

## V LENT 2018 (PASSION SUNDAY)

### SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

*St. JOHN 8.46-59*



Just what do we think of the man who calls himself...“I AM”...the Name reserved for God alone?

C.S. Lewis was one of the greatest Christian apologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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

Passion Sunday marks a dramatic shift in the Parish’s liturgies. The pink flowers at the High Altar and rose-colored vestments of Refreshment Sunday are gone. We are visually struck by seeing the crucifixes, statues and icons covered in purple veils.

The PASSION in Passion Sunday and Passiontide means endurance and suffering. Jesus endured cruel public ridicule and suffered unimaginable physical and emotional pain before being executed like a common criminal. Why did he subject himself to all of this? He said, “I have to do this for all of you”. It was for us!

During the last weeks of Jesus’ life on Earth, he continued to preach and teach and heal. The lawyers and religious leaders constantly criticized him for his action and accused him of being an agent for the Devil and a sinner.

Just before the action in today’s Gospel, Jesus encourages people to follow him the Light of the World and those who follow him will never walk in darkness. Many were happy to hear this and believed Jesus was telling the truth. The lawyers and religious leaders didn’t understand what he was saying. Jesus invites us to follow him too.

Beginning today and continuing through Good Friday the Gospels show Jesus raising the stakes in his encounters with the authorities. His discussions with the Pharisees become more confrontational. When he says those who follow him will never die...they dismiss what he says as absurd.

Jesus tries to explain to the lawyers and religious leaders...the real reason he came was to make the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life God made to Abraham and the prophets come true. His message Abraham would celebrate the day this happened is lost on them. How could Jesus possibly know Abraham who had been dead almost 2000 years?

Everything comes to a head in today’s Gospel. Jesus’ claim to have existed before Abraham was born culminates in Jesus calling himself...I AM! In the Book of Exodus...this is the name God calls himself when Moses asks him, “Who are you”? Jesus has just identified himself as God!

That is enough to send the lawyers and religious leaders into a frenzy...to them Jesus has just committed blasphemy. They can no longer tolerate Jesus and pick up stones to throw at him. But Jesus hides himself behind a curtain. All of the action in the Gospel takes place in the Temple in Jerusalem. The custom of covering crucifixes and statues and icons in church comes from today’s Gospel.

Let’s try to imagine ourselves caught up in the middle of the action in the Gospel. Let’s try to imagine we are in Jerusalem and Saint Joseph Parish is the Temple. Over the next two weeks we are going act out liturgically the events in Jesus’ life that will take him and us from the pivotal moment today when he claims God’s Name for himself...to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday...to the Last Supper...and to the final moments of his life on Good Friday.

The Gospels challenge us to make a decision about Jesus...what we think of him...what we believe about him. What do we make of the man who calls himself...“I AM”...God...the man religious leaders 2000 years ago dismissed as a crackpot and troublemaker?

C.S. Lewis was correct when he wrote the claims Jesus makes about himself lead us to one of three conclusions. There is only one conclusion we can come to that makes sense...

...He is exactly who he claims to be!

