



MEDITATIONS FOR LENT by Father Robbie Low

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT – THURSDAY John 8: 51-59

‘Before Abraham was...I am.’

There are many astonishing claims in the Bible and today’s gospel brings us hard up against the claim upon which the Christian conceit/schema stands or falls. Jesus is in the middle of a particularly vicious verbal punch-up with the usual suspects as to who is the true heir to the fulfilment of the Abrahamic tradition and promise? Is it the scribes and Pharisees, who hope, not unreasonably, for a Messiah who will get rid of the Romans and ensure liturgical correctness in the Temple. Or is it this ragbag of half-witted revolutionaries with their slippery and charismatic leader who seems to have some view of a universal covenant with himself as the key clause. The insults are tasty and the fur is flying. Jesus questions their claim to covenantal continuity, they remind Him that He is a bastard and the son of a whore. They’ve done their research and are not buying Mary’s fantastic version. Small towns have long memories.

Then Jesus drops this bombshell – a phrase which you either go with or it writes Him off as a dangerously disturbed delusional. He says, apropos of the competing Abraham claims, ‘BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS I AM’

Those who would like to say that Jesus was a delightful man doing his best in trying cultural circumstances, but never claimed to be God are utterly undone by John’s Gospel. From its opening prologue of the Word made flesh, it marches to the drumbeat of Incarnation, of the divine enfleshed and become Man. If anyone has missed the point in the opening salvo, John records Jesus’ persistent use of the divine name as belonging to Him. That holy and ineffable name, used only once a year by one man, the High Priest of Jerusalem, on the Day of Atonement, is frequently on the lips of Jesus. From the I AM the Good Shepherd, Light of the

World, Way, Truth. Life, True Vine, Door through to His response to the guards in Gethsemane – ‘I AM HE’ (whereupon they step back and fall on their faces as they would before the High Priest), John’s account leaves no wiggle room for the ‘nice bloke’ theory of Christianity. Jesus is God or He is mad.

In saying, ‘Before Abraham was, I Am’, Jesus is claiming that He is much more than the thirty something human being they can see. He is consubstantial and co-eternal with the Godhead. This is an outrage to the Jews and later to the followers of Mohammed who see a perfectly decent prophet’s legacy traduced by His followers – especially John and that ghastly man Paul. Why Jesus most faithful followers would traduce the Master or create fairy stories for which they were prepared to die is unanswered by the reductionists and later heretical offshoots of the Abrahamic tradition. The reason that this particular row, in today’s gospel, is so passionate is because upon its outcome rests no less than eternal salvation. More tomorrow.

Spiritual exercise: Cosmic Christ or little local lay preacher?

Reread John 1 v 1-14 and Paul to the Colossians 1 v 15 – 20.