

## Lent 5 (Passion Sunday) (2024)

If I were to look out from this pulpit and ask, **“Can any of you name any faults I have?”** I can only imagine the responses I would get.

Newcomers might say, “We don’t know you that well.” But those of you who have been here a while would likely begin holding up your hands and having your say.

Don’t worry, I am not going to do that, as we might well be here all afternoon. I want you to get out in time for lunch.

Who in his right mind would ask such a question?

Yet, this is what we find Jesus doing as today’s Gospel opens: “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” That word “convinceth”

means, as the Revised Standard Version translates it, convicts.

“Which of you can find any fault in me?”  
That was what Jesus was asking.

And, to make matters worse, He directs this question to His severest critics.

What happened?

No one could come up with anything to say.  
Remarkable indeed.

What does this say about Jesus?

We are going to find out as we look closer at the claims of Christ found in this Gospel.

But before we do, I think it would be helpful to fast-forward to the end of the passage. Here, we find these words:

**“Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.”**

The ‘they’ here are the Jewish religious leaders who are already rejecting Jesus’ message and plotting to get Him out of the way. Even at this stage of our Lord’s ministry, the shadow of the cross looms on the horizon.

No doubt, it is for this reason that this Gospel was chosen for this Sunday. It is to prepare us for the reading of the Passion narrative next week on Palm Sunday. It is to point us in the direction of the cross.

Knowing where we are heading is important, but as we look forward, we should not miss the rare gems found in today’s passage.

This Gospel tells who Jesus is and thus why His death is significant . . . why we should pay

attention to Him . . . why we should join Him as He makes His way to the cross.

If He were just a man among many, just another teacher of timeless truths, His dying on the cross would have about as much relevance as a crash on I-285 at rush hour.

But He isn't just one among many. Today's Gospel reveals Jesus as the One who has no rivals, the One who is uniquely qualified to bring about reconciliation between God and man.

First, we encounter what has been called "the miracle of His manhood."

He is like us in every respect in terms of His humanity. Yet, as we have just seen, He is faultless in terms of His moral perfection. Not even his severest critics could find any fault in Him.

Jesus' full humanity should be a source of comfort to us. The One in whom we are invited to put our trust is not some distant, stand-apart deity. He really understands our plight as humans. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4), all the way to the cross.

We can therefore come to Him in great confidence.

What are some of your concerns and challenges, your griefs and sorrows, this morning? /// Tell them to Jesus. Be assured He understands and cares.

Likewise, His moral perfection, which marks Him out as different from ourselves, is important and merits our attention.

It qualifies Him to our sin-bearer, substitute, and great high priest.

A flawed Saviour would be no saviour at all. Such a one could not bridge the gap between ourselves and God. He would be a bridge broken at the farther end.

Again, Jesus is without rivals. Seek no further. Hear and respond to His invitation: **“Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**

The second thing we discover about Him is closely related to what I have just said about His absolute moral perfection.

He exceeds even the patriarch Abraham in dignity and status.

Who was Abraham?

Well, he was the progeniture of the covenant people of God. They looked to him as their head and found their identity in him. For the Jew of Jesus’s day, he was the greatest of the greatest.

Yet, we hear Jesus say in today's Gospel:  
**“Abraham saw my day and rejoiced.”**

He seems to be saying here that Abraham in his lifetime was granted a vision of how God was going to work out His plan of rescue for fallen humanity. It would be through one of his offspring. This one would be greater than himself.

We can take this one step further. It is likely that the One who appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre and said that Sarah was going to have a son in her old age was in fact a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Son of God, the One we know as the Second Person of the Trinity. The story is written up in Genesis 18. So, Abraham really did see Jesus, and no doubt rejoiced.

As today's Gospel moves along, we hear Jesus saying something even more startling:  
**“Before Abraham was, I AM.”**

Abraham lived around 2000 years before Jesus? How can Jesus precede Him?

We get our answer in the words, **I AM.**

I AM is the inner meaning of the most sacred name for God – Yahweh.

It was the name revealed to Moses at the burning bush: “Tell them that I AM is sending you.”

What then is Jesus saying? ///

He is identifying Himself with the invisible God of the Universe, the ground of all being, the One without beginning or ending.



No more audacious claim can be found in all of Scripture.

Jesus is human in every respect. We have looked at the miracle of his manhood.

He could look His severest critics in the eye and ask what none of us would dare ask, “Which of you can find any fault in me” and come out the winner.

Yet, He was and is more than a perfect human. He is God’s One and only Son, the One who is uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, God and ourselves.

But there is third and final truth about Jesus we should not miss: **He is the conqueror of death.**

**“If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death,”** we hear Him say.

Here we find Jesus looking beyond this present order where death reigns supreme and holds all men captive.

Here we find him looking to a brand-new order. This new order began to emerge when Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter morning. It will be fully realized when Jesus comes again.

I conducted a memorial service yesterday. If Jesus' words about death were false, if He were not telling the truth, I would have had no real words of hope to offer.

Anything I said would have been fluff and conjecture . . . empty words signifying nothing.

But thankfully that is not the case.

Imagine an immense gray prison with an endless line of people filling in. Each time someone enters, the door crashes behind him. No one comes out.

Well, that is what had been happening with the human race as far back as anyone could remember. People had been filing in the door of death with no one coming out.

On Easter morning, that changed. One did come out.

Jesus' resurrection is the pledge that many more are to come. He has stormed the prison house and is setting the captives free.

I did have Good News to deliver at yesterday's memorial service, and it is all because of Jesus who is unique in every respect, the incomparable.

Not only is He perfect man, He is perfect God and the One who holds the key to death's dark prison.

Today's Gospel points us on to Good Friday where the divine-human Jesus will win a victory for us that no one else could – no, not even the patriarch Abraham.

Because of the victory, we have Good News, Good News not founded anywhere else, Good News grounded in historical fact, Good News sent us by God Himself. Let's not remain mute. Let's tell it out!