

Belief Is Behavior Fifth Week of Lent Wednesday, April 10, 2019 Dn 3:14-20,91-92, 95; **Jn 8:31-42** (So a true believer is one who follows in the ways exemplified by Christ, foreshadowed by Abraham; and that is what it means to be free.)

“Jesus said to those who believed in him, ‘If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

This reading has been very confusing for many people because it starts off with Jesus addressing those who believed in him and then it becomes very adversarial, very argumentative. But actually what it is, is **a critique of what is meant by belief**. So for many people, many people in the world today claim to believe in Jesus; they claim to believe in Christ. But according to this critique, they really don't believe. Why? Belief is not a matter of words. It's not a matter of belonging. It's not a matter of loyalty. It's not a matter of descent or family identity. None of those things are what belief is about. **Belief is about behavior. If you were Abraham's children, you would be behaving as Abraham did.**

Now St. Paul takes this issue up in Galatians and he says that the Jews as a nation are mistaken when they believe that they are the inheritors of the promise to Abraham. So Paul says, well, the Jews as a tribe, as a group, as a nation, really belong to Moses and the Mosaic covenant, and that's all well and good; but **the promises that were given to Abraham were given to his, in Greek, *sperma*, meaning his descendent**, singular, because the word descendent in Greek is a singular. It could mean descendents in general, but it's a singular word grammatically. And then St. Paul says, well, **the descendent is Jesus; so only those who cleave to Christ in faith are really inheritors of the promise.**

Well this goes a little bit broader. **It says the descendent, the *sperma*, are those who behave like Abraham.** And that is also referred to when Jesus says, “Those who come from the east and the west and the north and south and dine with Abraham,” that's a reference to the heavenly

banquet, and those who were coming from the east and the west are those who are like Abraham, who behave as Abraham behaved, not those who are in a group or this group or that group. This is very important for understanding the Gospel according to John, the Good News according to John. This is not a matter of belonging to a certain group, even the Christian group. It's a matter of behaving as Abraham behaved and, therefore, behaving as Christ behaved. And what does it mean to behave as Christ behaved? It's a man who has told you, referring to himself, the truth that I heard from God. That's what it means, **to do what Jesus heard from God. That is what it means to be a true *sperma*, descendent of Abraham, or for that matter a true person of faith, a believer.** That's what the believer does. So it's about what people do, not what they say. "Abraham did not do this," that is, Abraham did not try to kill him.

Now it seems a little premature to talk about killing, but at the end—this part is cut off a little bit—but at the end they take up stones. And they take up stones because his reference to the Father in their belief system—in their belief system—his reference to the Father is blasphemous. **But what John is trying to point out is that their belief system isn't relevant; in fact, no belief system is actually relevant. What really is relevant is what people do. How people act. And the model is Abraham, and the model is Christ.** So a true believer is one who follows in the ways exemplified by Christ, foreshadowed by Abraham; and that is what it means to be free.