

Lent 5 2020

John 8:46-59

St. John Lutheran Church, Palmer, KS

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Son of God did not become a YouTube video but became flesh. He became a man, not a Facebook livestream from heaven.

Christ is with you. His blood saves you. It is not the digital, recordable, virtual thought of the blood of Jesus that saves you from your sins. It is the actual blood of the Son of God, spilt on the cross, that saves you. In Egypt, it was not the idea of putting lamb's blood on their doorposts that spared the OT church from the tenth plague. They couldn't just YouTube some other guy putting out the blood on his door. They needed the actual blood on their own doorway: *Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt* (Ex. 12:13).

As we become more and more surrounded by virtual reality, we need to remember what is truly real. Christianity is not virtual. It is not merely a set of ideas. Christianity is flesh and blood. It is historical fact. It is a bloodied cross and an empty tomb. Christianity is Christ. Christ for you. Christ with you. Do not get the idea that because the pastor is with you virtually that Christ's presence is also a virtual presence. Christ is with you really.

Thanks be to God that He comes to us through His living Word. He brings us to himself through the voice of the Holy Gospel. That Gospel, that message of the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake, can even come through radio and internet and smartphones. For many Christians around the world, virtual service is the best they have right now, which well more than our forefathers had when they had to be cut off from church in emergencies.

But the danger in these days is that we slip into complacency and a casual attitude about God and think that his presence is also virtual. The danger is that we slowly become like the Jews in today's Gospel. They subscribed to Abraham's channel. They read Moses' FB posts. They knew all the Bible information about God. Yet Jesus says to them, "You do not really know God."

They didn't know him because they forgot that God was a real person standing in front of them. The living God is not this virtual thing that you can livestream. There is not an app for that! God is a Trinity of persons. He is maker of all things. God is love. And love always comes near.

Love is never content to be virtual. The husband who must be away from his wife will send videos, phone calls, and mail. But it is a stop-gap. What he wants most of all is to embrace her again.

Christ came to embrace all people, Jew and Gentile alike, in his outstretched arms on the cross. His took away all sins and the just wrath of God.

Christ is the IAM, the God who embraces his people and stays with them. He is with you now, not virtually, but really. His name is baptized onto you. His angels guard you. On the last day he will wipe away every tear from your eyes. We rejoice that his Word can be preached over radio and internet, but that should cause us to remember even more that our eternal goal is not a virtual reality but a personal fellowship with him in his presence.

God always comes near to his people. When our first parents rebelled, and brought sin and pandemics into the world, God came to be present with them still. “The Lord God [was] walking in the garden in the cool of the day, yet Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

But Christ has paid your debt. There is no need to hide. If you are afraid, do not be too ashamed to pray. He does not come to cast you aside. He will not socially distance himself. Christ became man to be physically present. To have rocks thrown at his face when he revealed himself to be the IAM. He came to be spit upon, whipped, mocked in person, and nailed to a beam.

He came to give you his body to eat and his blood to drink so that he may embrace you with his forgiveness, life, and salvation. Whether we can receive the most precious sacrament now or not, you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. You have eaten the risen Lord’s flesh and according to his own word he will raise you up on the last day. You have your Baptism and his very words, in which he says: *Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.*

Will this be the year with only a virtual Easter? Never. Whether churches can gather or not, Christ is risen. He lives not virtually but for real. Hear him now! *Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.*

*Come soon, Lord Jesus.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.