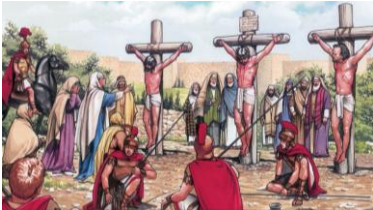


Gospel lesson

In this reading we see that even in the depths of His greatest darkness, Jesus remained true in love for God and love for humanity, forgiving sins and looking to new life in God's kingdom.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-096-jesus-crucifixion/>;
credit: Good News Productions International and College Press Publishing

Luke 23:33-43

³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,

³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

Happy Thanksgiving! What are you thankful for?

<Let them respond>

It is a crazy time in the world. What are some things that make you feel fear or pain right now?

<Let them respond>

We just spoke about blessings before this. Even in the midst of the things causing pain and fear, we can see that God is with us, giving us many blessings.

What does society/the material world suggest we do to

live well? <Let them respond>

What do you think are the most precious things in life? <Let them respond>

How do we get those? Can we buy them? Do we have to hurt others to get them? <Let them respond>

Jesus taught us to love God and to love one another. The most precious things in life grow out of healthy relationships, with people helping and nurturing one another. They are not what society/the material world generally focuses on, but they are gifts from God.

Through the sharing of our Creator's love and faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, we find the means to resurrection life and growth. I hope you are able to give God thanks for very many blessings and have much joy in life.

<Hymn "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

UMH #297>

Message: Woe to the Shepherds



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-days-are-surely-coming/christ-the-king-reign-of-christ-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/christ-the-king-reign-of-christ-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Great Giver of all good gifts,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and

- abide in our hearts,
That we may rejoice in the bounty You have given us
and live for the resurrection life to come. Amen.

We conclude the Christian year today with “Woe to the Shepherds”:

“Reign of Christ emphasizes the relationship with all of creation, with us and with all. We belong to Christ, the unifier, the one who gathers us and claims us as precious children of God. This is a day to stake our claim as followers of Christ.”



<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10238496279248590&set=gm.24178420905168054&id=437021569734654>; picture
screencaptured from
<https://www.hyattmoore.com/videos/Luke-14-banquet-time-Lapse>; credit: Hyatt Moore

What do you notice in this picture?

<Let them respond; wheelchairs/disabilities, smiles,
lots of food>

Do you think they generally have an easy life?

<Let them respond>

How might the things that we do or that we ignore
affect them? <Let them respond>

We can impact other people's lives by what we say and do. I pray that we keep the grace of God foremost in our hearts and minds in all cases, cherishing the unique gifts and perspectives of all we encounter.

We can influence those in power to change how they treat [those who have more challenges to face in life than we do]. Do you think leaders today treat all people as children of God? <Let them respond>

There is an old saying, “Power corrupts.” It is tempting when others look up to you, to use them for personal gain – and there are far too many stories of [leaders using fear tactics to maintain power] to accept that they are doing it out of love for those under them, for we know that “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jehoshaphat-reforms/>;
credit: Sweet Publishing / FreeBibleimages.org

Jeremiah tried to warn the kings of Judah that God would put an end to their corruption. Today’s reading comes shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, possibly after the first of three mass deportations of the people as Babylon took over (the second was when the temple was destroyed).

Through Jeremiah, God makes it clear that the Jewish leadership was responsible for scattering the people because of their corruption, their unwillingness to lead the people according to God’s law. It seems rather stupid of them in hindsight.

The psalmist sang about the power of the Most High, that no military could stand before the Lord. God is exalted above all the nations, and is our refuge and strength. Woe indeed to the shepherds who scatter

God's people instead of tending to them with love!

After all, as Paul described, God seeks to "reconcile to himself all things." God does not seek to destroy anyone with an open heart, but rather to redeem them. **On the cross** Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" and then proceeded to tell a guilty criminal that he would go to Paradise with Him.



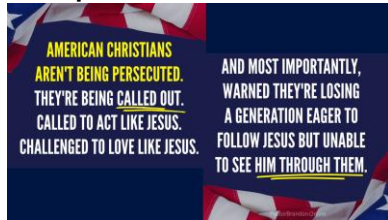
picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/jesus-dies/>; credit: Courtesy of Lumo Project Films - www.lumoproject.com

If God has the depth of mercy to endure our darkest places of sin and still bring us into light, how dare we permit (let alone ask for) anyone's pain or destruction from our places of comfort? If we see injustice, we need to speak up about it.

Anyone who says that we should not bring up politics in church really ought to read the Old Testament books about the prophets - they were always calling political figures to account. As followers of Jesus, we have a responsibility to call all leaders to adhere to God's commandments - not the case law specific to the culture of that day, but the commandments that ensure we nurture one another in healthy relationships.

God wants all of human society to flourish; that includes the needy and oppressed. Societies have proven over the centuries that God's commandments enable healthier societies and more progress for the benefit of humanity. Those who confuse nationalism

with worship of God are missing the truth.



picture from

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=122291663108016919&set=a.122142283424016919;>

credit: Pastor Brandon

As Facebook poster Pastor Brandon put it, “American Christians aren’t being persecuted. They’re being called out. Called to act like Jesus. Challenged to love like Jesus. And most importantly, warned they’re losing a generation eager to follow Jesus but unable to see Him through them.”

We have one king: God, know to us in the Trinity of Creator, Son, and Spirit. Even those who rejected Him noted the sovereignty of Jesus in their mockery of Him as King of the Jews. We know that the world here and now can be better in following God’s commandments and that the kingdom to come fulfills that glory.

Woe to the shepherds – those leaders who claim to protect people – who do not follow God’s commandments. They will fail and their followers suffer. Let us always be faithful to our Creator, share in the inheritance of the saints through Jesus, and strive to be part of God’s kingdom on this earth through the power of the Holy Spirit.