

Judica (*Passion Sunday*)

St. John 8:46-59

March 29th, 2020

Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC

Simpsonville, SC

Pastor Jerald Dulas

Before Abraham Was, I AM

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Gracious God, Merciful Father, Who dost bountifully forgive and show mercy unto all who truly repent of their sins: We heartily beseech Thee, dear Father, forgive us all our sins, and grant us Thy grace, that all we who call upon Thy Name, each day abstain from all unrighteousness and sin, and turn unto Thee with all our hearts, that by the power of Thy Spirit we may daily be found in sincere faith and obedience, bringing forth fruits of true repentance: grant us also that, seeking and calling upon Thee in faith and confidence, we may find Thee a merciful God and Father, and be assured of Thy gracious help and blessing in every need of body and soul, until at length, by Thy grace, we obtain eternal salvation; through Thy dear Son, our Lord and Savior, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have come to the final and third part of the Lenten season. We started out in Pre-Lent, or Gesimatide, where our Lord invited, instructed and enlightened us. Then we passed through Lent proper with our focus being on the Ten Commandments, and specifically how much we daily and often break the Ten Commandments. Now we have entered Passiontide. This is why this Sunday is called "Passion Sunday" because our focus turns from our works—our sins—to the Passion—the suffering and death—of our Lord + Jesus Christ. There are those who would erroneously call Palm Sunday "Passion Sunday," because the first of the Passion Histories from the Gospels is read, but today is rightly called "Passion Sunday" because it begins the season of the Passion, or Passiontide.

So then, how does the Church begin this most solemn part of the Church's year? How are we shown the cross and passion of our dear Lord + Jesus Christ? This season begins with the murdering and lying Jews. Earlier in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of the Evangelist and Apostle St. John he records that the Jews desired to kill our Lord + Jesus. They were looking for any means, any words, that they could use to kill Him. We are shown in this pericope why they want to kill Him, and we also see our Lord's response to them. They present our Lord + Jesus with death—His death—and He presents to all those who believe on Him life—eternal life.

In this Gospel is summed up the entire seasons of Lent and Easter. Lent presents us with death; death on account of our manifold sins and iniquities. We deserve the Triune Lord God's eternal wrath and displeasure on account of our sins. We deserve an eternal life in Hell on account of our daily breaking of the Ten Commandments. But the season of Easter gives us life. Through the works and merits of the Christ—our Lord + Jesus—He has won for all mankind eternal life with Him; He has atoned for the sins of the whole world, so that those who believe on Him inherit an eternal life with Him and all the saints and angels in Heaven. This is the truth that our Lord + Jesus would have us hear from Him

today. But the Jews in the Gospel reading do not want to hear the truth. They are of their father the devil, and he is a murderer and a liar from the beginning. The Jews take their cues from their father, and follow his lead in becoming murderers and liars.

They want to have no part of the Lord + Jesus. They do not want to hear His Word. They do not want Him to be their Messiah. They only want to kill Him and be done with Him. They even accuse our Lord of being a Samaritan and having a demon. The accusation of being a Samaritan is the same as saying that He is an apostate of the house of Israel. The accusation of having a demon implies that nothing He says should be believed, because the devil is the father of lies. The Jews therefore do not want to hear anything from our Lord Who they believe to be a lying apostate. And for this they desire to kill Him.

Our Lord + Jesus does not let the accusation go unchecked, but preaches to them their error. The truth is that anyone who keeps His Word, that is, believes that He is the Savior come into the world to redeem mankind from their sins, shall not see death. Those who cling to Him in faith will not see death; they will live forever. The Jews pose a logical question. After all, we see death all the time. People die every day. Abraham has died. The Prophets have died. Many saints in Christ have died. How is it then that our Lord + Jesus says that we will never taste death?

This is only confusing if one only considers our Lord to be speaking about physical death. The body dies, but the soul of the person with faith lives on in Heaven. This is what our Lord + Jesus is saying. Abraham is not dead; he lives on eternally in Heaven. The Prophets are not dead, they live on in Heaven. All of our loved ones—the saints—who have died in the faith are not dead, they live on in Heaven. For they have all clung in faith to the Lord + Jesus; they have clung in faith to His works and merits on their behalf. We too, who cling to our Lord + Jesus and His suffering and death—His Passion—in faith that through it we have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation have exactly what He promises we will have. We too will not taste death, but will live forever in Heaven.

Our Lord + Jesus promises us this by giving us the example of Himself: “Before Abraham was, I AM.” He Who is alive not in the presence of the Jews was also alive at the time of Abraham; even before the time of Abraham. He is eternal. His existence is continual from before the foundation of the world. In the same way that our Lord + Jesus is eternal, all those who cling in faith to His Word—His promises of salvation through His passive and active obedience—will also live with Him eternally. We will live eternally because of His Passion—His suffering and death on our behalf.

Abraham rejoiced to see His day. Indeed, Abraham prefigured the sacrifice of the heavenly Father’s Only-Begotten Son when he willingly offered up his son Isaac as a sacrifice at the Lord God’s command. A lamb was provided—a ram—on behalf of Isaac, so that the lamb served as a substitution for Isaac. The sins of Abraham and Isaac were offered as a whole burnt offering in the ram provided by the Lord God. The people of Israel, through the establishment by the Prophet Moses, also were given a ritual means by which their sins could be atoned for through the offering of a lamb—a whole burnt offering. Their sins were placed upon the lamb and the lamb was completely burned up to show that their sins were also completely burned up and destroyed; they were completely atoned for.

Our Lord + Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. By His suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross, He atones for the sins of the whole world. He is the burnt offering for our sins and trespasses. By His death—His utter destruction—He wins eternal life for us. This is the truth that our Lord + Jesus wants all men to believe. He wants us to cling to this truth in faith and receive the gifts He won for us. He wants us to not believe the lies of the devil, the world and our sinful flesh, which do not want us hear His Word, or believe His promises, but want us to wallow in our sins and trespasses; they want us to wallow in their lies, so that we either despair like King Saul or Judas Iscariot, or become puffed up with pride like the Jews in today’s Gospel reading.

The Jews did not want to believe the truth; they did not want to believe the Lord + Jesus. They are therefore truly of their father the devil, who is a murderer and liar from the beginning. To show this the Evangelist and Apostle St. John in His Gospel chooses the way he relates the works of Christ in a significant way. For he writes at the end of today's reading that our Lord + Jesus was hidden from them and passed by them on His way out of the temple. They were unable to see Him. In their clinging to their lies, they were unable to see the truth. Their lies blinded them. In the very next chapter of the Gospel of St. John, our Lord + Jesus heals a blind man who comes to Him in faith.

The Jews in their unbelief, remain spiritually blind and dead. The blind man in his faith receives both his physical and spiritual sight. All those who cling to the truth of our Lord + Jesus receive both spiritual sight and eternal life with Him.

We have entered Passiontide. Our Lord + Jesus offers up Himself as a sacrifice for us; to win forgiveness for our sins and grant us eternal life with Him. Through His death, we have eternal life. Therefore, we will never taste death, because He has consumed death for us once and for all by offering His life as a ransom for ours. He has burst open the grave so that it now has no more power over us. He endured the scoffing of the Jews, and the accusations of being a blasphemer all for us. Now that old liar the devil can no longer bring any kind of accusation against; he can now no longer convict of sin, for our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ has atoned for our sins—offered up His life as a ransom for us—on the tree of the holy cross. This cross is our one reliance that we hail for all eternity for from this tree He lives and reigns to give us eternal life. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who through Thy Son, True God and our Redeemer, didst say: "If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death," We beseech Thee, bestow upon us Thy Holy Spirit, that we may give due honor to Thy Son, keep His Word, trust in it, comfort ourselves therewith in the hour of departure, and through death enter into everlasting life; for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!