

Peace Lutheran Church

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Rev. Dennis Wenholz

Rev. Khai Lee

FIFTH WEDNESDAY IN LENT

APRIL 1, 2020

**AT THE CROSSROADS
A SERIES OF SERVICES FOR LENT
WEEK 5: Obedience**

OPENING RESPONSE

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

C Amen.

P You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice,

C And you shall serve him and hold fast to him.

P Be faithful unto death

C And I will give you the crown of life.

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, "Whoever is of God hears the words of God."

C Gracious God, we confess our slowness to hear Jesus' words calling us to choose a life of love and service. We often hear the roaring of our own willfulness and ignore the urging of Jesus to follow him. We set our own path, seek our own advantage, cling to the things we have made for ourselves and turn away from the guiding of the Spirit. Forgive us, Lord. Open our ears to hear Jesus' call, our eyes to see the needs he sends us to fill, our mouths to speak the good word to those who need to hear it and our hearts to receive the Spirit's leading. Fire us by your Spirit to be about the life choices you have called us to make. Let us overflow with the doing that proclaims your very presence with us.

P I have the honor and privilege, by the grace of God of announcing to you the entire forgiveness of your sins. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ. You are forgiven and free--Not by anything you have done, but, by everything Christ has done on the cross. Yes, you are free to share the steadfast love of God with all people. Go now, for His peace dwells within you. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING ... PSALM 119:1-8

Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD!

² Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,

³ who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!

⁴ You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.

⁵ Oh that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!

⁶ Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous rules.

⁸ I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me!

EPISTLE READING ... EPHESIANS 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

GOSPEL READING ... MATTHEW 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very

sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?”⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

SHORT MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

SERMON DIALOG WITH JOHN (pages 3-4)
(Meng Xiong as John)

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. We pray for your world and our own nation. Lord, send your Spirit into our nation and into this sin-sick world. Be with those who live in places of violence and persecution. Strengthen and save the oppressed, the persecuted, the victims of injustice, the victims of wars and all who cry to you for help. Give faithful leaders to our nation and throughout the world. Make us agents of healing in this hurting world. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P We pray for your congregation and your whole church. Send faithful pastors, teachers and leaders, so that they might act as your shepherds among your people. Inspire your followers to evidence your loving gifts in their lives. In your mercy,

C Hear us, Lord.

P Lord, give us hearts that overflow with the grace and love you have shown to us in Jesus Christ. Put your Word in our hearts so that we might demonstrate the new life that you have bought for us. Guide our hands as we serve, our voices as we praise, our feet as we follow and our hearts as we constantly turn to you. Make us able to choose the good you would have us do. In your mercy,

C Hear us Lord.

P We pray for the sick, the suffering, the grieving and 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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

During this time, the Worship Services will be available through live-stream on our Church’s Facebook page:
www.facebook.com/plcfresno

**PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
2020 LENTEN AND EASTER WORSHIP SCHEDULE**

Holy Week

Palm Sunday, April 5th	9:00 am
Holy Thursday, April 9th	7:00 pm
Good Friday, April 10th	7:00 pm

† **The Resurrection of Our Lord** †

Sunday, April 12th	9:00 am, 12 noon (Hmong)
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At the Crossroads
A Series of Services for Lent

Week Five: Obedience
Sermon Dialog with John

The **Sermon Dialog with John** is delivered by the pastor (P) and another reader (R) in the role of John:

P For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Matthew 12:50). By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. (1 John 5:2)

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. Tonight we have an expert on the crossroad of obedience. He was there in the Garden when Jesus faced that crossroad—when he confronted his part in God's the plan of salvation. We welcome the disciple John, called "the disciple Jesus loved."

*(John enters. He is dressed well or in biblical costume.
He walks humbly.)*

P John, welcome. Can you tell us something about that night in the Garden, what you saw and what you learned about Jesus?

R *I'm almost embarrassed to be here. Yes, I was in the Garden with Jesus, but I certainly didn't understand what was going on and I certainly was no help to him there.*

P Did you see him praying?

R *Yes, he went away to pray. And he asked us to pray with him. I could tell he was struggling, but after the meal, after the cups of wine we drank with the Passover meal, after the walk to the Garden in the dark, I just couldn't keep my eyes open. I admit I fell asleep.*

P Didn't you understand the terror Jesus was facing?

R *Not really. Not then. It was not unusual for us to go off as a group and join Jesus in prayer. It happened often. Jesus was busy at prayer many times as we traveled with him. I just didn't know what was going on there in the Garden.*

P Do you understand now?

R *Now. Certainly. I wish I could go back to the garden and do it over. I wish I could join Jesus in his prayer, in his struggle. I know that it would be different now. Jesus was facing the most difficult crossroad in his life. He was staring at the reality of the suffering he would have to endure, facing the cross and most terribly, facing it alone.*

P Was it really different from the other times he had to choose between his own way and God's way? Was his choice to obey in spite of the pain so unusual?

R *Not really. We know that Jesus was often tempted in his life to step away from God's plan for him, God's plan for us. Satan harassed him like he had done in the wilderness with a way out, a way to avoid the suffering. "Just bow down and worship me," Satan said. "And I will give all this to you." He was offering a shortcut that avoided the cross, but Jesus sent him away and clung to the path that God had set for him.*

P What does Jesus' choice to obey, in spite of the terror that faced him, mean to you now?

R *It inspires me and convicts me. It must do the same for you.*

P How do you mean?

R *I'm certainly not unique. I faced a crossroad like Jesus' many times in my life. Oh, not with the weight of the world on my shoulders, but with my own heart in conflict over which way to go. I faced that crossroad every time I came to the place where I heard the voice in me say: "Look, you know what will happen if you choose to obey God's claim on your life, you will be hurt, you will be excluded, you will be scorned, you will be persecuted. Every time I stood at the crossroad, I remembered Jesus in the garden and asked him to stay awake with me and watch with me and pray for me.*

P Did that happen often?

R *In those years after Jesus ascended, all of us who followed him were faced with the choice to follow or deny him. If we denied him we could escape the threats, the persecution, even the death that faced us. We were outcast, rejected by many of our brothers, and threatened often with suffering or death. I asked God's help to remain faithful and encouraged others to do the same in my book called Revelation. I wrote: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10).*

P But we aren't persecuted. We don't face that kind of crossroad.

R *You face the crossroad of obedience every time you confront a choice that asks will you follow your own way, the way of the world, the way that others push you to, the way you think will be easiest or most pleasant for you. Or will you follow the way Jesus would lead you – the way of obedience.*

P But those kinds of choices happen every day.

R *And that is why you need the power and presence of God's Spirit every day. That's what Jesus was doing there in the Garden and on the cross. He was bringing forgiveness and new life to you there. By God's power and the sacrifice of Jesus you begin each day new and forgiven, new and able to make the choice of obedience.*

P And how can we make those right choices?

R *Here's another thing I wrote in the Gospel, Jesus said: "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). The same Jesus who struggled there in the Garden, the one who went to the cross, the one who rose is there in our hearts, with us at our crossroads and in our choices.*

P Thank you, John, for those words of encouragement. We will remember with you and rejoice with you for what Jesus has done and what he will do in us and through us.

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