

Peace Lutheran Church

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Rev. Dennis Wenholz

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MAUNDY THURSDAY

APRIL 9, 2020

**AT THE CROSSROADS
A SERIES OF SERVICES FOR LENT
Maundy Thursday: Forgiveness**

OPENING RESPONSE

P In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

P The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.

C Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

P As far as the east is from the west,

C So far does he remove our transgressions from us.

P If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins

C And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

P For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

C Therefore we give glory to God who raised him up and gave us the promise of salvation. Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P Jesus said, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

C Forgiving Lord, we confess that we find ourselves cherishing your forgiveness, yet we seek to avoid forgiving those who sin against us. Forgive our need to carry grudges, to count the injuries done to us while failing to see and confess the failings in ourselves. Forgive blindness to the hurts and needs of others while we tend to our own broken promises and broken intentions. Fill us with your heart of compassionate forgiveness and make us those who heal and encourage our loved ones. Fill us with the Spirit so that we might overflow with the serving that proclaims your very presence with us.

P Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING ... PSALM 116:1-9

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

⁶ The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE READING ... 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING ... MATTHEW 26:26-29

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Lord.

SHORT MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

SERMON DIALOG WITH MARIE AND TOM (*pages 4-6*)

(Jan & Jim Turpin as Marie & Tom)

A TIME OF SILENCE FOR REFLECTION

PRAYERS

P Let us bring our prayers and petitions to God, who hears and answers the pleas of our hearts. During this Holy Week, Lord, we pray your peace for the nations and peoples of the world and our own nation. Send your Spirit into leaders and rulers. Give them wisdom and a vision of your will for their peoples. We ask your help and comfort for those who must live in places of violence and persecution, especially those who suffer for your name. Strengthen the oppressed; hold the persecuted in your protective hand; send justice to the victims of injustice; and encompass all who cry to you for help with your saving presence. Make us agents of healing in this hurting

world. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P We pray for this congregation and your church in the world. Give faithful leaders so that your church can be a place of healing and reconciliation for all who are broken in spirit. Inspire your followers to take up their crosses of love and service. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P Ever-present Savior, fill us with the gift of your forgiveness, so that we can carry that forgiveness to all in our world. Give us a spirit of repentance so that we can more fully depend on your gracious gift of forgiveness. Give us the strength to choose the way of open acceptance and reconciliation for all we meet, all who are broken in spirit and burdened by the sins of the past. Lead us to take your healing power to all those around us who cry out for help. Make us able to choose the path of love. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P We pray for the sick, the suffering, the grieving, the lonely, especially those we name in our hearts. We commit them to your loving care. Heal, help and comfort them according to your will. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P These and all other petitions and requests we bring before you in the name of Jesus. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

BENEDICTION

At the Crossroads
A Series of Services for Holy Week

Maundy Thursday: Forgiveness
Sermon Dialog with Marie and Tom

The **Sermon Dialog with Marie and Tom** is delivered by the pastor (P) and two readers, one in role of Marie (1) and one in the role of Tom (2):

P Crossroads. They are there for all of us. We may move along from day to day easily, walking in the sunshine, enjoying the view, feeling at peace. And then it comes. A crossroad. A choice point. There we stand, frozen to the spot. Which way now? Right? Left? Straight? What waits down each of those choices? Which way does our heart call us to go? Which makes sense? Which is God's way?

The answers aren't easy. A crossroad can bring daunting spiritual pain. And it can bring us to our knees. It can even bring us to destruction. Or it can bring freedom.

(Note: This story can be done as a chancel drama. The pastor sets the scene with the first paragraph and two characters—Marie who in a wheelchair, and Tom who is holding a bouquet of flowers—speak the parts. Simple props might include an end table and a chair.)

P A story for Maundy Thursday: Clutching the bouquet of wilted Easter flowers, Tom watched Marie for a while across the darkened nursing home room. He had not seen her since the accident. Not seen her except every

time he closed his eyes. Then he saw her face, right there in front of his car—and he could not stop. She turned her wheelchair toward him.

1 *Tom? Is that you?*

P Tom moved into the light.

2 ***Marie. How did you know it was me? It's been a long time ...***

1 *Oh, I knew you'd come.*

2 ***I tried to get to the hospital and then I heard they had moved you here. I would have come sooner, but I've been busy. You know how it is ...***

1 *I've missed you, Tom. You were such a good neighbor. Mostly I've missed our Saturday morning walks to the store when we'd meet there on the sidewalk. They were so much fun. Do you remember?*

2 ***I remember. 'You're pretty fast, for an old dame,' I used to say when you'd try to keep up with me. You were very quick when you stepped out between those cars that morning I decided to drive to the store ...***

1 *Oh, I know. I don't know what I was thinking ...*

2 ***It wasn't my fault, you know. The police said it wasn't my fault.***

1 *No. It was mine. I wasn't looking. Silly old me. And I'm so sorry.*

2 You? Sorry?

1 *I know I hurt you. And I knew you could not just forget.
(Tom puts the flowers on the end table and moves closer.
Suddenly he falls on his knees.)*

2 Marie! Oh God, what have I done? How can God forgive me? How can you forgive me?

1 *Oh, Tom, God has already forgiven you and so have I.*

2 If only I could believe that. I can't sleep. I can't close my eyes. When I do, I see you lying there on the street, and I feel so helpless.

1 *Tom, do you know what day it is?*

2 It's the Thursday before Easter, isn't it? I wanted to see you before Easter.

1 *That's right. It's Maundy Thursday. Listen, Tom. Listen! Do you hear it? Do you hear the sound of this day?*

2 What sound? I don't hear anything.

1 *Yes, it's there. So plain. It's the sound of the broken hearts being healed. The hearts are still healing, Tom. Jesus' gift of himself reaches all broken hearts. Even hearts broken by guilt. God has touched your heart, too. You can come out of the darkness you have made for yourself. You can know that on this special day, because Jesus chooses to forgive you. You are forgiven and free.
(There is a pause. Tom puts his hand in Marie's and then stands again.)*

2 I'm glad I came.

1 *I'm glad you came, too. I've been worried about you. Will you come again?*

2 I will. I will come. Maybe we can go Saturday grocery shopping again.

1 *I'd like that. I'd like that very much.*

2 I've got to go.

1 *Oh, Tom. Happy Maundy Thursday and happy Easter.*

2 Thank you. (Pause.) Thank you, Marie. You have given me back my life.

(Marie and Tom exit.)

P There is no burden like the burden of guilt. There is no spiritual pain like that of something we deeply regret, something we long to have a chance to do over, something that glares with the truth that we have failed. The disciples struggled with guilt. Peter confronted the truth that he had denied Jesus when the rooster crowed. And he went out and poured his heart out in tears of sorrow. Judas confronted his guilt. When he realized that he had marked Jesus for arrest and saw that Jesus was dragged to trial and condemned, he threw the thirty pieces of silver on the floor of the temple and then went out and hanged himself.

Guilt can destroy. Guilt can put a shroud of pain and darkness over our lives. And worst of all, we cannot wish it or will it away. It hangs there, plaguing our sleep,

devastating our days, clouding the spiritual light we seek—dragging us to despair.

In our story, Tom faced a choice. He could continue to carry that load of guilt or make the choice to confront it, to confront his painful act, or continue to carry it like a stone in his broken heart.

Confronting our guilt is not easy. It can be embarrassing to admit our fault. It can be painful to face a person we have hurt. Certainly Jesus understood the immensity of our guilt when he shared his body and blood on that Thursday evening. He didn't say, "Never mind. Your sins aren't all that bad. I just wave my hand and speak a wish for you and you can feel better about yourselves." God's act of forgiveness is not an act of excusing.

We realize that it was our sin, our guilt that drove Jesus to the cross and we realize that we are forgiven and freed from past sins, not by wishing or hoping, not by anything we can do. It is by trusting in Jesus, receiving his body and blood, that we are helped, that we are healed, that we are forgiven.

And most marvelous of all, that forgiveness permits us the miracle of forgiving ourselves and forgiving others who have hurt us.

That doesn't mean it is easy. When we are hurt, when we are put down, when we are injured by someone else, our heart tells us that we have a right to strike back, to punish the person who has hurt us. But when we make that choice, when we choose to bury the hurt, carry the

anger, long for revenge, we hurt ourselves. We are the ones who suffer with that pain. We are the ones who carry the mark.

In Christ's act of love for us, we are forgiven and free. Free from our own guilt and free to forgive others. We are empowered by the Spirit to act, not in anger or revenge, but in love. We are able to forgive as we have been forgiven.

People of the Jewish faith, on a Day of Atonement, are called to forgive someone who has caused hurt or to seek forgiveness for hurts that have been done to others. What a perfect way for us to celebrate this forgiveness day. By the power of the Spirit, as we receive the body and blood of Christ for our forgiveness, let's resolve to forgive others. Let's seek reconciliation with someone who has caused us pain, and let's go to the person we have hurt and ask forgiveness. At the crossroad of forgiveness we are called to act in the forgiveness we have so freely received. Lord, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Amen.

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