

The “I Am”
John 8:48-59

Children learn very early on how to push buttons. I’m not talking about on electronic devices, though they can do that too, and figure them out much more quickly than someone my age. The buttons I’m thinking of are our personal buttons – those things that when said or done can get us rather riled up.

A driver doing something stupid will almost always evoke a verbal response from me. A show of disrespect is something that can set me off. That’s why I have often commented that I could never be a bus driver. With today’s rules and regulations, it would be all too easy to respond in a way that would get me fired.

Maybe you are aware of the things that get you worked up. Maybe it is the mention of a certain political figure or gas prices. Maybe it is something more personal, like that certain tone of voice your child or spouse uses sometimes. Maybe children bickering or fighting can do it, especially if it is in public.

We all have our buttons. The non-believing Jews were trying to find ones for Jesus. When they asked, “*Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?*” they were not trying to compliment Him. They were basically saying that He was a person of dubious lineage, had His theology all wrong, and was a lunatic. They had closed their hearts and minds to the possibility that He could be the promised Messiah and that what He was saying was the truth.

The Messiah question was important to them, and was a promise they were waiting for God to fulfill, but they had already decided Jesus was not the one. What needed to be done now was to defame and deride Jesus – to get Him out of the way so they could get back to living their lives the way they wanted.

That’s not what Jesus wanted, and so He pushed a few of their buttons. He did not do it like they did – with malicious intent. He loved them, and wanted them to believe the truth.

They were very proud of their lineage – having Abraham as their father. And of their theology – the message of God spoken by the prophets. Jesus points out that salvation is not about lineage, and that they have not truly listened to the words of the prophets. They know of God the Father, but they do not know Him. Most of us know of President Biden, but none of us truly know Him.

The Jews in our text thought they did. They thought they knew God. But what does Jesus say? He answers their question, “*Who do you make yourself out to be?*” by saying, “*If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ 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 keep his word.*”

Jesus’ word is the key. “*Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.*” They would not listen to or keep His word. Instead *they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.* This is off topic a bit, but this sentence leaves me

scratching my head. This whole back and forth between Jesus and the non-believing Jews has been in the temple. Why are there stones in the temple? Were there piles of them here and there for just such an occasion? “Just in case the chance comes up for a good stoning, we should have a supply on hand!”?

Back to the all-important question.

In the great theological work, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, the question is asked, “Who are these guys?” Butch and Sundance are on the run again, from another posse, but this time they aren’t getting away. They try every trick they can think of to throw the posse off of their trail, but they fail. Every time they look back, the posse is still after them. They can’t lose them. “Who are these guys?” they ask in disbelief.

This is the same question we must answer regarding Jesus. The Jews thought they had an answer. Jesus gave them the true answer. Jesus reveals the answer to us in His word.

Trinity Sunday isn’t about some abstract theological concept. We do confess the words of the Athanasian Creed. We have to. That’s what we’ve always done on Trinity Sunday.

But Trinity Sunday is really about God revealing Himself. He does so most clearly through His Son, Jesus Christ. And we get to know Jesus through the Holy Spirit as He works through the Word.

Scripture reveals the truth of who God is and what He has done for us. The Father freely sends His Son into the world

to redeem us. The Son willingly gives up His life on the cross to earn for us the forgiveness of sins. The Spirit is breathed out that He might live in us. By the power of the Spirit, we keep the Father’s Word, Jesus, in us. This is what it means to have eternal life, and the promise of never tasting death.

Is our lineage what we should count on as our ticket to life everlasting? (No.) Is it the good we have done that will earn us eternal life or the evil we have done that will earn us eternal fire? (No.) You will see those words at the end of the Athanasian Creed. In that context it hinges on the will of the Father – to believe that Jesus is His Son – to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Apart from faith in Jesus there are no good works. Apart from Jesus it is only eternal fire.

The Father wants for us the former – to believe in Jesus and have eternal life. And so He reveals Himself to us in the Scriptures, through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith in us.

Our God comes to us in bread and wine with the body and blood of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of the faith the Holy Spirit has created. There is nothing abstract about that. God comes to you to work in you faith, forgiveness and life everlasting.

Who is this guy? We will speak the Athanasian Creed in a few seconds, but the best answer could be a song we sang at vacation Bible school this week: “Jesus Loves Me, This I know”. Amen.