

**Judica , A ✕ D 2011**

**John 8:(42-45)46-59**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7-8). Whoever is of God, hears the words of God. All throughout Lent, the crowds around Jesus have gotten more and more irritated with Jesus and His Word. Two weeks ago, they accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Satan. This week, they accuse Jesus of being possessed by a demon, of blaspheming, and of deserving death. So it is with the Word of God. If you are not of God, you cannot hear it, you will not hear it. Those not of God not only refuse to hear the Word, but it is eventually taken away from them. In the end, they receive what they wanted.

2 This is the litmus test of faith: how do you receive the Word of God? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. “The reason why you do not hear them,” Jesus judged the Jews, “is that you are not of God.” Did you catch how the crowd of Jews only selectively heard the words Jesus spoke to them? “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.’” But that’s not what Jesus had said. He told them, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” What’s the difference? It’s just a small change, but it demonstrates that hearing, they do not hear. Later, the crowd charged Jesus, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Indeed, because the Son of God is coeternal and coequal with God the Father, He has seen Abraham, but that’s not what He said to them. He said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”

3 Finally, when Jesus declared to the crowd, “Before Abraham was, I AM,” they picked up stones to kill Him. It’s not a grammatical mistake; it’s theological precision. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Before He took flesh in the Blessed Virgin’s womb, Jesus was. Before they named Him Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity was. He was; He is; He will be. All at the same time. In saying “I AM,” Jesus used the Holy Name of God about Himself. I AM who I AM. He is God. And His Word is terribly offensive.

4 So how do you receive the Word? Certainly, there were multitudes who rejected Jesus’ preaching outright, as there are today. Perhaps they are too lazy to attend to the most important matters in the week at the very beginning, hearing and receiving the Word of God. Perhaps their idols of mammon and money have them working instead of receiving the gifts of God. Whatever the reason, their refusal to hear the Word of God is obvious, so this warning from Jesus is not levied against them. But to those in the pews, whose ears ring with the word as did the Jews hearing the preaching of Jesus but who nevertheless accused Him of being demon-possessed, how do you hear the Word of God? Isn’t your hearing rather selective, as theirs was?

5 God commands generosity toward the Church and toward the poor, but the crowd replies, “Certainly God means generosity within reason. I’ll give what I can without having to modify my lifestyle. God would never ask that of me.” God commands chastity, saying “lead a sexually pure and decent life in what you say and do,” but the crowd responds, “What harm can

a little viewing do. If God really meant not to look at women to whom you're not married in various states of undress, what would we watch on television? Certainly Christianity is not that inconvenient." And when God says, "defend your neighbor, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way," the crowd replies, "Certainly God doesn't mean to command what we say while at the hairdresser or in the church parking lot or over coffee with friends. What else would we have to talk about if God demanded rigid obedience to the Eighth Commandment?" God commands "be fruitful and multiply" but the crowd reasons "Of course by 'fruitful' God means 'once you're ready and established' and by 'multiply' He certainly permits taking drugs to keep things at a responsible one to three."

6 Repent. This is worse than playing with fire. This is the Holy Word of God. If you only selectively hear it, you are no better than the crowds whom Jesus warned, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." The Word of God is truth. Any compromise is a lie, and is not from God but from the father of lies. Push away His word, make your excuses, harden your heart, and eventually your faith will shrivel up and die. And then nothing will avail for you on the last day.

7 "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Whoever is of God hears the words of God. Everything depends on the Word. The Jews were wrong. Jesus is neither possessed by a demon nor does He come from the devil. He, the Incarnate Word, comes from His Father. That's what got the Pharisees really riled up: the news that this Word of God Incarnate had come to die as the sacrifice for sinners. That's the heart of the Word of God that you cannot bear to hear without faith: The Word of God took on human flesh to die the death every sinner deserves, to be the Lamb for the sacrifice. The world simply cannot bear to hear that, nor can they understand it. But you, beloved of the Lord, hearers of the Word of God, have received the Lord's gift of faith. The faith without which the Word of God is impossible to comprehend comes exactly through the hearing of the Word of God. The faith the Lord requires He gives freely as a gift. So today, as you hear His Word, do not harden your hearts.

8 You cannot make yourself a child of the Heavenly Father, but by the power and promise of His Word, He has made you His child in the waters of Holy Baptism. Whoever is of God hears the words of God. And the reverse is true: whoever hears the words of God is of God. It's not a command; it's just a matter-of-fact. What do you hear? He who made you His child through the water and word of baptism continues to deliver to you the word that made you His own. You hear His word of Holy Absolution. You hear His words of consecration of bread and wine, making them vessels for His Body and Blood and then you hear His gracious invitation to receive these for your salvation. Whoever is of God hears the words of God.

9 The powerful Word of God, which changed you from an heir of death to an heir of life, from a child of the devil to a child of God, continues to work. Like flame attracts a moth, the Word of God draws you to it. So, today, when you hear the Word of God, do not harden your hearts. It's the Word of God proclaimed to you that was the means through which the Holy

Spirit delivered faith. It's the Word of God proclaimed to you through which the Holy Spirit keeps you and grows you in that faith. It's the Word of God proclaimed to you, delivered to you in Holy Baptism, applied to you in Holy Absolution, fed to you through the Holy Supper, that makes you of God. Whoever is of God hears the words of God. Whoever hears the words of God is of God.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer