

Rock of Ages

See print copy for song.

Old Orchard Church
Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 21, 2010 – 10:15 to 11:45 a.m.

See print copy for picture.

**Jesus answered,
“before Abraham was born,
I AM!”**

–John 8:58–

Descent To the Cross: Before Abraham Was, I Am

In the burning bush God revealed himself to man as
I AM WHO I AM.

Almighty, incomprehensible, supreme in majesty,
He who had no beginning is himself the Ground of all being.

But in the fullness of time He reveals himself again;
he comes with a face, with a laugh, with a heart that cries,
“Do not be afraid.

Yes, before Abraham was, I AM.

I am the inscrutable God.

But I am humble in heart, and I am gentle.”

We thought we could make him who Is, to be nothing:

We crucified him, the Lord of glory.

Yet God turned it to our good.

Bless him in the congregation of the forgiven,
the company of those who trust in Christ!



Scripture Readings

Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 3:6-15

Gospel Reading: John 8:48-58

Sermon Series on Matthew

“Trial By the Gentiles: The Secular Manipulation of Jesus”

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-31

Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

The One God-Man

Looking at Jesus' life primarily “from below,” I have not stressed such concepts as preexistence and divine essence and dual nature, which take up so much space in theology books. It required five centuries for the church to work out the details of Jesus' divinity/humanity and I have deliberately stayed close to the viewpoint presented by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, not the interpretive screen provided by the rest of the New Testament and formalized by the [later church] councils of Nicea and Chalcedon.

Even so, the Gospels themselves present the mystery of Jesus' dual identity. How did this Galilean Jew with a family and hometown come to be worshiped as “Very God of Very God”? Simple: Read the Gospels, especially John. Jesus accepted Peter's prostrate worship. To a lame man and an adulterous woman and many others he said commandingly, “**I forgive your sins.**” To Jerusalem he remarked, “**I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers,**” as if he was not a rabbi standing before them but the sovereign God of history. When challenged, Jesus answered bluntly, “**I and the Father are one.**” “**Before Abraham was born, I am**” he said on another occasion, uttering the sacred Hebrew word for God in case they missed the point. Devout Jews did not miss the point; several times they picked up stones to punish him for blasphemy.

Jesus' audacious claims about himself pose what may be the central problem of all history, the dividing point between Christianity and other religions. Although Muslims and, increasingly, Jews respect Jesus as a great teacher and prophet, no Muslim can imagine Muhammed claiming to be Allah any more than a Jew can imagine Moses claiming to be Yahweh. Likewise, Hindus believe in many incarnations but not one Incarnation, while Buddhists have no categories in which to conceive of a sovereign God becoming a human being.

Could Jesus' disciples have back-filled his teaching to include such brazen claims as part of their conspiracy to launch a new religion? Unlikely. The disciples, as we have seen, were inept conspirators, and in fact the Gospels portray them as resistant to the very idea of Jesus' divinity. Every disciple, after all, belonged to the most fiercely monotheistic race on earth. As late as Jesus' last night with them, after they had heard all the claims and seen all the miracles, one of them asked the Teacher, “**Show us the Father.**” Still they could not grasp it. Jesus was never clearer in his response: “**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.**”

Jesus never temporized or waffled about his identity. He was either the Son of God sent to save the world or an impostor deserving of crucifixion. The people of his day understood the choice precisely.

—Philip Yancey in *The Jesus I Never Knew* (1995)