what Jesus was saying about Himself, “ἤραν οὖν λίθους ἵνα βάλωσιν ἐπ’ αὐτόν – they therefore took up stones to throw at Him” so as to stone Him to death. The “therefore” is there to direct us to what has just happened; Jesus claimed to be God, and that’s why the stones reappear.

Were they the same stones held at the beginning of this incident, the ones intended for the tender body of the woman caught in adultery, the ones He by His words had shamed them into dropping, or were they different stones? Either way, the one sans sin is now the target, not the actual sinner, and if you want to know what the Vicarious Atonement looks like...

But not so fast, “Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐκρύβη καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ – Jesus hid Himself and went out from the Temple,” sort of the opposite of “revealing” Himself. To the question of Judas (not Iscariot) last week as to what’s up with Jesus making Himself manifest to us, but not to the World...actually, it’s worse than that for the World. Jesus is hidden from the World.

The various English translations often have nefarious theological reasons for what they do. Here, at face value, then would appear to add or omit “διελθὼν διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν· καὶ παρῆγεν οὕτως – going through the midst of them, and He passed by them” based on which manuscript family is currently in vogue. That may well be all that is going on here.

Besides that, there is a definite eastern twist to the inclusion of that phrase. The phrase sounds a lot like what Luke (4:30) relates about the response to His sermon in Nazareth,

and when they wanted to throw Him off of the cliff, “αὐτὸς δὲ διελθὼν διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν ἐπορεύετο – He passed through the midst of them and went away,” a miraculous thing.

In both the Nazareth and this incident, Jesus is facing an angry crowd who mean to do Him harm. To say that Jesus hid Himself – like Nestle-Aland say John says here – is one thing. To say that He hid Himself and then left, going through them on His way out, is another thing, equally miraculous as the Nazareth incident, and how exactly would that play out?

More to the point, which is it? Did He hide in Temple, or did He leave it, passing through the angry men? If TV has taught us anything, Jesus would have gone up and found Himself on the roof of the Temple. Since there were no helicopters, He would have had no other choice to get away from them other than miraculously walking through the midst of them.

This angry mob was wanting to stone Him, and the visual we get these days – the Christian young woman who was recently stoned in Nigeria, for example – is that the stoners surround the stone, and how do you get away from that? If you manage to break through their perimeter, they will follow you and you there will be nowhere to hide from them.

It’s the same word “to hide” used in other places in the NT – including in Matthew (13) where Jesus states the reason why He speaks in parables – to talk about how God hides the truths of the Kingdom from the unbeliever. When they start saying that you have a demon and displaying their non-comprehension of the Trinity, and that’s what’s going on here.