

## V Lent 2026 (Passion Sunday)

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

**Hebrews 9.11-15 St. John 8.46-59**



*"Before Abraham was born, 'I AM'."* Jesus has just made a direct, explicit claim to divinity. He has elevated his authority far beyond that of a mere prophet or teacher. Jesus' declaration "ups the ante" by claiming the covenant name of God (YHWH) revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14 for himself. The religious leaders viewed this as blasphemy. They took up stones to throw at him. But Jesus went into hiding...but not for very long.

Passion Sunday commences the final two weeks of the Season of Lent called Passiontide. The custom of covering statues, crucifixes and icons with purple veils during Passiontide began in 9th Century Germany. They symbolize Jesus going into hiding from the religious leaders as recorded in John's Gospel. The veils tell us something is different and stand in stark contrast to the flowers and rose-colored vestments that lightened things up a bit last Sunday.

The *Passion* in Passion Sunday and Passiontide...means *endurance* or *suffering*. There is a dramatic shift in the Gospel readings from now until Good Friday. The encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders become more confrontational. The Father gave him a mission to complete...the Redemption of mankind. The road to Calvary and the Cross will be rough for Jesus, but he can't turn back now.. He will endure suffering...and it was all for us.

The confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders reaches a boiling point when he makes the most outrageous claim to being God. Jesus has just signed his own death warrant. The true meaning of his Sonship and his mission were hidden from the people who wanted to kill him. Jesus was forcing the religious leaders and those around him to decide what they believed about him. Was he the Son of God...or was he nothing more than a trouble-making anarchist?

C. S. Lewis, the great lay Christian apologist of the last century, argues in *Mere Christianity* the claim Jesus makes to being God forces us to make a choice what we think about him, and there are only three options available. He writes...

*...“I am here trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”*

Lewis’ journey from atheism is a compelling story. He was forced to decide what he believed about Jesus. He concluded atheism made no sense at all and the only sensible option was to return to the Christianity of his roots...and to embrace Jesus as the Son of God and his Lord and Savior.

Passiontide is the continuation of our journey to the Cross. Jesus was able to hide from the angry crowd for a while because it wasn’t the right time for him to finish his mission. But we cannot run away and hide from Jesus or our own Passiontide journey of suffering and endurance. Passiontide confronts us in the most personal way and demands we make a decision about Jesus.

Jesus could have done things differently. He could have spared himself the suffering and endurance of his own Passiontide. He could have 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.

What do we think about Jesus? We have three choices we can make. Either he was the greatest con artist who ever try lived and fooled the world; or he was certifiably crazy and should have been locked up; or he was and is exactly who he claims to be...“I AM”...God. The choice is ours...and there is only one choice that makes sense.

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