

**Sunday, June 16, 2019 – Trinity Sunday**  
**“It Starts with Jesus”**

John 8: 48-59

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Question Answered

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Do you remember the first time you pondered your own origins? I do remember some very early ideas on the subject. I was four years old and my parents told me I had a baby sister on the way. Probably based on some cartoon or children's book, I'd seen the image of a stork, flying with its beak enclosed around a blanket forming a kind of hammock and a baby safely nestled inside. This was where babies came from. I told my parents I wanted to see the bird bring the baby to the house. It was then that I was given an age appropriate response – the baby is in Mommy's tummy, when I was very small I was in Mommy's tummy, too. I still didn't understand it well but it was a far better answer than a feathered mailman bumping the doorbell with his beak before flying off for the next delivery.

Which came first – the chicken or the egg? This is essentially the argument in the tense Gospel reading you heard. Abraham or Jesus? For the crowds, they are the children of God, because they are descendants of Abraham. Remember Abraham? 2,000 years before Jesus, God makes Abraham a promise that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars or sand on the seashore. All nations will be blessed by this chosen people. In the other corner we have Jesus – claiming that God is His Father and that all these descendants of Abraham do not know God because they reject Him. They had different answers on this chicken or egg debate – it's obvious to the crowd, Abraham is greater than Jesus. Jesus says that Abraham rejoiced looking forward to His day. The crowds are beside themselves and angry! And then Jesus says perhaps the most shocking and controversial line in His entire earthly ministry – “Truly, truly, I say to you – before Abraham was, ‘I am!’”

Jesus isn't just saying He predates Abraham. It's the clearest statement He makes before dying on the cross that He is God. “I AM” – calling to mind God sharing His name, Yahweh – which means, “I AM Who I AM” to Moses through His voice out of the burning bush. God, who is, and was (with no beginning), and is to come, with no end. God, in all the ways we're confessing in intricate detail in the Athanasian Creed this morning. The message is clear

– you crowds think you’re God’s because you’re children of Abraham? Well I’m the Son of the Father, I AM God!

But how do we know? Why do we believe what we believe? I suppose some folks might believe because it’s what they learned when they were young, or just because that’s what our family does, believes in God... just like I believed babies came from storks... but the moment a better explanation comes along, they’re gonna bail. Maybe you know someone like that – or maybe you’ve been that person.

No, I’m asking what’s at the root of our faith? Why trust this statement by Jesus to be God? The crowds obviously didn’t believe Him, they picked up stones ready to put Him to death for blasphemy.

Several years ago I was up in Yosemite for the first time. We drove over to an area of sequoias. Such ancient and towering trees – if you didn’t know, you’d assume their roots plunge deep into the earth to anchor their crushing mass from toppling over. I was astonished to see instead an enormous tree toppled on its side, roots splayed out every direction but down. Trees hundreds of feet tall and able to leave for thousands of years are held in the earth by just that? It turns out that sequoias only grow around other sequoias, their roots entangle one another helping support and hold each other up.

Again, what anchors our faith? You might say it’s the Bible. Best selling book of all time, so they say. It’s the Word of God, through it the Holy Spirit speaks to us and helps create faith. I’m pretty sure that for most of you, I don’t need to expound on the positives of the Bible.

The only problem is, if you’re talking to someone who doesn’t already believe in God, the trust level in the Bible is iffy at best. Years ago at my church in California I was privileged to join a young adult from our congregation in having conversations with students on local university campuses. We set up a table, give away coffee and often get into conversations about religion. Many of the students start off thinking we’re from an atheist club on campus and really candid talks happen. I’ve got news for you – in our post church culture, \*this\* is nothing more than a little understood piece of ancient literature, a collection of works with a creation myth that shares common elements of other creation myths in the ancient Near East, a destructive flood tale, and silly stories like men living three days in the belly of a fish. Jesus is nice because he tells us to

love each other – an ancient humanitarian prefiguring Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. This, however, has no real ongoing value, other than as a prominent piece of literature in human civilization. This is the baby brought by the stork – we have better answers now, after all.

And let's be honest – if you're someone here who doesn't believe in God or you're not sure, some of this *is* strange and hard to believe. It's not just you, it's many of us Christians here, too. There's stuff that happens in the Bible that just doesn't happen in everyday life. I do believe it, and I'll tell you why in a moment.

No, I suggest a different starting point for faith – after all, wasn't it the crowds in the text who kept talking about their heritage as children of Abraham and their prophets and Scriptures as the basis of being God's people? What comes first? What strong root system will hold this all together?

I'm led back to the text – yes, from the very Bible that many do not trust – where Jesus says things like, “anyone who keeps my word will never taste death,” and “before Abraham was, I am!” Could it be that the object of trust, the reason Christians believe anything written in the Bible, anything confessed in our Creeds – could it be because what Jesus says is true?

At the core of the Christian message is the fact that God was not content to simply share everything He wants us to know in a book, no matter how important it might be. Instead the eternal, unchangeable God became human and dwelt among us. That's Jesus' claim – that He is the Son of God, sent to die a gruesome death as sacrifice for all people whose shortcomings make them unworthy of being with God. And that'd be all of us! So we hear the testimony of various eyewitnesses in the Gospels who tell us what Jesus said and did, how He died and more importantly that after He died He took His life back up again. He appeared to hundreds of people having everything to lose and nothing to gain died their own gruesome deaths because they were convinced of the truth that Jesus really did defeat death and ascend to Heaven. If that is true, as most of you here today believe, that backs up the claim to be God in our text this morning.

The root system that holds us in place is the work of God – the Bible is one tool God uses to communicate and strengthen the faith of people who believe but it is not the object of

our faith. I don't believe in the story of Jonah and the fish because the Bible says so. I trust the testimony of Scripture because Jesus references it as being true.

This Trinity Sunday with all this dense theology, if you're someone who feels confused or conflicted over what you believe, before you consider anything else – doubts over the creation story, discomfort with what the Bible says about social issues – please start with Jesus and stay on that question of Jesus and stay there, inquiring about Jesus. Same thing if you don't believe in God. Ask, inquire, dig, come and talk to me or Pastor Brad after he arrives – did Jesus rise from the dead? Is His claim to be God true? If you're someone who feels secure in your faith, remember that in every conversation with a loved one or friend the starting point is always and only Jesus.

There's only one reason people believe. It's being rooted in the Father who created us, the Word made flesh who died and rose for us, the Holy Spirit who uses the Word and the Sacraments to bring us to faith and make us strong. Amen.