

Palm Sunday / I Am Series
John 8:51-59

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the Word of God this day. Amen.

I just read to you a Gospel passage that is not part of the normal lectionary cycle. Years ago, before the 1978 Green Hymnal reworked the lectionary, today was simple Palm Sunday. A day set apart to remember and take note of Jesus' triumphant ride into Jerusalem. The Passion Sunday back then was on the fifth Sunday of Lent, It would have been last week and had this Reading from John 8 as its Gospel reading.

I like this old lectionary style. We can remember the passion story on Friday at our 7:00 P.M. special Choir Cantata worship of Lessons and Carols. Instead we today spend more time getting a better understanding of Palm Sunday. Back in the old days this Gospel reading would have been the last one you were to hear before the triumphant ride on Palm Sunday. It sets the stage for the confrontation of Holy Week. It makes us ask whose side are we on? It sets the two sides with people cheering and calling out Hosanna, Hosanna and another group of people who just in a few days are yelling crucify him, crucify him. This passage identifies Jesus and sets people apart between believers and unbelievers. Do you believe in God or reject God.

Jesus identifies himself as God when he says those words of the great I Am, in verse 59. In that line it makes it clear, "Before Abraham was, I am." "I am who I am" is a name for God almighty. All Jews would have known this and knew the context of when this naming of God took place. It was on Mt. Zion, When God had heard his people cry out in pain and suffering as slaves in Egypt. At that time God calls to Moses out of the burning bush and sends him back to Egypt to go before Pharaoh and speak for all the Hebrew people asking for their release. Moses, worried and scared about this calling God has commissioned him with asks who do I say is sending me when they ask, And God says tell them, "I am who I am" has sent me.

God clearly there says "I am the one who was, is and always will be, the eternal one, the everlasting one. Ever present Lord". So when Jesus says here in John 8, "before Abraham was, I am" he is claiming that he is that very Lord. The one and the same, the one who spoke to Adam and Eve, the one who spoke to Abraham and told him he will be the father of a great nation. The one who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. The one who spoke to Samuel calling him by name to anoint his kings of Israel. The one who spoke to the prophets of old like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. The one that is, always has been and always will be, God almighty, eternal, everlasting. Jesus says "I am." Do we hear this and believe?

Humanity has a gift - a gift to hear or not hear, to believe or not to believe. And we all do that very thing each and every day. One way we do this is to concentrate on just part of the message, a part that doesn't make sense and so we don't listen beyond that. We all know people that do that, if we don't sometimes do it ourselves. Someone is talking with you and your not really hearing them because your thoughts and mind are already thinking about what they first said, and so you miss everything else they say.

In this Gospel reading, some of the people are doing this very thing. They get caught up in just a part of Jesus' words and do not understand the entire meaning. He has been trying to show them that he is the Way, the Light of the World, that he is the Truth. Finally he says quite plainly, "Very Truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." And the religious leaders hear just part and get even more set against him. "Now we know that you have a demon." They think he is saying that people can not die, that is absurd. Everyone dies, Abraham dies, Isaac died, Jacob died, Joseph died, Moses died, Isaiah died, Jeremiah died, Daniel Died, all humanity dies. So they obviously figure Jesus is filled with evil spirits and insane, because he doesn't know what he is talking about. They hear him speak, but they don't listen to his words. They are twisting his meaning of course into some literal picture of escaping this earthly death here and now and living on this earth forever. So they get caught up into trying to picture this scene of no one ever dying and miss Jesus' whole gift of eternal life in the kingdom of God, not here on earth, but a spiritual life with God.

Another way people don't hear the word of God is to accept without thinking what they believe to be true. We do that also. I am sure again we all know people who have this talent in life. To hear you say no, that you don't want to do something, that you can't do something, that you won't do something and they respond with Good I'm glad your willing to do it. We have that talent to only hear what we want to even if it isn't being said. We just believe what we want and ignore if it doesn't match up with God's plan.

Some of the people in Jesus' day knew he was a great man, many people were following and believing in him. He had influence and power. He had crowds swayed to his side. Perhaps he could take on the religious leaders and throw off their tyranny. Or even better perhaps he will lead a revolt against Rome and the entire nation can be freed. They naturally attribute human characteristics to Jesus thinking that must be what he is about. We still do that to this day, thinking Jesus will do what we want. God will of course be just as we say.

But really Jesus says quite plainly that he is **not** about glorifying himself, raising himself up, trying to become the person in charge. He instead is to be about offering up his life,

humbling himself, sacrificing himself for us. He is doing the glory of God by fulfilling God's will not humanities will. He says If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me. And yet the people still think that he is about to raise himself up in grandeur, to take on the establishment and claim Israel's throne, to face down the tyranny of the religious leaders, to lead the rebellion against the Romans and free Israel to be a mighty country once again. They hear what they want to hear. That is a perfect way not to hear God. Just hear what you think you want to hear.

But yet our story does have promise, because we know there are some that heard Jesus and believed in him, heard his message and kept it in their hearts. Earlier in this very chapter John records that even in the midst of the arguments between Jesus and the religious leaders, "many who heard Jesus say these things believed in him."

Obviously by the time we get to his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on this Sunday, we know that some of the people in that crowd believed and heard Jesus. They may have still been closed off in part, but they were trying. They might have miss understood his intentions to come as the sacrificial lamb instead of a triumphant king that takes his leisure on the donkey slowly coming into town in pomp and ceremony, but they celebrated the coming of the king. They might have wanted him to do their bidding, but he did the Lord's bidding and fulfilled the promise. So by the time he is coming on Palm Sunday the line had been drawn and some believed and hoped in him and some refused to listen and rejected him seeking to kill him.

The question that leaves us with is where are we in that story? Do we listen and hear God or are we only hearing part, closed off to what God's will truly is?

In our baptisms we are made children of God. We are given a promise of God's love, and forgiveness that was offered to us through the sacrifice of our king. Not to win for us a worldly kingdom, of riches and greatness but a life that is everlasting. That we are assured of that place in that eternal kingdom. The struggle we have is we are a lot like those people in our Gospel reading we hear what we want, we interpret God as we want, and we respond to God only as we want. Instead we are to raise our Hands and praise God in all that we are, in all that we do and in all that we have following the King of kings and Lord of lords, Praising him and singing his praise. Hosanna to the Son of David, he is the Lord. Do we follow and hear that message believing or do we follow our own path?

MAY THE PEACE AND GRACE OF GOD BE WITH YOU THIS DAY AND
THROUGHOUT THE WEEK TO COME.

