

SERMON FOR SUN. JUNE 12 AND WED. JUNE 15, 2022

Trinity C 2022 Jn 8:48-59 “The Great, Merciful I AM.”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, I recently read a blog post that asked the question: ***Does the Church want people with problems?***

Perhaps we think (or have been given the impression) that the answer to that question is no. The Church is made up of folks who *used* to have problems, who *used* to be sinners but are *now* happy and righteous in Christ.

Therefore, we hide our struggles with sin, weak faith, and doubts. We try to look strong, like we have it all together, for that’s what Christians – *real* Christians – are like, after all.

Maybe we have *given* the impression that the Church does not want people with problems.

We send that sometimes not-so-subtle message in how we carry ourselves, in our slowness to help, our reluctance to listen, or our impatience and preoccupation with our own lives.

We prefer giving money instead of getting actively involved, so we aren’t inconvenienced; let someone else do the work.

Of all of this, I am guilty, and I suspect (to some degree or another) so are all of you.

And we need to repent not only of our prideful delusions of goodness, but most importantly, ***of what all this in us communicates and teaches others about God:***

***If the Church does not want people with problems, then neither does God.***

And so the message becomes: you better clean up your act, get your life together, and measure up, if you want to come into the presence of a holy and righteous God.

How many think the message of the Church is about living up to God’s standards instead of about receiving God’s forgiveness?

How many think the Church is full of hypocrites, because they see us teaching one way but living? The truth is that we who bear God’s holy name have not always kept it holy.

But what a different picture we see in the Holy Gospel today. For in it, we encounter in flesh and blood is the eternal God come to be with His problem-filled, sin-enslaved people, exactly *because* they are problem-filled, sin-enslaved people, *in order to* set us problem-filled, sin-enslaved people free.

Jesus came to defeat the enemies that had gotten the best of us—namely, sin, death, and the devil – and restore us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

**And He does so because this is who He is.** Unlike us, with God, words and deeds are *not* two different things – ***who He is, is what He does, and what He does is who He is.***

And so, in Jesus, we see God as He truly is – our God who wants people with problems because He loves us.

And on this Holy Trinity Sunday, we remember and confess that this is who God is and has always been.

God has *always* been working for us. Jesus is the one whom all the Old Testament prophets foresaw.

And so that is what Jesus is saying when He tells the Jews: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”**

Jesus is telling them that I AM the one who created all things. I AM the one who confronted Adam and Eve after they sinned. I AM the one who told Noah to build an ark.

I AM the one who not only *saw* Abraham and *knew* him but *called* him and made a covenant with him. I AM the one who wrestled with Jacob.

I AM the one who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and revealed to him this name, *my* name.

I AM the one who brought the people of Israel out of Egypt.

I AM the one who divided the Red Sea, fed them with manna, and gave them water from a rock to drink in the wilderness.

I AM the One who fought for them to deliver the land I’d promised them.

I AM the one who dwelt with them in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The one who gave Solomon his wisdom.

I AM the one who consumed Elijah’s sacrifice before the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. I AM the one who Isaiah saw and trembled before.

And now – *now* – I AM with you in flesh and blood. **Your** flesh and blood. just as I have served you and kept you for so long, so now I have come to join myself to you and save you. Once and for all.

I have come to take your sin and its penalty upon myself. To take your place under the Law and fulfill it.

I have come to take your place in death and destroy its power in my resurrection. That my problem-filled, sin-enslaved people may live – forgiven and free, both now and forever.

And that's what happened just a few minutes ago, the Great I AM, Father, Son and Holy Spirit claimed little Mason to be His child. Mason looked alive all right, but he was dead spiritually. He was a born a child of men, but is now reborn a child of God who promised to be with Mason all the days of his life. **PAUSE**

The Jews could not understand or accept; **a God who comes and serves us!** – so they called Him a hated Samaritan, accused them of being demon possessed and crazy, and picked up stones to kill Him.

But do not judge those Jews, for we must confess that such a God does not make sense to us either.

Why would a holy God love lawbreakers, serve sinners, and die for the likes of you and me? We, who repent so little and try to earn so much? We who take His forgiveness for granted? We who profane the holy name given to us?

Yet look! What divine patience and love Jesus shows – with the Jews then, and with us today – not leaving them to the demons they accused Him of having, nor throwing stones in return, nor condemning us in our unbelief but bearing with us.

Patiently, lovingly, that what we sinners cannot understand, we might yet – through the power of the Holy Spirit *believe*.

Believe that such selfless love is possible and that God shows us His glory not by remaining up in Heaven but by coming down from Heaven to save us.

The Almighty shows His strength by becoming weak. The object of universal praise in heaven demonstrates His greatness by coming to serve.

And so the Father sends His Son into the world, to bear our sin and be our Savior. And the Father and Son send the Spirit into the world, to give us the gift of faith and be our teacher, reminding us of all the words Jesus told his disciples.

And yet, as we confess, there are not three gods, but one God. One God in three persons and three persons in one God, **working as one** for us and for our salvation.

For this is who He is. Not only our Creator but also our Redeemer and Sanctifier.

And this great God, the great I AM, who came in our flesh and blood and ascended the cross to shed His blood and die on that altar of wood for the forgiveness of our sins...

Is the same God who now comes to us in His flesh and blood on this altar, that we may eat His body and drink His blood and receive that forgiveness of sins.

Feeding and filling us with Himself. Strengthening us who are so weak.

And that Great I AM has claimed little Mason as his dearly beloved child. Not because Mason is so cute, nice, or brave, but because a loving God wants nothing more than to save those born with original sin.

And even though we profane His name given to us in Holy Baptism, He does not take that name away from us – but in divine patience and love, restores us as His children; creating in us clean hearts and renewing a *right* spirit within us.

His Spirit. That the devil, the world, and our sinful nature have power over us no more, but that we live and be who we are: children of our Father, redeemed by the Son, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Not hiding our struggles and weakness but rejoicing His strength. Not insisting on our goodness but praising His forgiveness. Not withholding our love, forgiveness, and help, but giving to others what has been first given to us.

Confessing the name that has been given to us in both word *and* deed. That all may know who our God is!

Not a God who doesn't want people with problems, or who insists that we fix ourselves – but a God who loves you, and so has come in love **for you.**

To free you not **for sin, but from sin.** To make you His own. And so you are.

And so may what we confess with our lips this day be true in our lives everyday: ***Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to Him because He has shown His mercy to us. AMEN***