

Midweek Lenten Service



Artwork done by Adam Sadely

The Purpose of Suffering: Reflecting on the importance of the suffering of Christ and the Church.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOLLYWOOD

The purpose of the Lenten services is to invite us into a time of contemplation as we look at the way in which our Lord suffered, the necessity of that suffering, and the importance of our participation in that suffering. While Advent was a time of curiosity and wonder, Lent is a time for us to reflect on the centrality of the Cross.

If you are not participating in the live stream, we invite you to individually or communally work through the liturgy that was designed for this service.

Call to Worship

Dean Choi

From Genesis 17:7: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." The God we love is a covenant God where no matter how much time passes by; His promises are kept throughout the generations. May God's faithfulness lead us into worship today Amen.

Opening Prayer

Written by Nancy Norris

Loving Lord Jesus. In the sacred season of Lent, we are encouraged to move closer to you in your suffering and to walk intentionally and humbly as a co-sufferer in, your journey to the cross. We had no idea when we began, that we would find ourselves in the middle of an international pandemic. Every day we are living with unprecedented change and disruption and we confess that we are very uncomfortable that this suffering and sadness has been thrust upon us. It is hard, scary, painful and overwhelming. We are tempted to hoard, to isolate and feed our fears. Instead of trusting in you, we naturally turn inward, away from the critical needs of others who may be more vulnerable and needy than we are.

Gracious Lamb of God, scripture reminds us that you can sympathize with our weaknesses because you have been tested in every way, just as we are being tested now. You suffered and died for this very purpose, so that we could live freely and live fully, without fear, in the hope and joy of the resurrection.

We confess that our hearts are selfish, and we are reluctant to live sacrificially. Grant us mercy to be full of grace and light to our family and neighbors. Gracious, Lamb of God, we want to shine your Gospel love into this fear-filled world. We pray for courage and for strength to live as your beloved children and share the gifts of kindness and compassion in the unknown days that lie ahead.

It is with deep hope, and faith that we pray this together, **Amen.**

Opening Psalm – Psalm 38

Ruth Schmidt

¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
² For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.
³ There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
⁴ For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy
for me.
⁵ My wounds grow foul and fester
because of my foolishness;
⁶ I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all day long I go around mourning.
⁷ For my loins are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.
⁸ I am utterly spent and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.
⁹ O Lord, all my longing is known to you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
¹⁰ My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
as for the light of my eyes – it also has gone from me.
¹¹ My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction,
and my neighbors stand far off.

¹² Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin,
and meditate treachery all day long.
¹³ But I am like the deaf, I do not hear;
like the mute, who cannot speak.
¹⁴ Truly, I am like one who does not hear,
and in whose mouth is no retort.
¹⁵ But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.
¹⁶ For I pray, “Only do not let them rejoice over me,
those who boast against me when my foot slips.”
¹⁷ For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.
¹⁸ I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.
¹⁹ Those who are my foes without cause are mighty,
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.
²⁰ Those who render me evil for good are my adversaries because I follow after good.
²¹ Do not forsake me, O LORD;
O my God, do not be far from me;
²² make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation.

Prayer for Illumination

Written by Courtney Moore

Holy God, you have given us your Word to guide us, teach us, comfort us, and give us wisdom. Your Word is a light to our path; the true hope in this dark world. Give us the ability to truly hear your Word and follow its teaching so that we may know you better, love you more, and be a truer reflection of your love in this world.

Old Testament Reading – Genesis 3:1-13

Courtney Moore

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^[a] knowing good and evil.”

⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

This is the Word of the Lord

New Testament Reading – James 1:12-18

Mac Heald

¹²Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. ¹³No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved.

¹⁷Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

This is the Word of the Lord

Time of Silence (*Spend 2-3 minutes in silent reflection*)

Homily

Written by Dean Choi

“The Importance of Temptation”

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁴ But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor;⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The one question we will unpack today: **Are you satisfied with the food you are eating?**

When I first read this passage, the one question I did not understand was why does the devil ask Jesus to make bread in the first temptation in v.3? What we know is that Jesus fasted for 40 days (v.2) and the NRSV says that Jesus is famished which according to the Oxford’s dictionary defines famished as, “extremely hungry.”¹ If it was me, my go to comfort foods after fasting is pepperoni pizza with jalapenos and bacon bits with mint chocolate chip ice cream for dessert. If I got Chicago deep dish pizza, that would be my downfall because I’m from Chicago and we have some of the best pizza in the world! Yet for all the ways that the devil can tempt Jesus with food, it does not look like the devil knows what he is doing at first glance. However, if we expand out into examining the three temptations together with the context that is given at the beginning in v.1-2, a greater purpose can be understood. It is not by chance the devil is asking about bread. God is ultimately revealing something here.

¹ *Lexico Powered by Oxford*. s.v. “Famished,” accessed March 23, 2020, lexico.com/en/definition/famished

For those that are confused with how the Spirit of God leads Jesus to be tempted by the devil in v.1, I want us to know that the encounter with the devil is the first evidence of a divine act and purpose.

In the second temptation, the devil quotes Scripture² and asks God to fall down from a high place with the mentality that if Jesus is the Son of God, God the Father would ultimately rescue Jesus. Now that might sound like a ridiculous request but in truth, the text is revealing the nature of sin itself that a person living under sin will be tempted to challenge God's identity and authority. Jesus responds quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 to not test God.

In the third temptation (v8-10), the devil promises Jesus that all kingdoms on Earth will be given if Jesus bows down and worship the devil. Jesus responds by stating that He worships God and serves Him only.

What kind of test is the devil giving to Jesus to have Him make bread? I believe the bread signifies the past covenant relationship between God and Israel:

Reason #1. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness and in the Book of Exodus, the Hebrews are led by God into the wilderness.³

Reason #2. 40 days has been used in Scripture to signify the establishment of a new covenant. With Noah, it was the flood.⁴ With Moses, it was 40 days in the Mountain and 40 years in the desert⁵. With Jesus, it was 40 days in the desert.⁶

Reason #3. Jesus is "extremely hungry" when the devil asks Him to create bread. In Exodus 16:32, God is the one who creates manna, the bread that sustains the survival of the Hebrews while living in the desert for 40 years.

Reason #4. Jesus responds to the devil to not test God with the 2nd temptation and Moses calls out the Hebrews in Exodus 17:1 for putting God to the test!

Reason #5. In the 3rd temptation, Jesus is brought up to a high mountain to worship the devil. While in Exodus, Moses enters the presence of the Lord with the burning bush and worships God (Exodus 3:2). However, the community of God in Exodus 32 falls short of the covenant by worshipping a golden calf.

I believe the devil is testing Jesus when asking Him to make bread to see if Jesus is the God of the Covenant. Why is this significant?

In all instances of this passage, the temptations are a reiteration of how the covenant of God was established with Moses and how the people of God had failed repeatedly to keep it throughout all generations until Christ. When Christ enters at this point in the story, he is preparing a new way for us to live where God fulfills the covenant promise to reconcile humanity with Himself forever by answering every question of the devil in covenant language!! This is how we know that Jesus is the smoothest person alive because He points to Himself when He answers the questions without directly saying so and the devil could not keep up! In modern culture language,

² Psalm 91:11-12

³ Numbers 32:13

⁴ Genesis 7:4

⁵ Exodus 24:18

⁶ Matthew 4:2

be smooth like Jesus. Perhaps this is why the devil leaves Jesus in v.11 releasing the reality that Jesus has come in the flesh and the reign of the devil was coming to an end. Praise God!

In this case, the bread is a cultural exchange that embodies the long history of God and all His covenant people who came before. To be clear, we are NOT elevating the bread as holding significance. Instead, we remember the one who creates and provides our daily bread. I want to remind you that it is by bread and grape juice at FPCH that we partake to remember the sacrifice of Jesus's body and blood on the cross, His resurrection, and empowered by Jesus's presence through the Holy Spirit during communion. In fact, a theologian named James K. A. Smith puts it this way, "[w]ith communion, we don't pass around grapes and for bread, we don't pass around wheat because both elements of wine and bread are forms of cultural making."⁷ In another way, Smith explains by stating that it is ultimately not just about what you do during communion but also what happens to you.⁸ At communion, we encounter the presence of the living God together with your church community. Therefore, it is by no mistake that the devil comes to test Jesus but in the same framework, it is by no mistake that Jesus overcomes the devil and his schemes. Amen? Now I do not want people telling me after this sermon that they are gluten free or that you do not eat bread in your life. I am not also telling you to go eat more bread or that by eating more bread means you are somehow being holy. No! No! No! God is the main character in the story, not the bread. God is the one who turns ordinary things like bread into sacred blessings.

To understand why food taste better when God is the one who blesses the meal is like being able to eat food from someone you truly love. Likewise, food that is blessed by God when we pray is a way of setting a part our meals, acknowledging that we thank God for providing the food in our lives.

So, I now ask you again: **Are you satisfied with the food you are eating?** If I were substitute bread for food for a moment in this passage, we might hear things a little differently. "One does not live on [food] alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God." (4:4b). When we pray and eat our food, remember the cultural significance of history that ties generations of believers that rest on God's faithfulness and not our own. God is the initiator, promise keeper, and the one who shows us the way to live a life of faithfulness. The audience hearing the message during Jesus's time while alive just did not know the cost of what Jesus was going to endure and be mocked and killed by those that He wants to save.

For the past few weeks Pastor Joel and Pastor Tim have asked you all to reach out to friends, church members, and to check up on people during our current "Shelter at home" mandate. I want to now expand the call beyond this because if we only connect by reaching out to those around us, then we can easily push aside other people that are being directly impacted by the corona virus. My partner Jodie works as an emergency

⁷ James K. A. Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation Lecture*. 2010. Lecture at Calvin University. Accessed June 25, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/9229782>

⁸ James K. A. Smith *Desiring the Kingdom*

nurse who sees corona virus potential patients every time she goes to the hospital. Two of my brothers are doctors and they are both married to doctors as well. My second brother has had to come into work to fight the corona virus for the past 3 weeks straight. They are on the front lines and as the corona virus cases increase, please encourage and support the medical friends or any essential personnel that you know and reach out online to people you do not know because there is more than just kind words that can be given at this time. Staying home is top priority to support the well-being of all of us in faithfulness but I want to remind you that prayers can be intersectional. My family is mostly made up of Asian Americans and the corona virus has sparked fear that is fueled by racism against Asian Americans of so many people in the United States.⁹ Violent hate crimes against Asian Americans have risen since the corona virus broke out. Many of those people recorded on the news that are beaten and harassed as Asian Americans have been the elderly. If we only reach out to those in our church, we will miss out on reaching the millions of people around us that are being impacted by the virus. So, as the medical community puts their health and well-being on the line for all of our sakes, can we pray for them that God would keep them and their children healthy and protected? May we as the body of Christ be vigilant in speaking up and protect one another, our family in Christ. Amen?

Let's pray: Jesus, may your words teach us that when you answered the devil in covenant language that you were speaking to us as well. That we can smile and be glad that you fought for us by entering into the world in flesh and loving upon your children. Encourage all of the medical workers that have been pushing themselves with limited supplies of masks to treat and heal the people in their care. God, you said that you came to heal the sick, Lord we pray that you would answer that declaration at a time like this that the physically sick too may know that you are with them. Lord, feed your people who are struggling at home with not having enough food to feed their families or are having trouble buying groceries. May you restore hope to those that have lost their jobs or are not getting enough hours to support themselves during this time. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

⁹ Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. Opper Jr. *Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear For Their Safety*. New York Times. Published March 23, 2020. Accessed March 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God,
Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human. He was crucified for us
under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Nelson Steinert

Almighty God,
you love us, but we have not loved you.
You call, but we have not listened.
We walk away from neighbors in need, wrapped in our own concerns.
We condone evil, prejudice, warfare, and greed.
God of grace,
help us to admit our sin,
so that as you come to us in mercy,
we may repent, turn to you, and receive forgiveness; **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Mac Heald

Having been invited to the table of grace by the living Christ, let's speak to Him now with thoughts of thanksgiving.

And, as we pray, consider the words from one of the most loved hymns of the Church. *O Sacred Head Now Wounded* is attributed to several authors and translators, but its meaning is as vibrant today as during the time of its first writing, perhaps nine hundred years ago.

*What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this, Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for Thee.*

Lord of the Passion, Lord of Lent, and Lord of every season of the year, accept our thanks – words that must come from humble hearts, words that must spring up when we consider who we would be, where we would be without You.

Holy God, who are we but broken people, with broken hearts, broken minds, broken bodies – that You would put us back together? You did it with one heartbreaking act of Your own: the turning over of Your one and only Son Who, though God Himself, would live life as a human, yet in perfect obedience. Obediently, humbly, selflessly, He gave up His life so that we could live. We thank You, Jesus, for such sacrifice. And we thank You, Father, for seeing us now as people with souls that are whole and holy, only through our trust in the saving blood of Your Son. And we thank You, Spirit of God, for Your counsel and Your comfort and Your pointing us to Jesus.

So odd, isn't it, that we worship You together, *apart*? And yet, in Your creative way, O God, You've inspired people through the ages to meet such social challenges as war, politics and disease so that we could ever find You in the darkness of our circumstances. May we never take for granted our longing to be together, to be with You.

And so, what language shall we borrow to thank You, dearest Friend? Perhaps the language of mindfulness – keeping before us the knowledge of what You went through, Lord Christ, to rescue us. In the words of Isaac Watts:

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

Thank You, God. **Amen.**

Charge and Blessing

Dean Choi

May the God of peace who is able to create the universe with His voice speak now to our bodies mercy to know in our bones that God is in control. God, bless your people with food that is made in love to remind us of our cultural history of existence that you are our promise keeper so as we engage with our neighbors online or six feet apart, we may share the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.