

Sermon 2007 Holy Trinity
Text: John 8 48-59
Theme: "Why So Angry?"

No one can get a crowd as mad as Jesus can. I have often thought about what it was that he said that would move a group of people to bend over, pick up big rocks and try to kill him. There are plenty of people who irritate me, but it is hard to imagine being angered enough by what someone said to decide that you're going to kill him right then and there with a bunch of rocks.

I think it is the truth. When we speak truth, even truth spoken in love, we often anger people. All in all we like our fantasies don't we. We like to make up our minds about things and never have to rethink or be challenged. And so we tend to surround ourselves with people who will agree with us whatever our fantasy may be and we tend to lash out at those who challenge our fantasies.

Jesus is the master of truth. Every single thing that comes out of his mouth is truth. He does not shade it to achieve his goal. He does not twist it to protect a personal agenda. This is both comforting and disconcerting. First it is comforting because

we know that when Jesus says that those who keep his word have eternal life, it is absolutely true and we are secure in our salvation. Second, it is disconcerting because there is no gray area. It is black and white. Keep Jesus' Word and you honor God and inherit heaven. Don't keep Jesus' Word and it's off to fire and brimstone for you. End of discussion. No second chances.

But understand that keeping Jesus' Word is NOT the same as keeping the rules or obeying. This is where the right wing of Christianity misses the boat. The verb that is translated as "keep" has a rich meaning but "obey" is not part of it. It is more like a shepherd keeps his flock. He guards and protects that which is valuable. You can obey the commandments all day long but if you are only here because of obedience, Jesus is not impressed. You can obey your mother and father in every single thing but the commandment is to honor them and honor and obedience are not the same things. Honor implies relationship and connection. What he is saying is that people who get eternal life are the people who are connected to him.

It's not as though you have to figure out the secret code or complete the obstacle course to get in. It's not like a fraternity or a sorority where you have to get Jesus to like you to vote you into his club. The work is all done and Jesus loves you already – just as you are – he loves everyone, just the way they are. But if they refuse his love, break the connection, reject his gift, there is no other way into paradise.

We learn a great deal from Jesus in his interaction with antagonists in this text. Look how they try to insult him by calling him a Samaritan, a lower class of people in their eyes. Of course Jesus is as Jewish as they are and they know it, but look how he ignores their prejudiced insult. There is nothing to be gained by wrestling with a pig. You just get dirty and the pig likes it. Insults hurled at us in anger are best left unanswered. Answering does not serve the Gospel or glorify God.

As far as having a demon, he simply denies that. They need to know the truth. This is not a demon, but the Son of God. A demon does not honor God because he has no relationship with God. Look how lovingly Jesus speaks this difficult truth by

holding to the facts without editorial. How hard it would be not to throw in a couple of editorial remarks, but who does that serve? Not God. Not the Gospel.

We celebrate the Holy Trinity this weekend and there have been few teaching more contested than the Trinity. This is an excellent example of speaking what we know to be true and stopping. The Holy Trinity is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one God. There is no need to explain beyond what the Bible says. We don't understand it. We cannot explain it. We cannot dissect it and replicate it. It just is and we believe by faith not by sight.

Will people become angry at us for confessing the Holy Trinity? Quite possibly. Will they pick up rocks to stone us? Well, in this country we have some protection against physical stones, but there are lots of different types of stones. But we will keep Jesus' Words. That's all we are called to do. We are not called to police the world and make sure that everyone is toeing the line. We are not called to justify and defend every choice we

make. We are called to live in relationship with Jesus and to speak the truth of that relationship in love.

There are some who feel a need to divide everything into right or wrong and then argue about it. My friends, we live in a broken world and there is very little right about it. The truth is that only the self righteous honestly believe that they have a corner on the market of "what is right" and those who despair need to hear how much Jesus loves them – not everything they have done wrong.

Imagine how wonderful the Church could be if we focused only on sharing His love in absolute truth and refusing to argue about whose not doing it right. Amen.