
TRINITY SUNDAY

MAY 26, 2013

ABRAHAM REJOICED TO SEE MY DAY

Pastor Jim Dunn

John 8:49-58

49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. **50** Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. **51** Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." **52** The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'" **53** Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" **54** Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' **[a]** **55** But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." **57** So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" **[b]** **58** Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Do you remember the first time you ever saw a baseball field? As much as I love baseball, I didn't see one until I was eight years old. The first time I ever saw a baseball field was the day of my first baseball tryouts. I saw that large open field of green grass and smelled the dew. I saw the white bases against a background of red dirt. I saw the men who would serve as coaches and so many boys, all carrying baseball mitts. I heard the crack of the bat, and the snap of balls hitting mitts. I read the advertising signs hanging from the fence, and I saw the bleachers.

I'd like to be able to say that it was love at first sight. But if you, too, had been there that day, you would have seen a nervous, red-haired, freckle-faced kid with black-framed glasses at the plate, grasping his bat incorrectly and standing no kind of hitter's stance that you've ever seen. Chopping at the ball, as if I had an ax in my hand instead of a bat. Looking like the greenest greenhorn to ever set foot on a real baseball field.

In the midst of that entire baseball splendor, I want you to focus on only one part: the boy at the plate grasping his bat incorrectly. Bring that picture with you to another open-air scene: the front of the Temple of Jerusalem with its huge white stones lifting up into a clear, crisp autumn sky. Standing just outside the Temple in the humongous, open air Courtyard of the Gentiles are Jesus and His disciples. He's speaking with some leaders of the Jews. And from the responses of these leaders, it becomes evident that they are grasping their bats incorrectly.

Repeatedly, Jesus, throughout this conversation that starts in verse 12, speaks of *eternal* death. Verse 21: "You will die in your sin." Verse 24: "I told you that you will die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will die in your sins." Verse 51: "If anyone keeps My word, he will *never* see death." Jesus speaks of eternal death.

These leaders of the Jews don't get it. They do not grasp it. They're grasping their bats incorrectly. Their response reveals that they think Jesus is talking about physical death. *Never taste death?* they respond. That makes no sense! Even Abraham died.

Verse 52: "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will *never* taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?" They do not grasp that Jesus is talking about eternal death. They do not grasp that they are deserving of eternal death. They do not grasp that their nature is sinful beyond repair. They do not grasp that even though they are children of Abraham, and therefore even Solomon's feast would not be too good for them, they are slaves to sin. They do not grasp that they are slaves to sin, not just their bodies but their minds, too. They do not grasp that their powers of reasoning, their common sense, is like a faulty batting stance. It's not entirely to be trusted.

Now, we rely on common sense. Some things are just common knowledge. Even when the Bible would tell us otherwise? We forget that our powers of reasoning, our common sense, our common knowledge are just as susceptible to sin as anyone else's. Like the leaders of the Jews, we like to think that our minds are holier, that our powers of deduction are purer. We do not grasp that every thought we have in our heads is corrupted by sin. We think we understand that we deserve eternal death. We think we grasp the teaching that we are sinners. The scary part is we don't even know when we are grasping that teaching incorrectly – thus acting, speaking, thinking in a self-righteous manner.

I did not know I was grasping the bat incorrectly when I stepped up to the plate that day at my first baseball tryouts. A coach came around behind me. From behind me, he reached around and moved my hands into the correct position for a right-handed hitter. That is – putting your right hand above left hand. Then, he showed me where to place my feet in relation to home plate, standing sideways to the pitcher. Still from behind me, he placed his hands over my hands and helped me swing at a few pitches, to show me how not to chop at the ball. All the while, he spoke to me kindly, which probably was the first step in creating my love for the game.

Who is the One who helps us grasp that we have eternal life through Jesus Christ? The Father who in love sent His Son! The Son who suffered eternal death so that we won't suffer eternal death! Who was lifted up on Easter to open eternal life. The Holy Spirit! The One behind the preaching of the Word! The One behind those kindly spoken words that create in us love for Jesus. Kindly spoken words like, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day."

The leaders of the Jews had said to Jesus, "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?" Jesus replied, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day." Indeed, Abraham lived to see Jesus.

Bring that picture of a boy on his first baseball field to one more open-air scene: the top of Mount Moriah. Where young Isaac hears the crack of the wood and the snap of the fire as his father arranges his makeshift altar for offering his son.

There had been the miraculous conception of this son. And in that miraculous conception of Isaac did the Holy Spirit cause Abraham to see the miraculous conception of the Holy One of God? The writer to the Hebrews says that Abraham did see the resurrection. It's why he was willing to sacrifice Isaac. "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead." Then, God provided the ram. In the giving of the ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac, did the Holy Spirit cause Abraham to see the giving of the Lamb of God to die eternal death instead of us?

"Abraham rejoiced to see My day." How the Holy Spirit used these kindly spoken words! It was not love at first sight for these leaders of the Jews in regard to Jesus. But later, we are told in Acts chapter 6, that many leaders of the Jews, many "priests became obedient to the faith." How the Holy Spirit used these kindly spoken words! How He used all that they implied to give Abraham's later descendants a grasp of sin, eternal death, and Christ's sacrifice for our salvation!

So, who spoke these kind words? I still remember the name of the coach who spoke kindly to me at my first baseball tryouts: Mr. Cooper.

The Name of the One who stands behind us and helps us grasp anew each day that we are slaves to sin, body and mind, deserving of eternal death? The Name of the One who stands behind us and helps us grasp anew each day that because of Jesus we will not die in our sins, we will not taste eternal death? Do we remember that Name?

Yes, we do! It's the Name we honor on this Trinity Sunday. It is the Name we love. It is the Name that has been spoken upon us. It is the Name we bear.

The Name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit... Amen