

V Lent 2025 (Passion Sunday)

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Hebrews 9.11-15 St. John 8.46-59

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“Jesus goes into hiding” might be an appropriate sub-title for the Fifth Sunday in Lent. The *Book of Common Prayer* designates the final two weeks of Lent...*Passiontide*. “Passion” refers to the suffering and endurance Jesus experienced...for us. Why did Jesus go into hiding?

This morning’s Gospel begins with Jesus and the religious leaders having a heated argument over racial purity. The religious leaders thought because they were descended from Abraham, that was sufficient to guarantee them an entrance into heaven. Jesus, like his cousin John the Baptist before him, rejected that claim. Jesus insisted salvation was only possible through repentance, faith and keeping God’s words and commandments...not through one’s pedigree.

The argument escalates when the religious leaders accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon in him. Jesus replies he has no demon in him. He is honoring his Father by doing the work he was commissioned to do. They are the ones who are dishonoring God and those who follow his teachings will never die. That was almost too much for them to hear...after all Abraham and the prophets all died. They demanded Jesus explain himself.

Tensions mount. Jesus tells them if they really knew God they would know what he was saying was true. He tells them if they really understood the Scriptures...they would know Abraham was happy because he saw his coming. The religious leaders laughed. Jesus wasn’t even 50 years old...how could he possibly know Abraham? Jesus then claims for himself the name reserved for God and God alone...“I AM”! Jesus has just signed his own death warrant. They picked up stones to throw at Jesus...he left the Temple and hid himself.

We cover crucifixes, statues and icons in the church during Passiontide to remind us the Gospel records Jesus went and hid himself behind a curtain until the time was right for him to complete his mission of Redemption...and to help us focus our attention on his suffering and endurance! The Stations of the Cross are never covered...they are the compelling visual Story of our Salvation which we celebrate at every Mass.

C.S. Lewis was one of the greatest Christian lay apologists of the 20th Century. In his book “Mere Christianity” he writes the claims Jesus makes about himself lead us to one of three conclusions:

- *He is the greatest con artist who ever lived*
- *He is certifiably crazy*
- *He is exactly who he claims to be*

Passiontide challenges us to decide what we think about Jesus. Is he a liar who pulled off the biggest con job ever? Is he a nut case who should be locked up and never to be heard from again? Or, is he exactly who he said he was...and is...the Son of God? The only sensible conclusion we can reach is made clear to us as we continue our journey to Good Friday and the cross...Jesus is the Son of God! Abraham indeed was happy to see his coming. So are we!

Jesus tells us the whole reason he came to us was to set us right with God the Father, and to establish a new covenant through the shedding of his own blood. The Writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us Jesus’ Sacrifice is the one time event that cancels the temporary effect of Temple sacrifices. It can never be repeated. He is the “one oblation of himself once offered...a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction...for the sins of the whole world.”

Passiontide concludes on Good Friday, with Jesus suffering the death of a common criminal on the Cross, put on display for everyone to see. His disciples didn’t want to hear this, partly because they didn’t believe it would happen, partly because they were expecting the Messiah to be a new King David. The news Jesus had to die for us isn’t something we want to hear either. We will learn through the Passiontide readings and the Church’s liturgies, there was no other way for us to be put right with God, except by God himself.

Passiontide invites us to join Jesus in his journey to the cross...to suffer and endure in the only way we can...through our own trials and tribulations and times of uncertainty. His Passion didn’t last...neither will ours.

Jesus said, “I AM!” And he is!

