

V LENT 2016 (PASSION SUNDAY)

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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HEBREWS 9.11 ST JOHN 8.46



Things have changed since last week...the church looks different today...flowers are gone...crucifixes and icons and statues are covered...things are getting serious...Jesus has gone into hiding...but not for very long.

The *Book of Common Prayer* designates that last two weeks of Lent...Passiontide. *Passion*...means *endurance* or *suffering*. There is a dramatic shift in the Gospel readings and our focus today and next Sunday and throughout Holy Week.

Absent from today's Gospel is the Jesus gentle meek and mild we have come to know and love and expect...the Jesus who makes us feel good. Instead we find an argumentative and confrontational Jesus. He is having an angry exchange of words with religious leaders about miracles, Abraham and God.

The confrontation reaches a boiling point when Jesus makes the most outrageous claim...he tells the crowd before Abraham lived..."I AM". Jesus uses God's name to identify himself...God...and signed his own death warrant. The crowd picks up stones to throw at him...but he is able to run away and hide. The veiling of the crucifixes and icons and statues reminds us Jesus went and hid himself.

When Jesus calls himself "I AM"...the name reserved for God...it was too much for the people to hear. They were confronted with something they could not understand much less accept...God was with them...he wanted them to know it...they wanted to kill him.

Passiontide is about Jesus' endurance and suffering and our own Lenten journey...and we are confronted with the same claim Jesus makes. What do we make of Jesus? Do we buy into his claim he is God...or not?

C.S. Lewis writes in "Mere Christianity" the claims Jesus makes about himself lead us to one of three conclusions: he is the greatest con artist who ever lived; or he is certifiably crazy, or he is exactly who he claims to be.

Jesus was able to hide from the angry crowd...but we cannot run away and hide from Jesus. Passiontide...our own suffering and endurance isn't something we can run away and hide from either...nor should we try. Passiontide confronts us in the most personal way and demands we make a decision about Jesus.

In our Wednesday Lenten Study we have been reading a wonderful little book..."With Jesus to the Cross". Beginning with Palm Sunday our liturgical reenactments during Holy Week will take us

through Jesus' suffering and endurance and to the foot of the Cross...and we will be there...we cannot run away from the Cross.

On Palm Sunday we will be the crowd running out to meet Jesus. We might remember the prophet Zechariah said our King would come to his people riding on a donkey. And we will sing joyfully, "All glory and honor to you, King Jesus". But then things change. Later we will read Matthew's Passion...and we are the angry crowd shouting, "Kill him!"

In our "Walk in Jerusalem" on Wednesday we will experience the "Divine Reversal". We will walk with Jesus and his mother to the Cross and we will see him fall...we will fall too. We see his tears and those of his mother and we should not hold back on our own tears. This is real...this is not make believe...this is what it's all about...we cannot run away and hide. The "Divine Reversal" is God's love in action...for us.

Love is what Jesus tells us we must do...it is not a polite suggestion...it is a direct command. On Maundy Thursday we will celebrate the Institution of the Eucharist...Jesus gives us his own living Body and Blood to give us strength until he comes back. We will sing "Glory be to God on High". It is a joyful celebration...but then things change again.

We will take the consecrated bread to the Altar of Repose...our version of the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks us to do one more thing...spend one hour with him. Time is short. Will we take just one hour out of our busy and hectic lives? And we leave the church in darkness getting ready for what's next.

Good Friday...Jesus offers himself...he is the "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." This is the conclusion of Jesus' Passiontide...the end of his endurance and suffering. Through the Liturgy of Good Friday we are there at the foot of the Cross. We don't like what we see but we can't run away and hide.

Jesus could have done things differently. He could have spared himself the endurance and suffering of his own Passiontide...and changed the way we keep our own. But Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He knew claiming to be "I AM"...God...would turn the crowd against him and ultimately get him killed.

Our own Passiontide journey must conclude with a decision about Jesus. Is he a con artist? Is he crazy? Or is he exactly who he claims to be...I AM...God...and everything he did was for us?

