

Sermon for Lent V Judica – John 8:46-59

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Jesus said to [the Jews], ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.” Something was different when you walked into church today. The images that adorn our nave have all be covered, shrouded, hidden. The liturgy’s accent of grief increases yet again over these next 2 weeks. Today we enter what is called Passiontide. Not only has our Gloria in Excelsis and Te Deum been taken away, our Alleluias still exiled, but now our crosses and statuary are veiled in sadness. Even these signs and figures of Christian comfort are taken away from us. Or as today’s Gospel put it: “... Jesus hid Himself...”

And as is ever the case, the liturgy tells us more about real life than we ever knew. Where was Jesus when you felt abandoned in a relationship when they walked out on you? “...But Jesus hid Himself...” What about when your spouse has been working long hours when you need them home? “... But Jesus hid Himself...” What about when your struggles in marriage are more than you can bear? “... But Jesus hid Himself ...” And another Easter holiday rolls around, and your loved one whom you miss will not be there. “... But Jesus hid Himself...” In the hard times, where is God to be found?

How did it get to this point? Why did Jesus hide Himself in today’s Gospel?

Prior to His hiding, Christ addressed Himself as the divine name. He told the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” It’s as if He said, “I am the Beginning and the End. Before heaven and earth were created, I AM, and I abide for eternity.”

How did those Jews react to this answer? With these words, Christ brought them to arms so that they turned to stone Him! As their hearts were stony and stubborn, so it was to stones that they turned. The Jews picked up rocks to throw at Him. However, Jesus hid Himself. He stepped into His invisible, Divine glory, and right in the midst of His enemies, He went out of the Temple.

For those Jews, this was not the Messiah they were expecting. He had no political power or wealth to overthrow the Roman government. He was merely a common carpenter’s son from Nazareth. Rather than falling down and worship, selfish men pick up stones to kill Him.

But don’t we also think the same way? Why doesn’t God fix my problems now?!? Why doesn’t He take away my loneliness now?!? That’s not my Jesus! Why should I fall down and worship Him when He is hidden?

There certainly are times when we must bear the consequences of our misdeeds and transgressions. We are sinners with thoughts, words, and deeds chock full of vice,

hatred, and lust. At certain times, our grief is brought upon ourselves. But this is not always the case. Our sufferings are not always signs of God's wrath and punishment. In other words, the troubles we face are not always punishments for past sins. God's strange and alien works are for an important purpose. Those works of calamity and strife He intends for our benefit, "for His power is made perfect, [and more apparent], in our weakness," as St. Paul would say.

As Christians we often find ourselves in difficult situations and trying circumstances. We may cry out, "I am being crucified—suffering all sorts of pain, affliction, and hardships—but I had hoped that God loved me." Today's Gospel has made the point that Jesus hid Himself. But there is a question that has not yet been answered: "Where is Jesus hiding?"

In God's mysterious way of working, Jesus is hiding precisely in our trial and in our affliction, in our loneliness and in our desertion, so that His loving will can be accomplished in us. By His "strange" or foreign work, God lays hold on us, humbles us, brings about repentance, causes us to think of and hunger and thirst for His Divine Gifts, and finally, drives us to the cross and brings us in faith to eternal life.

Our hardships and afflictions are but a small reminder of the sufferings and cross of Jesus. While Jesus did hide Himself for the moment in this Gospel, our Lord would not hide His back from being scourged. He would not hide his face from being slapped and spit upon. He would not hide His hands from the nails. He would not hide His head from the crown of thorns. On Golgotha was revealed the most horrid outpouring of wrath upon sin: "He made Him to be sin who know no sin ..." Yet, in that cross is also, at the same time, the greatest act of the Gospel: "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

It is quite clear that Jesus' first followers by no means recognized the Gospel taking place on Calvary. They hid themselves in fear. And later the disciples walking with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus said, "Our chief priests and rulers ... crucified Him. But we hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:20-21). What irony! By His crucifixion, Jesus did redeem Israel! And Jesus now redeems you! He purchases you with His blood even again today!

For where else is Jesus hidden? Not under veils of cloth, but under bread and wine where He reveals His body and blood given for you for the forgiveness of your sins. He's hidden in His Word of forgiveness revealed to you by His proclamation and preaching through sinful men. Your redemption is here. In Jesus you have a High Priest who loves you, wants you, and will never leave you. You are part of the new covenant in His blood, that you might eat, drink, be cleansed, and have eternal fellowship with Him. "For you [also] have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠