

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

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*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, April 23, 2023**

The Third Sunday of Easter

**Festal Evensong**

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

*on*

Matthew 5:10

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**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Why should those who do the right thing be persecuted?

Persecution is an act that the powerful can do to the powerless.

Generally, we have no particular objection to doing the right thing.

But there is a great reluctance to be persecuted.

This reluctance is instinctive, so we tend to believe

that wanting to avoid persecution is justified regardless of the reason.

But Jesus is saying that there is something more important than that instinct.

That is doing the right thing.

To do the right thing in this world, many times we have to stand up to the powerful.

So we have to risk persecution. That is the teaching of Jesus.

Doing the right thing despite persecution should be the life of a Christian who claims to follow Jesus and should be the activity of a church which is Christians' gathering.

How much are we being persecuted for doing the right thing?

In this land, at least in American society in the 21st century, the church is no longer a persecuted group.

Why?

Is it because this society is a just society? Or is it because we're not doing the right thing? Or is it because the church is not powerless?

This society, where young children and teachers are killed in a school that should be the safest place, is never just.

This society, where people are unfairly treated as criminals because of their dark skin, is never just.

This society, where people are frequently attacked for no reason by strangers on the street because they are elderly or because they are Asian, is never just.

Practicing righteousness is never easy.

This is because even if we do not have to endure the pain of persecution, at least we must undergo the inconvenience.

Are we willing to put up with this inconvenience for righteousness?

It is common sense in this world to think that it is not very smart to spend my time and energy on someone else's business.

Being persecuted for doing the right thing is far from being smart.

Rather, it's more like something that looks foolish.

What Jesus urges us to decide now is to live a foolish way of life, not a smart way of life that this society says.

And what he showed as an example of that foolish life is his death on the cross.

During Lent, in order to feel even a tiny bit of his suffering, we Christians spent time accompanying him on the path of his passion.

In Jewish society, Jesus embraced those who were alienated from the community and treated as sinners because they were tax collectors, prostitutes, sick, disabled or possessed.

We tried to feel the hardships that Jesus had to go through when he confronted the Jewish ruling class at the time, who turned the temple into a marketplace and made the lives of the common people even more difficult by advocating the law.

It was uncomfortable for us doing nothing following the ordeal, so we tried to cut out on consuming coffee, wine or social media during Lent.

However, we know that living as a Christian is to participate in the suffering of Christ on a deeper and more essential level than that.

And it's not just limited to forty days out of the year.

As I prepared for today's sermon, I felt very uncomfortable.

Frankly, I have never been persecuted for doing the right thing.

I was tormented by the thought of whether it would be right to preach about something I hadn't done yet.

However, there is one thing I made up my mind with faith despite a kind of persecution.

It was as a woman, to go on the path of a priest.

It may be that it is so common now in the Episcopal Church that there is nothing strange at all.

But 17 years ago, when I first aspired to the priesthood in Korea, it was a difficult decision risking some sort of persecution.

The first woman clergy in the Anglican Church of Korea was ordained in 1999 since she graduated from Seminary in 1977 waiting for 22 years.

Far better than the time they had to endure, but still, in many countries around the world, women's calling to the priesthood comes close to risking persecution.

When I heard someone's sarcastic comment whether I really believe I can be a priest and when a lay interviewer openly told me that she didn't like a woman priest, I could not be shaken because I knew that I was doing the right thing.

I know that 'Righteousness is stronger than persecution.'

And I am so happy to be here with you as a priest at this moment.

Was Jesus happy when he was persecuted for doing righteousness?

I believe that he who has greater love than anyone else in this world was happier than anyone else.

And Jesus is inviting us to enjoy that true happiness with him, the happiness that this world never can give.

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who enjoy this true happiness.

Happiness that can only be enjoyed by fools who are persecuted for doing what is right, that special happiness might be the joy of resurrection.

Just as Jesus' activity to transform all things is revealed through his suffering and death, the existence of the kingdom of heaven will be revealed through persecution for doing righteousness. It will be revealed that this visible world is not all, and that it is an illusion to think that the world's powerful people are the masters of the world.

For doing what right thing will I be persecuted?

For doing what right thing will our church be persecuted?

I pray that this thrilling question will not end only as a question in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.