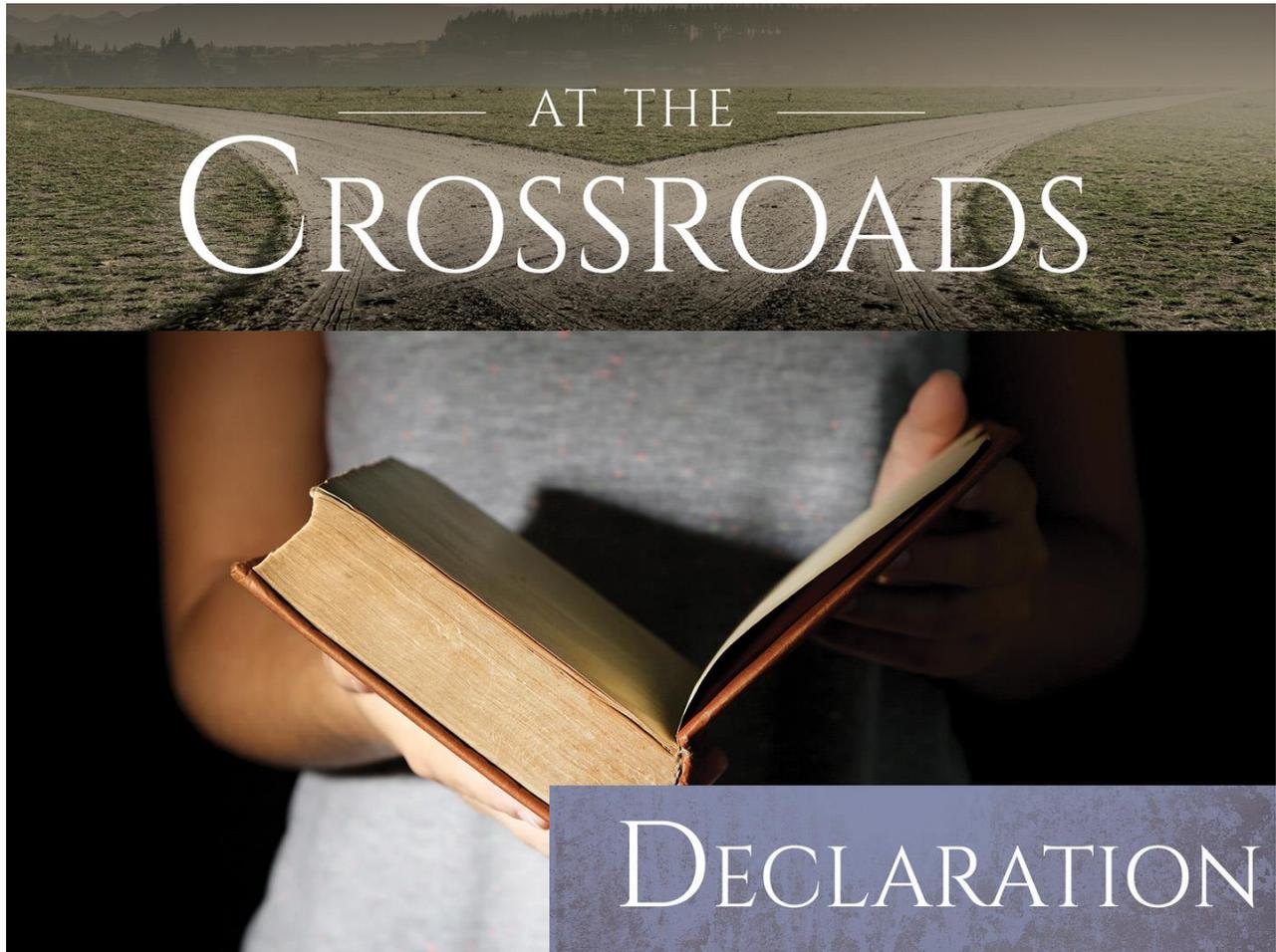


Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
Lent 4
March 24, 2020
7:00 pm



Welcome to Week Four in the At the Crossroads series, in which Peter is asked to declare whether or not he knows Jesus and he decides to deny his Savior. When questioned about our Lord, we are called to boldly declare our faith in Christ. Let the readings from Scripture, sermon dialog with Peter and hymns help us come to the crossroads of declaration ready to announce our allegiance to the Lord.

OPENING HYMN: *In the Cross of Christ I Glory (324)*

- 1 **In the cross of Christ I glory,
tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
gathers round its head sublime.**
- 2 **When the woes of life o'ertake me,
hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
never shall the cross forsake me;
lo, it glows with peace and joy.**
- 3 **When the sun of bliss is beaming
light and love upon my way,
from the cross the radiance streaming
adds more luster to the day.**
- 4 **Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
by the cross are sanctified;
peace is there that knows no measure,
joys that through all time abide.**

OPENING RESPONSE

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,

Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

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.

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

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Jesus sent us as his witnesses, to proclaim his Gospel in all that we do and say.

Lord, we confess that we are often tongue-tied and silent when we should speak, we are often bound up in ourselves when we should act in your name. Forgive us, Lord, for our reluctance to proclaim the Good News that we treasure. Forgive our selfish clinging to what we need for ourselves and our unwillingness to offer your gifts freely to those around us. Forgive our empty promises, our silent passing by, our blindness to others, Lord. Equip and empower us. Send us mightily into your world. Fill us so full of your gracious love and forgiveness in Jesus that we cannot but shout his name and overflow with his gifts of grace.

I have the honor and privilege, by the grace of God, of announcing to you the entire forgiveness of your sins. In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and free—free to share the steadfast love of God with all.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: *Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling*

- 1 **Hark, the voice of Jesus calling,
“Who will go and work today?
Fields are white and harvests waiting,
who will bear the sheaves away?”
Loud and long the master calls you;
rich reward he offers free.
Who will answer, gladly saying,
“Here am I. Send me, send me”?**

- 2 **If you cannot speak like angels,
if you cannot preach like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus;
you can say he died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked
with the judgment’s dread alarms,³⁸¹
you can lead the little children
to the Savior’s waiting arms.**

- 3 If you cannot be a watchman,
standing high on Zion's wall,
pointing out the path to heaven,
off'ring life and peace to all,
with your prayers and with your bounties
you can do what God demands;
you can be like faithful Aaron,
holding up the prophet's hands.**
- 4 Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
while the multitudes are dying
and the master calls for you.
Take the task he gives you gladly;
let his work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when he calls you,
"Here am I. Send me, send me!"**

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

EPISTLE READING: Acts 2:22-28

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’”

GOSPEL READING: Luke 22:54-62

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

HYMN: ***Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus***

- 1 **Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
as soldiers of the cross,
lift high his royal banner;
it must not suffer loss.
From vict'ry unto vict'ry
his army he shall lead,
till ev'ry foe is vanquished
and Christ is Lord indeed.**

- 2 **Stand up, stand up for Jesus;
the trumpet call obey;
stand forth in mighty conflict
in this his glorious day.
Let all his faithful serve him
against unnumbered foes;
let courage rise with danger,
and strength to strength oppose.**

- 3 **Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
stand in his strength alone;
the arm of flesh will fail you,
you dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor;
each piece put on with prayer.
Where duty calls or danger,
be never wanting there.**

- 4 **Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
the strife will not be long;
this day the din of battle,
the next the victor's song.
The soldiers, overcoming,
their crown of life shall see,
and with the King of glory
shall reign eternally.**

SERMON DIALOG WITH PETER

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. Tonight we have an expert on the crossroad of declaration. The apostle Peter is with us. Peter is famous for his choices; some he would be proud of, some not.

(Peter enters. He is dressed well or in biblical costume. He moves hesitantly.)

P Peter, we seem to know you so well. We hear of you often in the Scripture. It is good to have you with us today.

R I am here to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am his servant and follower. I think I know why I am here, and I am not pleased.

P No? I thought you would be happy to be among us with your good news.

R Yes, certainly. But I suspect you want to focus on a time when I did not make a choice to be a proud witness—a time when I failed.

P That's what is puzzling to us and why we want to look at that event, at the time when you denied Jesus. It seems hard to understand. You were a leader of the disciples, the one who seemed to understand Jesus and what he was doing as Messiah.

R I thought I understood. Jesus even complimented me on my bold witness to who he was as God's Messiah. He called me blessed, filled with God's word.

P But then, even after you were warned, you denied him three times.

R If I could go back now and face that crossroad again, I would know what to do. You see, I thought I knew what Jesus was doing. In spite of the times he told us he was going to suffer and die, I still thought he would be what we hoped he would be. After all, he paraded into the city of Jerusalem in a way that said that he was the coming king. I thought we were on the way to having God's Messiah as the king and ruler we needed. I didn't know what all that talk of suffering was about.

P And that's why you could not speak his name when you were in the priest's courtyard.

R At that point, everything was going wrong. He wasn't supposed to be arrested. I even tried to fight for him. He wasn't supposed to be on trial. Where was his power? Where were his miracles? Where was his ability to simply walk away when they threatened him? At that point, when they accused me, I saw Jesus failing. And I failed.

P Were you afraid?

R Afraid? Yes, I guess so. But I was baffled, confused, disappointed, in despair. That's not an excuse. It is just what happened.

P You had said you would even die with him. Didn't you mean that?

R That was my quick mouth, another time I spoke without thinking. I just said that to impress Jesus and the others. I was looking for another compliment. It was important for me to know that Jesus respected me, thought I was worthwhile. I needed him to appreciate me and what I had done for him.

P And his warning? Didn't you hear his warning?

R Jesus said many things I didn't really understand at the time. I guess I just wasn't hearing. It was easy for me, and I am sure for you too, to see myself as strong in the faith, able to speak the right words, able to be the one to stand up for Jesus, able to witness. But when I was in that situation, I could not choose the path I knew I should choose. I could not say the words I knew I needed to say. It was dark in my spirit at that moment, and I could not see, could not speak.

P A terrible time?

R More terrible than you can know. Oh, I know that all of us find ourselves at places where we know we should speak the good word. I know what it is like for you. You find yourselves among those who dirty their minds and mouths with words that hurt or shame. I know you find yourselves among those who misuse God's name, act as though his commands don't exist. I know you struggle in your minds with what to say and do in those situations. The questions come: Will my words of faith help? Will they be effective? Won't what I say set me apart, make me look foolish, ruin my relationships? Isn't it better to keep quiet or just go along? I know. You may not face a time when your words would put you in danger for your life, but certainly there are times when we all find ourselves at a crossroad that calls on us to boldly speak Jesus' name and God's will, and we fail.

P You know us too well. We do not speak the words that we should, when we should.

R I guess the best part of my story is that I did not finish my discipleship in tears of failure. Jesus came and found me that day on the beach, after he had risen. He loved me enough to call me back after I had turned my back on him. "Do you love me?" he asked me three times. And he sent me to feed his lambs and sheep. And here is the best part, he calls you back, too. He does not leave us in our failure. He does not turn away. He is there each day with the forgiveness we need to go on one more day, to face one more test, to stand at one more crossroad. And by his power, the power of his Holy Spirit, to be what he wants us to be, what we want to be.

P St. Paul said: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. . . (Romans 1:16). That's our affirmation, that's our calling. We can stand and speak the Good News because he has done all for us.

R Certainly. Most certainly so. Remember that "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 1:9). Seek his power to walk in the light.

A TIME OF SILENCE FOR REFLECTION

MUSICAL MEDIATION: *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* arr. Callahan

PRAYERS

Let us bring our prayers and petitions to God, who hears and answers the pleas of our hearts. We pray for this world and for our own nation. Lord, send your Spirit into our nation and this pain-filled world. Be with those who are suffering because of violence, terrorism, war and hunger. Strengthen those in need and give them courage to face the evil that surrounds them. Make us agents of healing in this hurting world. In your mercy, **Hear us, Lord.**

We pray for your church in this place and throughout the world. Send faithful pastors, teachers and leaders, so that they might clearly proclaim your Word and shepherd your people. In your mercy, **Hear us, Lord.**

Be with us we pray, by the power of your Spirit. Fill us with your presence so that we might be about the task that Jesus sent us to accomplish, that we might proclaim in word and deed the Good News of God's salvation in Jesus. Help us to go into all the world teaching all nations what Jesus has taught us. Make us more confident of his promise to be with us to the end of the age. In your mercy, **Hear us, Lord.**

We also 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, **Hear us, Lord.**

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

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: *I Love to Tell the Story* (ELW 661)

- 1 I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings
as nothing else would do.**

Refrain

**I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.**

- 2 I love to tell the story:
how pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet!
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
the message of salvation
from God's own holy word. *Refrain***

**3 I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
I'll sing the old, old story
that I have loved so long. Refrain**

Refrain

**I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.**

BENEDICTION

May the perfect and perfecting grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the overflowing love of God, and the power of the Spirit that equips, empowers and sends us out to be God's proclaimers, be with us now and always. Amen.

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