

SERMON NOTES

Red Sunday

Synaxis Gospel
John 5:19-30

THE OFFER OF ETERNAL LIFE

INTRODUCTION

During the forty-day period after His Resurrection, until His Ascension, our Lord was finally able to teach the disciples deep theological lessons. He opened their eyes to the teachings of the Old Testament concerning Himself. Moreover, He gave them new knowledge about His Person, as revealed in His Incarnation. As we approach Pentecost, our Synaxis readings continue our focus on these teachings of our Lord.

The Gospel of John records those teachings. The Holy Spirit brought again to John's memory those events of our Lord's ministry, in which those teachings were first presented, though not understood. One of those occasions is the subject of our reading for today.

Jesus had just healed a man crippled for thirty-eight years. The man was barely able to drag himself to the edge of the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. It was said that an angel would move the water, and the first person in would be cured. The man had despaired of ever being able to get into the pool first. But Jesus found him, healed him, and told him to get up, take his pallet, and go. This occurred on a Sabbath, when one is not allowed to carry anything, according to the religious leaders. Angry and ready to kill Jesus for this, the religious leaders confronted Him.

When Jesus defended His action—that He had done these things on the Sabbath day—by replying, “*My* Father is working until now, and *I, Myself* am working,”¹ the Jews grew even angrier. They interpreted His words to mean that He was claiming equality with God.² For, it had been a debate among the rabbis how it could be that God, Who must continually maintain the universe, is said to rest on the Sabbath. They had resolved the problem in different ways, “but on one point they were all agreed: God was active all the time, on sabbath [sic] days as much as on ordinary days.”³ Jesus was identifying Himself with this activity. Moreover, they were furious when Jesus reckoned God as *His own particular Father*, because this made Jesus equal to, or the same as, God. This flew in the face of “Hear O Israel, the LORD your God is One LORD.” It is at this point that we pick up the conversation.

¹ In John 5:17, the little *καγω* is used for emphasis and can mean ‘also I’, ‘likewise I’, or ‘even I’.

² John 5:18

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983) pp. 126-127.

SYNTAXIS READING

John 5:19-30

*Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them,
"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of
Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing;
for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also
does in like manner.*

*"For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things
that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these
will He show Him, so that you may marvel.*

*"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them
life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*

*"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has
given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may
honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who
does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who
sent Him.*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and
believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not
come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now
is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God;
and those who hear shall live.*

*"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He
gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave
Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the
Son of man.*

*"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which
all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall
come forth; they who did the good deeds to a resurrection
of life, and those who committed the evil deeds to a
resurrection of judgment.*

*"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I
judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek
My own will, but the will of Him who sent me.*

NOTES

Therefore, Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

Jesus used the term *the Son* to show His peculiar relationship to God as His *Father* that was different from the rest of the Jews, who also called God their Father.

Our Gospel writer, John, has already pointed out that John the Baptist had identified Jesus as "the Son of God."⁴ 'The Son of God' was a title for God's anointed king. All the Davidic kings of Israel had been given that title at their coronation as Psalm 2 was recited. The Davidic line had not occupied the throne for hundreds of years. But the Jewish prophets had long expected the reestablishment of the throne under the Davidic line by One, Who according to Micah and Daniel, would also be divine (God Himself).⁵

John has also used the term *the Son* for the One sent from the Father in heaven.⁶

John has already established the identity of Jesus as the 'Word' Who is God, and Who became incarnate. He is the Creator of all things. So, of course, it was He Who created the Sabbath, and it was He Who rested on it, and it is He Who continues to work and maintain His creation (thus Jesus defense for working on the Sabbath). But the Reality that John in the Prologue of his Gospel has explained as God and the Word, Jesus is now explaining as the Father and Himself. The terms are uniquely tied together. In Genesis, God said, and it was done. In John 1, the Word does. Here, Jesus explains the Reality as the Father shows (initiates), and the Son does. The Father's action and the Son's action are really inseparable. But Jesus is now explaining this from the point of view of His incarnation, as the Word-become-flesh, sent from heaven, Who is the Son of God, the Divine King of Israel. (Bottom line: the LORD that is acknowledged in "Hear, O Israel . . ." they are literally seeing, robed in human flesh, in Jesus Christ.)

"For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.

Elsewhere, the Father calls Jesus His beloved Son.⁷ The adjective there is akin to the verb *αγαπεω*, *to love*. Here, a different verb is used, *φιλεω*, which, while it can mean *to love*, can also mean *to kiss*. The kiss was a form of greeting between intimate friends. It demonstrated acceptance and trust. If the latter is the meaning here, it would indicate the intimate trust that exists in this situation. The Father trusts the Son. This trust is demonstrated by the Father entrusting everything to the Son. Thus, this nuance seems to fit the context.

The Father *shows* (this could also mean *to explain by telling*) what He Himself does.

The greater works that Jesus will be given to do, and which will cause them to marvel, are listed below.

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

⁴ John 1:34

⁵ Daniel 7:13-14 and Micah 5:2; compare with John 1:49.

⁶ John 3:35-36

⁷ Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 1 Peter 1:17

In the Old Testament Scriptures, it is only God Who gives life.⁸ In Ezekiel 37, a vision is given to the prophet of God, bringing to life the dry bones of the Israelites. Possibly this is the foundation for the Jewish Synagogue prayer that apparently goes back to New Testament days:

“Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever; thou quickenest the dead; thou art mighty to save. Thou sustainest the living with loving-kindness, thou quickenest the dead in great mercy, thou supportest the fallen, healest the sick, loosest those who are bound, and keepest faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like thee, O Lord of mighty acts? Who is comparable to thee, O King, who bringest to death and quickenest again, and causest salvation to spring forth? Yea, thou art faithful to quicken the dead. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead!”⁹

The power not just to resuscitate, but also to quicken (revive), to give spiritual life to the dead, which belongs only to the Father,¹⁰ is the Son’s. He will give life to all those to whom He wishes to give life. But in hearing this statement, we must remember that the Son’s wish is based on the Father’s.

“For not even the Father does judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father Who sent Him.

In the Old Testament Scriptures, although men were assigned as judges, they were to act for God, the ultimate Judge of all, and were to judge according to His precepts.

Deut. 16:18: “You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall **judge** the people with righteous judgment.

Typical of the many verses that teach that God is the Judge is:

Isaiah 33:22: For the LORD is our **judge**, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

That He will judge all mankind is:

Joel 3:12: Let the nations be aroused, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there will I sit to **judge** all the surrounding nations.

That He will judge His people:

Ezekiel 18:30 “Therefore I will **judge** you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.”

But now, this ultimate judgment is assigned to the Son, the incarnate God, Who is the King. *He* will sit to judge the world. The reason is, so that He will receive the same honor as the invisible God the Father, Who has sent the Son.

Those, who believe that they can honor the Father without honoring the Son, are badly mistaken.

⁸ While life after death, quickening, is not often dealt with in the Old Testament, that God is the Giver of life and sustainer of life is recognized. See for example Genesis 1-2; Psalm 36:9 and 133:3. But see also from the New Testament: Rom. 4:17: (As it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who **gives life to** the dead, and calls into being that which does not exist.”

⁹ Quoted by Bruce, on p. 129, from S. Singer, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* (London, 1939) pp. 44 f.

¹⁰ See Psalm. 71:20; 80:18; 85:6; 119:25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159; 143:11. In the New Testament, see: 1Timothy. 6:13, “I charge you in the presence of God, who **gives life to** all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate.”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment; but has passed out of death into life.

The central teaching of our reading is focused on the eternal life that is available to mankind. Jesus affirms and underscores this teaching with His double “truly.” There are two requirements for the reception of eternal life:

- 1) **One must “hear” Christ’s word.** What does this mean? The term, *hear*, especially in Aramaic which Jesus spoke, means to obey what is heard. It is not simply registering that Christ has uttered a command. It must be obeyed. The basic command is to trustingly believe that the Father has sent Him for the purpose of providing salvation from sins by His work on the Cross. This kind of trust involves repentance and commitment to God. This is not an active work; it is an inward realization of one’s lost condition, and deep thankfulness for the grace that God has so abundantly and lovingly offered. It is a grateful acceptance of that offer.
- 2) **One must believe the Father.** We are all given the chance to be another Adam or Eve. They had the choice to believe God, to trust in His goodness and love for them, **or** to believe that He is not good and not interested in their best, and to believe that His goal is to keep them from achieving their full potential. Adam and Eve chose the latter. They did not exercise faith in God and His goodness, but believed the lie of Satan. This cost them the Garden of Eden and threw the world of mankind into sin.¹¹ But now, each of us has the chance to make that same decision. Those who choose to believe God, to have faith in His goodness and provision for us, are restored to the fellowship with Him that Adam and Eve lost when they disobeyed and died spiritually. We will not be condemned at the judgment. In fact, even now, we have left the state of spiritual death, and have eternal life.

“Truly, truly, I say unto you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live.

There is a general resurrection of the physically dead coming. However, there is a resurrection of the spiritually dead going on right now. Just as the physically dead will hear the Son of God’s call and will be raised from the dead, those who are physically alive, but who are dead in their sins (‘dead’ in this case means separated from God), who hear the call of the Son of God, are being given spiritual life now. They are being reunited to the fellowship of God.

“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;

In Colossians 2:2-10, St. Paul writes that there is a mystery about God and the Father and Jesus Christ. Theologians have broken their heads trying to understand how these concepts all fit together. Perhaps we should just simply accept what we are told in the Scripture. In Christ “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” This statement accords with what John has told us already in the Prologue of his Gospel, “in Him was Life.” This is being restated here with different terms (*the Father* and *the Son*). Life is in the Father; Life is in the Son. Everything the Father has, the incarnation of God, Who is the Son, has as well.

¹¹ They did repent, and were forgiven, which a study of the symbolism of Genesis 3 shows, but the damage to the world was done.

Thus, for all who will come to Him (accept Him and His work, or as John 1:12 reads: “receive Him”), Christ has the authority to bestow eternal life.

and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man.

“The Son of Man” is the title Jesus used most often of Himself. It is, in John, almost always used in the context of His passion (seven times out of ten). Because He paid the price of mankind’s sin with His own death on the Cross, it was right and proper that He should be the One Who executes judgment, either to pronounce a person righteous or to condemn a man as evil. The Son of Man will know who belongs to Him—who has accepted Him and His work.

It is marvelous to know that the One Who is our Judge, is the One Who loves us so much He died for us.

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, and those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

There will be a future resurrection of all the dead. Just as He called forth His friend, Lazarus, from the grave, someday, everyone who has ever died will be called forth by our Lord. At that time, He will sit in final judgment. Some will live eternally with Him; others will be damned.

The question is: what is meant by “done good” and “done evil”? Above, Jesus said, “He who hears (obeys) My word, and believe Him who sent Me, has eternal life and will not come into judgment.” This is then “doing good” It is, therefore, evil to reject His word and not believe in the Father. Those, who do this evil, will be condemned.

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent me.

Here, we understand the trustworthiness of the Son to the Father. He does only as directed (or “shown”). All initiative comes from the Father. The Son acts on the Father’s initiative. Even in His authority to judge, He only does so as He “hears.” He looks to the Father’s will even in this. God is just; therefore the Son’s judgment is just.

APPLICATION

“This Sunday, the third Sunday after Easter, is called Red Sunday (Karmir Kiraki). The origin of the name, Red Sunday, has been lost, but it is most probably related to nature. Like Green Sunday, it is a popular designation related to spring, since it is at this time of the year that the fields are adorned with red tulips amidst the green grass.”¹² However, in the Armenian flag, red symbolizes the blood shed by Armenian soldiers. For Armenians then, red symbolizes sacrificial death and also new life.

Our reading from the Gospel today discusses new life, the new life that God offers us. But this new life can only be ours because God, in His incarnate form, Jesus Christ, died

¹² Quoted from: Eastern Prelacy: Crossroads E-Newsletter - 04/29/2004

a sacrificial death for us. That this should be called Karmir Kiraki is then very appropriate.

The Jews of Jesus' day did not understand Who Jesus was. Although their prophets had prophesied that the Divine King would, someday, come in the form of God's Servant to die for their sins, they did not recognize that, in Jesus Christ, the prophecies were fulfilled. Even the disciples did not realize this, until after the Resurrection. However our Gospel writer, John, finally understood all that Jesus had done, and taught, during the three years of His ministry before the Crucifixion. In his Gospel, John lays it out for us, so that we too may know, and believe, and have eternal life.

In the first chapter, John told us exactly who Jesus Christ is. He is God. He is God, the Creator of all things. Because He is God, life is in Him. We know, and the Jews of Jesus' day knew, that there is only One God. Things got tricky for us when the One God decided to become a human being. Human beings must worship and obey God. How do we, then, explain the relationship of the visible incarnate (in human flesh) God, Jesus Christ, to the invisible God in Heaven? There is still only One God. John uses the terms, *God* and *Father* and *the Word*, and *Son of God* and *Son of Man*, to show how this One God functions. When the idea of initiation and sending is meant, John uses the terms *God* and *Father*. When the idea is doing what the One God wishes and initiates, John uses the terms, *Word* and *Son of God* or *Son of Man*. *Son of God* also is a title for the promised Divine King. *Son of Man*, also, is the title Jesus most often used for Himself, because it not only refers to His Divine Kingship, it also refers to the fact that, as a man, the incarnate God gave Himself sacrificially to die on the Cross for our sins. If this is still too difficult to wrap our minds around, all we need to remember is that everything that is God, was, and is in Jesus Christ.

In our reading for today, Jesus is explaining to the Jews that He is the Doer, and the Father is the Initiator, of all God's actions. Therefore, when Jesus healed the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day, it should not be thought of as breaking the Sabbath, because God works on the Sabbath as well as on other days. (This of course offended the Jews because they realized that Jesus was claiming to be God.)

Jesus went on to say that the other prerogatives of God, raising the dead, giving life, and judgment, are also Jesus' prerogatives. He will be the One Who calls forth the dead for the final judgment. He will be the One Who sits in judgment on all mankind. But He is also the One Who offers eternal life to all Who believe His words, and trustingly believe in God's lovingkindness. This great lovingkindness has caused God to send His incarnation, Jesus Christ, to take our place on the Cross, and to die for our sins. The Jews of Jesus' day, and we today, can have eternal life, freely, without cost, if we simply accept what Jesus said, sincerely repent of our sins and turn back to God in commitment to Him. If we do this, when the great final resurrection occurs, and we stand before the judgment seat of God, we will look up to see our wonderful Savior. Moreover, as we live our lives today, we are assured that, already, we have eternal life. We have this promise on the sure and true word of the Son of God.