

**Worship Service “A Double Life”**  
**Pentecost 24, Year C, 20th November, 2022**  
**Colossians 1:11-20 NIV / Luke 23: 33-43 NRSV**

**Prelude**                    [\*He’s Been There\*](#) music by Jelaire Richardson, played by Annie Center

**Opening Music**        [\*He Reigns\*](#)            performed by Newsboys,  
  
written by Peter Furler, Steve Taylor, CCLI SONG #4026635, 2003 Soylent Tunes  
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**Welcome Guests / Announcements**

**Pass the Peace**        [\*I Know That My Redeemer Lives\*](#)  
  
Music by Lewis Edwards, arr. by Susan Henry, played by Annie Center

**Opening Music (Lyric Video)**    [\*Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing\*](#)    **12**  
text by Howard Kingsbury, music by Edmund S. Lorenz,  
performed and posted to YouTube by University Mennonite  
Church, State College, PA

**Call to Worship** [responsive]

One:            Be still!  
**All:            We come to quiet ourselves in this haven of holiness.**  
One:            Be still and know . . .  
**All:            we come to discern the Word which can set us free.**  
One:            Be still and know that God is  
**All:            our Hope, our Help, our Refuge, and our Redeemer.**

**Invocation**

Spirit of life and love, we have gathered in this place, again.  
May we create here a circle of love, ever expanding, ever growing.  
A place of wisdom.  
A place of connection.  
A place of hope.  
Amen.

## **Epistle Reading: Colossians 1:11-20 NIV**

being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

## **A Time of Prayer**

### **Joys and Concerns**

### **Pastoral Prayer**

May we find you Create a throne room for yourself here, O Christ, but let it be the empty seat beside the anxious the lonely chair next to the confused the vacant pew next to the hungry and reign, O Jesus, as sovereign over the forgotten

May your reign be a mockery to the world but good news to those who seek out truth and may we join them in the search finding you walking the streets or breaking bread or sitting by bedsides

May we find you in border areas on the edge of things crossing over with the foreigner among children learning to finger paint as teachers to those who long to enjoy life again

May we find you with the worried silenced with nothing to say and space enough to keep it

May we find you on the wrong side of the tracks going where you should not and finding a place to lay your head among the lost.

May we find you singing our songs of justice and peace and removing your crown to do so.  
May we find you with a word that lives in the hopes of the afraid and a comforting peace for those who are broken.  
May we find you laughing at the powerful unnerving what folk think so secure while welcoming those who have nothing into your throne room.  
O Jesus, reigning in the world with your upside down kingdom may we find the faith to stand with you sovereign of life and servant of all.

**Hymn** (lyric video)      [\*There is a Wideness in God's Mercy\*](#) (vv. 1,2,4,5) **145**  
performed by Rockville UMC and posted to YouTube by J. Daniel Ashton

## **Gospel Lesson: Luke 23: 33-43 NRSV**

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.

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

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!"

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Message - A Double Life**

It seems strange reading the crucifixion story just before we spend a month in anticipation of the arrival of the hope we find in this life we are now reading of the end of. It's kind of anticlimactic, isn't it? Yet these two tales are very much related. Next week we will begin to look at the hope the arrival of Emmanuel, God with us, brings, and this week we see the fulfillment of that hope. Next week we step back to a world hopelessly stuck in the rut of ritual obedience seeking the promise of a life transformed. Yet that seems little solace in light of the abject bleakness of today's reading.

Like it or not, it's where the story we've been following all year leads, to torture and death on a cross. It's a tale of contrasting worlds. The world the way it's always been, and the world the way it could be, the way it was meant to be; the world of men and the world of God.

I say the world of men because that's what it was, ruled and dominated by men. It was a world based on wealth and power, where everyone had their place and status, with men having total control of all aspects of how things worked in that world. They decided who married who, who was worthy and who was not. You had those of prestige in charge and everyone else, those who were in, and those who were out. The system was set by those at the top, and they set the order by which everything worked in society. Deviation from that system was not tolerated. To maintain compliance, any challenge to the status quo was met with brutal reprisal. It had to be clear that the consequences of rebellion of any kind would be reliably severe. And that system worked, particularly well for those at the top, but also enough to give everyone else just enough to get by, mostly.

But what happens when something unforeseen comes along and throws a wrench in the system, such as a natural disaster, a plague, a famine, or an economic downturn? How do they justify such a flaw when those not at the top see the system breaking down? Easy, they put the blame on one of those groups not deemed to be worthy, one of the groups not deemed worthy to be "in." You isolate a sacrificial victim or group of victims, "a scapegoat," and eliminate the identified "cause" of the problem. Often, you ritualize this purge, creating a sacred myth to justify it, often making the victim's demise a holy sacrifice to justify the violence. In Jesus' culture, that concept was an old, familiar one that was easy to implement.

The term "scapegoat" comes from a story in Leviticus. In that story Aaron is told to bring a goat before God in the tabernacle, a goat that is to bare the sins of the people. Once the guilt is assigned, the goat is released to the wilderness to suffer and die alone, innocent and bearing the sins of Israel.

Sociologist Peter Glick points out that "Scapegoat theory refers to the tendency to blame someone else for one's own problems, a process that often results in feelings of prejudice toward the person or group that one is blaming. Scapegoating serves as an opportunity to explain failure or misdeeds, while maintaining one's positive self-image." An example he gives is if a person who is poor or doesn't get a job that he or she applies for can blame an unfair system or the people who did get the job that he or she wanted, the person may be using the others as a scapegoat and may end up hating them as a result. Essentially, scapegoating generally employs a stand-in for one's own failures, or the failures of the system one depends on, so that one doesn't have to face one's own weaknesses or the shortcomings of "the system."

There is clear archaeological evidence that ritualistic scapegoating has been a part of human society since the beginning. Some have even argued that it was necessary for social cohesion, for the majority to be able to maintain unity and identity. Without an agreed upon focus for the tension and resulting violence that was built in to a social group, they would turn on each other and make society unworkable. And while that may seem barbaric and uncivilized to our refined 21st century minds, is it really so far-fetched and remote from us? Glick points out that history is full of examples of those in the majority producing scapegoats to bear the blame for their own shortcomings as a society.

Ironically to our gospel story today, throughout Western history, it's often been the Jewish people. For most of European history, the Jews were tolerated, but forced to live in separate enclaves, good enough to provide the services they were skilled at, but not good enough to become part of the system. When things like the Black Plague occurred, or economic times got tough, it became

acceptable to vent their frustration and anger by blaming and purging the local Jewish community. This, of course, reached its zenith following the first World War, when many struggled in postwar Germany. It was easy for the Nazis to point to successful Jews as obviously conspiring against them, fueling the people's anger and frustration and making the unthinkable possible. Yet in the midst of this system, this world order that necessitated people who were in the system; and those who were the potential scapegoats outside, then enters Jesus Christ.

He offered a different system, a different world order which included all: the Samaritan, the Roman, the leper and the prostitute. There was no one ineligible to be "in." The kingdoms of this world depended on exclusion, his was based entirely on inclusion. The scapegoats of this world are the exalted of his. Unlike the self-centered focus of this realm, his realm was focused on the other.

What can you do for someone else instead of what is someone else doing for me? He taught a way of life in direct opposition to the accepted values of the world. Honor was found in humility, wealth was found in charity. The outcast had the seat of honor at his banquets, while the proud and boastful weren't on the guestlist. His kingdom offered hope and relief to those in the margins, those who struggled on the lowest rungs of the ladder, and those who couldn't even get a foot up on the ladder. So it should be no surprise that his message of hope and equality did not sit well with those who depended on "the system," the status quo that kept them favored over others. The system that relied on scapegoats to distract those less fortunate from justly turning their frustrated attention to those in charge of how things did, or didn't work. True to form, they mocked and ridiculed him, made him an outcast, a criminal, and to them, yet another distraction to release the mob's violence and frustration on, a scapegoat.

But like that initial goat in Leviticus, he truly was blameless and innocent. However, there was something unique about this holy sacrificial victim. Death was not the end. He didn't just quietly die and become a myth. His followers experienced him beyond the grave. A whole, growing group of people began to live into the life and realm he promoted, at odds with the "system," the status quo. They welcomed the outcasts, cared for the excluded. They rightly put the blame on those who were in charge, not on the helpless scapegoat victims because their messiah, their king, was the ultimate scapegoat. Throughout history their different way has weaved itself into society's narrative, caring for the poor, seeking justice for those the "system" would cast out, becoming the beacons of hope they were created to be by their savior, the one who has been there since the beginning. Yet the kingdoms of this world linger on. There is still a system that favors some at the expense of others, a status quo that requires the diversion of scapegoats. The allure of privilege maintains the system, often even among those who seek the kingdom not of this world.

How much do we participate in maintaining that age-old status quo? While the early church was a beacon of compassion and inclusion, how much did that dim when the church became part of "the system?" Scapegoats have not gone away in the last two thousand years. I mentioned the antisemitism that permeated Western culture throughout history. While I'm not minimizing the racism that still exists for Jews today, we've found plenty of others to blame for our misfortune. In this country, we've scapegoated African-Americans descended from those we enslaved to do our work, the Native Americans we largely stole the land we live on from, the Chinese who built our railroads, we've imprisoned Japanese Americans for their ancestry, jailed LGBT people for who they love; our history is full of scapegoats in this supposed "Christian" nation. Sadly, it's just not in our past history.

Today we allow our fear and frustration to ostracize those who flee to our shores to escape danger in their own countries. We still try to blame the LGBTQ+ community for our system's shortcomings. And alarmingly, sadly but not surprisingly, more are yet again blaming the Jews

among us. As usual, when the chips are down, that same old tired scapegoat list comes out.

The question we need to ask ourselves is which kingdom are we living in? While it may be easy to say, "That's not me, I don't support that behavior;" it's still taking place on our watch. What are we doing about it? Sadly, one of the worst things to happen to the Jesus movement was becoming the official faith of "the system." It's hard to buck the rules of the earthly realm when you are part of it and benefit directly or indirectly from it.

In the next month as we enter into the promise and expectation of the new Way that Christmas brings, let us reflect how we truly are living into that Way. Let us think about how we participate in and benefit from this worldly realm, and what more we can do, as individuals, and as the body whose head is the ruler of a realm that represents a radical shift from the scapegoating norms that still trudge on in this world. I pray we find ways to represent his kingdom together in this world, to those on the outside here and now, the scapegoats of today. Amen.

## A Call to Serve

### A Time for Reflection - [Let There be Light](#)

Music by Hubert Parry; Arr. by Mike Carson,  
played by Annie Center

## The Prayer of Thanksgiving

In thanksgiving for what has been shared, we say as one body:

(in unison)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Christ all creatures here below;  
Praise Holy Spirit evermore;  
Praise Triune God, whom we adore.**

## Hymn (Lyric Video)

### [All Glory, Laud and Honor](#) 237

written by Theodulf, Bishop of Orléans in about 820. It was translated into English by John Mason Neale in 1854. It is performed here by the St Michael's Singers. Video background by Hans Hansen from Pixabay. Posted to YouTube by Chet Valley Churches

## BENEDICTION

**You are the body of Christ.**

May you have the heart of Christ, tender for mercy. May you have the eyes of Christ to see a world in need. May you have the feet of Christ to bring good news. Go in peace! And God go with you.

## Postlude

### [Come Unto Jesus](#)

Music by Orson Pratt Huish; arr. by Tiffany Hobson,  
played by Annie Center