

The Fifth Sunday in Lent
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Hebrews 9.11-15 St. John 8.46-59



Jesus has just raised the stakes in the Game of Life. He has just made the outrageous claim of being God. He has called himself by the Name reserved for God alone...not to be spoken out loud. From this point on...things are only going to get more heated.

The final two weeks of Lent are called Passiontide. The terms "Passion Sunday" and "Passiontide" originated in Anglicanism. They were first introduced in the *1928 Book of Common Prayer*. "Passion" in this case means "suffering" and "endurance".

The scene in this morning's Gospel takes place in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish authorities are becoming increasingly nervous about Jesus' teachings and the crowds following him. His encounters with them are becoming more hostile as they look for ways to get rid of him.

The religious leaders had already accused Jesus of being an agent for Satan and being possessed by a demon. Jesus counters that charge by saying he isn't seeking anything for himself...he is doing his Father's work...by dishonoring him they dishonor the Father. He tells them whoever obeys him will never die.

Jesus' claim that those who obey him will never die prompts the religious leaders to repeat their charge he has a demon. To prove their point they tell him Abraham and all of the prophets are dead. They demand Jesus explain himself.

Things only go from bad to worse as Jesus tells them they don't really know God and are liars. He tells them Abraham was happy to see Jesus come. The religious leaders dismiss Jesus' claim he has seen Abraham since he isn't yet 50 years old. Jesus responds..."Before Abraham was born, 'I AM'." Jesus has just called himself by the name reserved for God and God alone. Jesus has just said...I am God.

This was too much for the religious leaders to bear. Their anger at Jesus for calling himself God...blasphemy in their minds...forced them to take action. They picked up stones to throw at Jesus...but he hid behind a curtain until they passed and he escaped to safety.

During this Season of Passiontide, we cover crucifixes, statues and icons with purple veils. This symbolizes Jesus hiding behind a curtain while the religious leaders run past him. The veils should also remind us it's time for us to get serious about what lies ahead for Jesus...and liturgically for us.

During the last weeks of his life on Earth, Jesus told his disciples they were going to Jerusalem. He told them he was going to be turned over to the police, and eventually end up executed. The disciples didn't want to hear anything about Jesus dying. We don't want to hear it either.

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. A covenant is more than a contract. If one party breaks a contract the other party is off the hook. If one party breaks a covenant the other party must live up to their part of the agreement. Covenants in ancient times always involved the shedding of blood. The way Jesus puts us right with God the Father is through the shedding of his own blood.

The Epistle to the Hebrews talks about the sacrifices the priests in the Jewish Temple made for the people. They repeated the sacrifices every year, which is what they were supposed to do. But the sacrifices the Temple priests offered could only forgive people's sins for a short period of time. They couldn't change people's hearts. They couldn't forgive sin forever and set us right with God.

Jesus is the Great High Priest who has forever taken away the need to have the kind of sacrifice that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem. His death on the cross is the "one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction...for the sins of the whole world."

Passiontide is the time for us to raise the stakes in our Game of Life. We have an opportunity to share in our own way the Passion and suffering of Jesus. Passiontide is our own special time of suffering and endurance. We should enthusiastically embrace Passiontide...we will then be ready to more fully celebrate Easter.

Jesus...I AM...God...has made himself known to us...and he's not hiding. Our job is to make him known to the world.

