

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

"What if God was one of us?" That is the question posed by pop star Joan Osborne with her debut single in 1995, which peaked at number four on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 that year.

Although the song was catchy, for which I shared in my "God in the Jukebox Bible Study" some years ago, there are some falsehoods in that song, like how God would appear secretly as a stranger on a bus. But the point of the song is the question: "What if God was one of us?"

Today on this Holy Trinity Sunday, God appears as one of us. Not at His return as proposed in that 1995 song, but during His earthly ministry. On this day, we recall how God revealed Himself at the Temple built with stones. We also recall how God's people reacted to His presence.

**[At the Temple Built with Stones]**

Our Gospel lesson today picks up in mid-conversation between the Jewish religious authorities and Jesus. The religious authorities are bombarding Jesus with question after question in order to catch Jesus in a lie. They would do anything to trap Jesus in order to call Him out as a fraud.

As question after question passes by, we see how the Jewish authorities are becoming more hardened and becoming more raving. The more they are rightly taught by Jesus, the angrier they become. Jesus asks them very kindly for the reason why they still do not believe, since they can find no fault either with His life or with His teaching. His life is innocent. His teaching is innocent. So, Jesus acts as He teaches: innocent.

These Jewish leaders have no reason for their unbelief other than they are not God's children. Therefore, Jesus issues the verdict on them and says: **"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God"** (John 8:47). With these words, Jesus is saying nothing other than this: **"You are of the devil."**

These Jews could not tolerate this, since they wanted to be God's children and His people. And for that reason, these Jewish leaders begin to rage away by defaming Jesus' life and doctrine. They ask Jesus, "***Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?***" (John 8:48).

Here, they defame His doctrine by saying, "***You have a demon***" (John 8:48), that is, "*You speak from the devil and Your doctrine is the devil's lie.*" They also defame His life by saying, "***You are a Samaritan***" (John 8:48), which for Jews was the worst vice imaginable.

So, how does Jesus react? Well, He teaches us here what must happen with us and His Word. As followers of Christ, both our life and our doctrine will be condemned and defamed. Sadly, this is done by what the world portrays as the most distinguished, wisest, and greatest people on the earth.

So, what does Christ do here? Does He challenge these Jewish leaders to a fight behind the Temple? No. He leaves His life stuck in shame and is silent and tolerates it. He tolerates being tagged with the insult in being called a Samaritan. But **He defends His doctrine**. He says, "***I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me***" (John 8:49).

Today, truth is seen by many to be offensive. Among what the world would name the most distinguished, wisest, and greatest people on the earth, they would say objective truth is "phobic." That is, by adhering to the truth, this person is having "an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to something." According to the world, society must move on from truth. But any attack on truth is actually an attack on Jesus, who is the Truth (John 14:6).

You see, as Christians – followers of Christ, we are to follow Christ's example. So, we take the personal insults. But at the same time, when Christian doctrine is insulted, we do as Christ does here. Jesus did not tolerate it when doctrine was insulted. There is where His patience ceased. Jesus risked His life for doctrine. He suffered all they did, so that the honor of God the Father and of His Word would not suffer.

In following Christ's example, if we perish, no great harm is done. But if we let God's Word perish by remaining silent, then we do harm to God and to the whole world. So, as the world attacks God's doctrine by slander, we cannot keep silent. Although they do us injustice, yet we remain right before God.

So, Christ defends Himself and says, ***“I do not have a demon”*** – that is, My doctrine is not the devil’s lies – ***“but I honor My Father.”*** That is: *“In My doctrine I preach the grace of God, through which He is to be praised, loved, and honored by believers.”*

But why didn’t Christ say, *“I honor My Father, and you do not honor Him?”* Instead, He said, ***“You dishonor Me.”*** With those three words, Jesus is secretly pointing out that His Father’s honor and His honor are one and the same thing, just as He is one God with the Father. But this secret will be revealed in mere moments.

So, when the world attacks the doctrine of God, then God’s honor is attacked.

As God’s honor is stepped upon at the Temple built with stones, Jesus lays down not the Law, but the Gospel, saying: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My Word, he will never see death”*** (John 8:51).

What words of comfort! Here Jesus is teaching them and us that whoever clings to Him by faith overcomes sin, death, and the devil! This is such amazing grace, since by our own very nature, we are all enemies of God, due to our sin. But Jesus here says that anyone who ***“keeps”*** His Word will never, ever see death. In fact, in Christ, death has no grasp on us! You see, Jesus’ forgiveness gives life.

We receive Christ’s forgiveness only by grace through faith in Him. This grace we first received through our Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection. You see, through Baptism we know that life has the final word, since through Christ alone, we are set free from death eternally! And through His Means of Grace – *Word and Sacrament* – we continually receive His forgiveness and strength for our faith.

But what did the crowd hear? Due to their hardened hearts, they heard the Law and said, ***“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? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”*** (John 8:52-53).

These Jews were focused on not the faith of Abraham and the prophets, but their works. They said, these men kept the Law with works and now each one of them is dead.

But this is not what Jesus said. Jesus said, those who keep His Word, would ***“never see death.”*** So, Jesus’ words are a Word of life, and it is true: **whoever keeps His Word will not see death eternally.** Throughout the entirety of God’s revealed Word in the Scriptures, there are only two places in the hereafter: eternal life or eternal death.

So, who does Jesus make Himself out to be, they ask? ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am”*** (John 8:58). The open secret of just moments ago is now fully revealed. Throughout this conversation, Jesus has been describing the relationship between the Father and the Son. They are One. *“Yes,” Jesus says, “I have seen Abraham. I spoke to Abraham. I am.”*

Here is God, one of us, yet without sin, standing at the Temple built with stones and His own people do not recognize Him. But they know full well what Jesus has just spoken to them. Instead of honoring Him, they pick up stones. Now, Jesus being fully God in human flesh, knew exactly what the angry crowd would do. This is likely why He spoke where He did at the Temple built with stones.

You see at this time, the Temple was receiving needed repairs, so there were heaps of stones near at hand. Jesus knew what this angry crowd was going to do.

As much as the Jewish leaders had hardened hearts, they also knew the Scriptures. At least certain Scripture passages, while they overlooked the ones referring to the Messiah. Since they heard Jesus say that He is equal to God, they did as Leviticus 24:14-16 prescribes to do: ***“Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death”*** (Leviticus 24:16).

So, they picked up stones in order to stone Him to death.

Here, Jesus spoke the ultimate truth. They should be worshipping Him. Yet, Jesus hid Himself by divine concealment.

### ***[The Holy Trinity Is Revealed in Jesus]***

Through Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit is recognized in its fullness. The very Son of God enables us to see the Holy Trinity by becoming flesh. So, when we see Jesus, we see the Father. We see the Holy Spirit. We see the Holy Trinity.

By Jesus being lifted up by going to the cross, by dying to atone for our sins is the way we are able to be with God and to see God for all eternity. The Son of God enables us to see the Holy Trinity by becoming flesh and by taking away our sin that would separate us from God.

The concept of the Holy Trinity is certainly above our human understanding, but He came to us in order for Him to have an intimate relationship with us through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

God is not distant from us. He reveals Himself to us in His Word. He reveals Himself to us in His Sacraments. In Jesus, we come to know the fullness of the Triune God. We come to know the mystery of the Trinity revealed in Jesus.

I have been asked from time to time if Jews worship the same God as Christians. It is true that Jews worship Yahweh, the “I am.” But if they are not worshiping Jesus, then they are actually worshiping an imaginary “Father.” So, in all respects, if a person does not worship Jesus as God, then they do not have the same God as we do, who is the one true God revealed to us in three Persons: The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To know the one true God is to know the Son of God.

So, on that day, Jesus revealed the significance of the Son in the relationship to the Father. So, to know the Son is to know the Father. Jesus is none other than the “I am.” Jesus is none other than Yahweh who came and spoke to Abraham who rejoiced knowing the Messiah would come. Jesus is none other than the One who spoke creation into existence.

In Jesus, the fullness of the Trinity is revealed. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠