

V Lent 2024 (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 claimed for himself the name reserved for God and God alone. He has just signed his own death warrant. There would be no turning back now.

C.S. Lewis remains one of the most influential Anglican lay theologians of the 20th Century. In his classic *Mere Christianity* he writes...

...“I am trying to prevent anyone 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 the 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 patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse...I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

We’re now in the final two weeks of the Season of Lent called Passiontide. “Passion” means suffering and endurance. Jesus suffered and endured the trial, conviction and execution of a common criminal. Lewis also knew suffering and endurance. He talks about his journey from atheism to Christianity. His wife of four years died from cancer and Lewis died from kidney failure three years later.

During Passiontide we are compelled to make a decision about Jesus. He is the greatest con artist who ever lived; he is certifiably crazy; or he is exactly who he claims to be...“I AM”...God!

In the Passion Sunday Gospel, the claim Jesus made for himself, that he is “I AM”...God...provokes an immediate response

from the priests and other Temple leaders...they pick up rocks to throw at him. They want him dead. But this was not the right time. Jesus was able to get away and hide. The veils covering the crucifixes, statues and icons in the church are the liturgical reenactment of Jesus going into hiding.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews talks about the sacrifices the priests in the Temple made for the people. These sacrifices could only forgive peoples sins for one year. They had to be repeated every year. They could not accomplish what Jesus accomplished for us. 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”.

The sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for us can never be repeated. He is the Great High priest...better than any earthly priest. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God...better than any earthly lamb. The blood he shed on the cross did more than rip the curtain apart that separated the people from the Most Holy Place in the Temple. It saved us made it possible for us to have everlasting life in heaven. Jesus is priest, sacrifice and God!

Over the next two weeks we will continue our journey to the cross and Good Friday. We will reenact through the Liturgy the Passion, Suffering and Endurance of Jesus. We will share in the only way we can...by being here...what Jesus went through for us. And we will begin to understand how to suffer and endure our own hardships and pain with him.

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes...

...“The existence of pain does not negate the presence of an omnipotent, loving God. When understood in the fullness of its context, we realize that it is the very presence of God that provides meaning and hope amid the pain. Christ was the ultimate, innocent bearer of unjust suffering. In the face of abject pain, self-sacrificial love, goodness, and power are met on the cross.”

Jesus said, “I AM”. We are here today because we believe he is exactly who he claims to be...God!

