

## Living Lent | Day 32

# *Nothing Separated Us From God... Not Even Ourselves*

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*Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

***John 8:51–59 RSV***

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### **Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:**

Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem and He has been engaging with the religious authorities in a long and sometimes heated discussion about who He is. In the crowd are those who John tells us "believe" in Jesus and He has now turned His attention to them. Yet even those who believe in Him are having difficulty with what He is saying. Surely Jesus has a demon. Surely Jesus is speaking nonsense when He speaks of those who keep His word never having to taste death. Surely He cannot think He is greater than Abraham. Indeed, by the end they are ready to stone Jesus.

Are they any different from those of us who say we too "believe" in Jesus? Sure, in some ways. We don't think Jesus has a demon. Having the testimony of those who

witnessed the resurrection, we are able to speak about eternal life (even if we have not yet experienced it or don't fully understand it), and hopefully we would not be in the crowd picking up rocks. But in other, equally profound ways we are very much like them.

Do you notice how those in the crowd use Abraham and the prophets as their norm as to what is possible? "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died." That's what we do. It is easier for us to look to the past than look to the future. We prefer to hold on to what we know or think we know than open ourselves to an unknown future, even one filled with promise. We all have our Abrahams, our prophets, our way of doing and thinking and believing which may blind us to the new possibilities which God has for us.

When Jesus tells us to forgive, do we find perfectly good reasons not to? When the Bible tells us to care for the aliens and immigrants, the strangers among us, do we tell them to go back to where they came from? We may not stone Jesus but we ignore Him and in the end that is close to the same thing.

And yet His love for us holds fast. Knowing the weakness of those in the Temple that day, He loved them to the end. Knowing our weakness, He loves us to the end. What a gift this Lent to contemplate that nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ, not even ourselves.

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### ***Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ***

The Reverend William (Bill) H. Barton is the Priest at St Andrews & St. Cyprian's Episcopal Churches located in Darien, Georgia. St. Andrew's is a historic church originally built in 1844 and burned during the Civil War. The present building was completed in 1879. Rich in history and an exceptionally beautiful church, completed in 1879 of classic 14th century English architect, the Church and its congregation serves the McIntosh County and Georgia low country. Likewise, St. Cyprian's is a historical tabby church built by the formerly enslaved people from Butler's Island after the Civil war. The church was consecrated in 1876 and is believed to be one of the largest tabby structures still in use in Georgia. It is part of the Episcopal Community of McIntosh County, and serves as inspiration for the steady presence of Service above Self in the County of McIntosh and beyond.

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