

March 25, 2020

LENTEN SERVICE

It is possible to watch a video of the sermon if you prefer. Go to the home page on the church's website: MemorialLutheranChurch.org It will be posted there for you to view.

IF you would like to get this electronically please send your email to mlcsecretay1940@gmail.com

P: The Lord be with you,

C: And also with you.

P: The Lord has called us to be His disciples and He promises us:

C: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Opening Hymn: "Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle" – Hymn 454

P: O Lord, enter not into judgment with our servant:

C: For in Your sight shall no man living be justified.

P: Almighty God, since You know that we are set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Psalm 122

P: I rejoiced with those who said to me,

C: "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

P: Our feet are standing

C: in your gates, Jerusalem.

P: Jerusalem is built like a city

C: that is closely compacted together.

P: That is where the tribes go up—

C: the tribes of the LORD—

P: to praise the name of the LORD

C: according to the statute given to Israel.

P: There stand the thrones for judgment,

C: the thrones of the house of David.

P: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

C: "May those who love you be secure.

P: May there be peace within your walls

C: and security within your citadels."

P: For the sake of my family and friends,

C: I will say, "Peace be within you."

P: For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,

C: I will seek your prosperity.

Message: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."*

One of my pieces of "quarantine" reading so far is Sixteenth Watch by Myke Cole. It's a science fiction novel about tensions on the moon between the US and China. What makes it unique, though, is that it's not about big space battles or warships like most science fiction novels are. Instead, it's about the US Coast Guard in space, and the unique challenges they face. While technically a military branch, the Coast Guard doesn't prepare for battles. Instead, they train for search and rescue missions, for capturing smugglers, for using non-lethal force. Instead of war, they work to make peace.

Peace as an absence of war is the main way that we in America use the word, and what we think of when we hear about peacemakers. When we pray for peace in the world, we think of peace between nations, peace between people groups in conflict.

But that kind of peace is not the only kind of peace that we are looking for. We also look for inner peace, an inner calm, a feeling that all is right in the world. Anxiety appears and disrupts our peaceful lives. As the coronavirus spreads, anxiety spreads even more. All of the disruptions we've experienced in the last several weeks, from school closings to toilet paper shortages to economic uncertainty, cause anxiety. Inner peace, like external peace, is just as unachievable on our own.

I saw this on the spring break trip to Houston two years ago. Everyone, even those who were helping with us, talked about the peace they'd lost because of the hurricane. We met with people who'd only had ankle deep water in their houses, and people whose houses had been totally submerged. We met with people whose neighborhoods had been safe from flooding this time, but remembered times they hadn't been so lucky. All around, there were people without a sense of peace. As we go through this time of upheaval, we know we have all lost some peace, even those whose health and jobs aren't directly affected.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is "shalom," and is used often in meetings or letters. But more than just an absence of conflict or a benign statement of well-wishing, shalom also carried with it the idea of wholeness, well-being, or salvation. The shalom, the peace, was promised by prophets when the kingdom of Israel was restored, and it would flow like rivers.

Jesus brings peace and makes peace because he is the Prince of Peace. He is the one about whom angels proclaimed "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). More than that, though, Jesus knows that what he is going to do, what he will accomplish on the cross, will make and bring true peace. As Paul would later write, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). And when Jesus appears to his disciples in the locked room after he was raised on Easter, his first words to them are "Peace be with you." Jesus came into the midst of their fears as a peacemaker, having taken all of their fears and failures and covered-up conflicts on the cross.

Jesus then sent his disciples out as peacemakers. They went out to end division where they could. They came to share the peace that surpasses understanding.

I saw a story on Facebook allegedly from a doctor in Italy who shared how even though he'd been an atheist, he was coming back to faith because of the example of a priest who had come to the hospital he was at to pray with the patients and the staff. Even as the priest got sick and died, he brought peace to those around him.

Our peacemaking need not be that drastic, but we can still carry the peace of Christ with us into the anxious world, as we care for our neighbors, properly socially distant, of course. Peace is not a state, but a relationship. Not just any relationship, but the stability of relationship with the One who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Peace is God's presence in our lives, because of what Jesus did for us. And from peace as God's presence in our lives comes those other sorts of peace. Inner peace, in the midst of the storms and trials of life. Peace that flows like a river, from God, through us, to the world. A peace that surpasses all understanding, that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Response:

P: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests." (Luke 2:14)

C: "Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace." (Luke 2:29)

P: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

C: "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

P: "The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."
(Romans 8:6)

C: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."
(Romans 14:19)

P: "God has called us to live in peace." (1 Corinthians 7:15)

C: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."

And be thankful.” (Colossians 3:15)

P: “Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.” (Proverbs 12:20)

C: “Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.” (Isaiah 57:2)

P: “Have your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” (Ephesians 6:15)

C: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3)

P: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

C: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:9)

P: “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” (Mark 9:50)

C: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:11)

P: “Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” (1 Thessalonians 5:13)

ALL : “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Psalm 119:

P: My soul faints with longing for Your salvation,

C: but I have put my hope in Your word.

P: My eyes fail, looking for Your promise;

C: I say, “When will You comfort me?”

P: Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke,

C: I do not forget Your decrees.

P: How long must Your servant wait?

C: When will You punish my persecutors?

P: The arrogant dig pits to trap me,

C: contrary to Your law.

P: All Your commands are trustworthy;

C: help me, for I am being persecuted without cause.

P: They almost wiped me from the earth,

C: but I have not forsaken Your precepts.

P: In Your unfailing love preserve my life,

C: that I may obey the statutes of Your mouth.

Hymn: “When Peace, Like a River” – Hymn 763

Message: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

With all of the rapidly changing directives over the last week and a half, one of the concerns raised is wondering if this is persecution of the church. After all, if Walmart can stay open, but churches are included with bowling alleys or restaurants in closure directives, is that right?

Of course, there’s a world of difference between how these directives are seen. Most of the time, churches are still included in essential services, even if they’re strongly encouraged to limit gathering sizes and face to face contact. Even if we can’t meet physically for a time, there’s no government censorship over our digital communications, no one checking in to watch comments.

But throughout the world, there is still persecution. Persecution takes many forms. Sometimes it’s only insults and mockery. People might make fun of you for being a Christian, indicating that you are stupid or foolish because you follow the crucified Christ. Even in the first centuries of Christianity, the Greeks and Romans made fun of believers.

Persecution takes harsher forms in other places around the world. In Islamic countries like Iran and Pakistan, it is illegal to convert to Christianity, and harsh civil penalties occur, along with the possibility of a so-called “honor killing” by zealous family members. In North Korea, Christians can be betrayed to the secret police by their family members and executed. In China, the Communist government makes raids on house churches and arrests pastors not sanctioned by the Communist Party.

Jesus says that when we are persecuted because of righteousness—that is, for believing and following Jesus—we are blessed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: “The faith-community of the blessed is the community of the Crucified. With him they lost everything, and with him they found everything. Now the word comes down from the cross: blessed, blessed.”

Jesus was persecuted for righteousness sake. He was persecuted because of his righteousness, not because he did anything wrong. Why should we expect anything different? But his suffering makes us blessed.

Response:

P: “Brandish spear and javelin against those who persecute me. Say to me, ‘I am your salvation.’” (Psalm 35:3)

C: “LORD my God, I take refuge in You; save and deliver me from all who persecute me,” (Psalm 7:1)

P: “The enemy persecutes me; he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead.” (Psalm 143:3)

C: “Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at Your word.” (Psalm 119:161)

P: “Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.” (Jeremiah 17:16)

C: “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)

P: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” (Romans 12:14)

C: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35)

P: “We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it.” (1 Corinthians 4:12)

C: “We are persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:9)

P: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

C: “will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:30)

P: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (1 Timothy 3:12)

ALL: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Passion reading: Matthew 27: 19-44

R: This is the Passion of Our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Prayers (Pastor)

Lord’s Prayer

Evening Prayer:

ALL: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your Holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Blessing (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “O Blessed Light, O Trinity” – Hymn 890