

Podcast Transcript

11.20.22 Reign of Christ – Proper 29 in Year C

*Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Luke 1:68-79 • Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Psalm 46 • Colossians 1:11-20 •
Luke 23:33-43*

*<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>
<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>*

[Intro and Transition:]

[Intro:]

- Hello y’all. Welcome back to The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we’re exploring what Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression - the context in which we are living today. Through Christian scripture and our various traditions, what guidance can we find and imagination can we practice, as white folks, about our role in resistance, in showing up, in practices of repentance and liberation?
- *My name is Rev. M Jade Kaiser -formerly, M Barclay, but recently returning to my given last name. But mostly, I just go by M. My pronouns are they/them and I am one of three co-directors and a co-founder of a collective called ‘enfleshed’ where we create and facilitate spiritual nourishment for collective liberation. As I record this, I am on the land of the Chiso, Jumanos, Apache, and Coahuiltecan (kow-aa-weel-tuh-kan) peoples, currently referred to as the Big Bend National Park. Each time I visit a place like, I am grateful the land has not been turned over to corporations or private profit, but even more, I know the protection and thriving of the land belong in the care of Indigenous tending. May we labor to make it so.*
- This podcast is a project of SURJ Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians—white Christians talking to other white Christians about race and white supremacy – about being a part of returning and tending all relations. We believe white Christians have a responsibility to commit ourselves to resisting white supremacy, to speaking up and showing up and disrupting white supremacy where we find it, especially through the Christian tradition. Any of us white folks who have grown up with a relationship to Christianity - whether conservative, liberal, evangelical, or progressive - have inherited Christian specific facets of white supremacy that we have the power and responsibility to unlearn and imagine anew, including our conception of the divine.

- We do this work remembering we are building up a new world. This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding's song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial "movement choir practice" in Denver, CO in December 2014, led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

[Transition:]

I'm usually prone to a poem or a prayer here, but to ground us this episode, I'm just going to invite you to pause in presence. As I prepare this, I'm surrounded by that kind of silence I can almost hear, if that makes sense. It's a nighttime kind of silence. An outdoors kind of silence. The kind that makes me feel held by the dark, by the night, by the ordinary, daily call to rest. Join me just for 60 seconds. Intentionally pausing. To remember that – often, at least, you can pause, for a moment. Put the brakes on the pressure of the day. Notice your breath. Notice your surroundings. Feel whatever you're feeling. And be present – bodily, spiritually, mentally – for the next 30 seconds.

- Read the scripture, unless it's super long, here or after the music break.

Dear ones, this is a heavy text – this week takes us to the cross – the site of state execution. I'll be talking through grief and state violence and what trans communities are facing – this is just an invitation to check in – and notice your capacity for heavy things, this moment.

Here's the reading from Luke 23:33-44:

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, "God, 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, God's 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^[a] 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 in your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>

<<“Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don’t get weary, though the way be long.”>>

[Main Content:]

As hard as this text is, I feel grateful it’s included in the lectionary in a time other than Good Friday. Of course, we need it three, in that compact unfolding of holy week – where a story of lifetimes and generations is boiled down to something with a kind of a start and a finish. It allows us to feel our way through multiple realities of collective life – engaging fear, betrayal, systemic violence and power – and also community, tenderness, and rising again.

But we need this part of the story to confront us again, with more space and time to linger with its difficulties. Outside of the rush toward easter.

As I was first moving through my own reading of this text, thinking about how important it feels to face now – I was thinking also of how it’s a day we come somewhat prepared to – as prepared as we can be – we know something of what good Friday feels like in our bodymindspirits. We have some expectations of what might come up for us. What matters to us about it or how it has challenged us in the past. We know the rhythms. And so we move toward it with this readiness for grief, for anger, for holding the hard things together. As I was thinking and feeling through that thought – I was struck by how similarly it feels to me each year as November 20th approach –Nov 20th is trans day of remembrance– and resonantly, the very date for this lectionary text.

It is a challenging connection. State violence against trans people – the criminalization of trans children and trans care and trans solidarity – has escalated in and beyond legislatures the last two years, propping up political campaigns like Texas’ gov’s Greg Abbot that were only reaffirmed through reelection last week. These kinds of laws and the surrounding campaigns – when the legislation is passed or upheld or not – kindle hatred and work to intentionally make cis people feel afraid – learning to find trans people and our experiences threatening and troubling.

This, a wider context that holds a difficult history – full of thriving and surviving and finding our way as trans and gender variant peoples but also of the violence we pause to remember each year on nov 20th. State violence that works hand in hand with interpersonal violence – shaping each other, as they always do. Violence that especially colludes at the intersections of global fights for basic rights and protections, poverty, misogyny, white supremacy, and significantly, stigma and laws against people who do sex work. When we come together to mourn the violence against trans people – especially those who have died directly by the hands of others – it is important to notice that we cannot engage the day’s roots or realities without extending the solidarity of mourning and struggle with people who do sex work – working to divest from the prejudices we have inherited about sex work – and also with those living in poverty, those on whom the police and with a wider network of global siblinghood – black and brown trans women, trans people – in the united states and in brazil and immigrants in Europe and elsewhere.

This all feels deeply entangled with the work we hope to do here through surj. There is no racial justice without trans justice – and we could talk about that reality alone for months. But a few ways I feel that truth are these: 1 – it is the history of white patriarchal colonialism that has led to the strict and only binary – as in two opposites – gender culture before us. It is wrapped up in histories of power and violence deeply entangled with racism and sexism. Transphobia goes hand in hand with both – and like all systems – it cannot be disentangled from the others. 2 – Black, Brown, and Indigenous trans and gender variant folks bear the greatest burdens under the policing and criminalization of trans people - through the state and the streets. 3 – as a white trans and nonbinary person, I know our communities – including those of us who are trans – we need to tend specifically our relationship to trans siblings of color – deepening our solidarity and nurturing our sense of trans liberation – not as an individual goal – but as a collective reality where our BIPOC trans siblings lead the way. And last, 4 – just like we talk about mutual interest here in ending white supremacy – how that frees everyone including us white folks – the same is true of trans liberation. We all have a stake in this – cis people of every background.

With that said, I am thinking back to our text. Holding the layers and the feelings of trans day of remembrance – those we have lost this year – and also the wider context of an increasingly hostile stance toward trans people in all our contexts – even children. Which always affects black and brown and indigenous trans siblings most severely.

Back in 2021, a dear colleague Rev. Saintremy hosted a powerful good Friday service that focused on trans people and this text. I'll put a link to the whole service in the resource section on the transcript if you'd like to listen. I'm sharing here an amended version of my part in that service – still – if not more – relevant today.

On crosses to his left and to his right, siblings in condemnation. Like so many in trans communities, the report does not refer to them by their real names, what made them laugh, what brought them joy, what communities claimed and celebrated them. We know them only by their story of death and the judgments made upon them by the state, history, the church. Criminals. Those who broke the rules - rules attached to power.

These two never had a chance to tell their side of their story. One beloved is angry all the way to death. We get it.

The other beloved, broken open with internalized shame – a sense of deserving this horror unfolding. We get it.

This year there was a barrage of anti- bills submitted across the country. Criminalizing and discouraging our existence. Violent rhetoric and fear-mongering contribute to our conditions of struggle. Our sisters demonized. Our young abandoned. Our brothers scapegoated. Our nonbinary kin mocked and erased while those in power wash their hands of the consequences.

But from the bowels of this racist, sexist, imperialist construction, sometimes we need but one to remind us again: that we are born from the things of paradise. And we know what it means to experience paradise today. Even in the midst of terror. By claiming the beauty of our lives. On our own terms. Paradise. Creating home for each other. Celebrating and comforting one another and loving the beauty of our bodies. However they change. Or don't change. In hearing our chosen names on the lips of our lovers. Fighting for one another's right to thrive. To feel safe to become, to be delighted, and to be housed, and fed, and protected. Even in the midst of nightmares, we can make paradise. We encounter paradise. Fleeting it may be. We understand.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker write that, 'it took Jesus a thousand years to die.' What they mean is that the way the story of god has become so confined to their death, wasn't always the case. The first thousand years of the community of christ didn't center crucifixion. The tools and rules of the empire weren't the primary forces shaping their lives and faith. They say the community and its art was ablaze with beautiful image of paradise – testifying to the truths of god alive – here and now. The reasons to live, the encounters with joy, the peace of ancestors, the power of collective organizing, the way we care for each other. That's paradise restored. We together choose not to let empire and its tools of violence define the terms of living our holy lives. Taking something back from what was stolen – something true, something real, even in those last moments of their precious lives – jesus invites the two to remember the cross as a source of lies – they are not deserving of this, they are right to be angry. This evil. This suffering. This terror. It doesn't define them. Their worth. Their power. Their communities. Not even in death.

Like we do for each other – Jesus ensures them they are inseparable from the life of the divine that bore them, sustains, them and receives them. Though their lives will transition, though there is death and loss and pain – there is glory too. And love everlasting in a community who will question the stories told about them, celebrate their being, weep and remember and keep them alive in the pursuit of paradise today. For those like them – like us – and everyone seeking freedom, generation after generation. Thanks be. We understand.

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>
<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

[Call to Action and outro:]

[Call to Action:]

- In this week's call to action, I invite you to check out the decolonizing gender curriculum. It's free and available at the link in the resources section. You can also just go directly to decolonizinggender.com. Spend some time getting familiar with the role of colonization in dominant understandings of gender today.
- I'd also like to invite you to consider making a donation to SURJ; we split every donation with a movement partner doing amazing work, like that of Souforce who works to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQI people by decloaking the ideologies of Christian Supremacy and healing our communities' spirits from weaponized religion.

You can donate online at <https://bit.ly/SURJSF> , or find our podcast page at surj dot org. We'll share the link on social media too. Thanks for helping support this podcast and organizing white people to show up for racial justice and the new world we're building together.

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[Outro:]

Thanks as always for joining us. We'd love to hear from y'all, and especially folks of color and non-Christian folks, by commenting on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or filling out the survey on our podcast page at surj dot org. Give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj dot org, where you can sign up for SURJ-Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode, which include references, resources, and action links. Next week we'll have a resistance Word from Rev. Anne Dunlap. And finally, so much gratitude for the work of our sound editor for this episode, Claire Hitchins. As always, we appreciate you so much, Claire. Thank you!

[Words of blessing/encouragement:]

- In remembrance of every trans beloved – in solidarity in and through the entanglements of gender and white supremacy and class and religious prejudices – in hope of a world where every cross has been abolished, every tool of state violence eradicated – may we go together, in grief, and honesty, and the hope of rising again.
- I'm M Jade Kaiser and thank you for thinking, feeling, and being alongside me today.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>
<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"
We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.>>

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RESOURCES:

- [Good Friday service](#)
- [De/colonizing Gender Zine](#)

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REFERENCES:

Parker, Rebecca Ann., Brock, Rita Nakashima. Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire. United States: Beacon Press, 2008.

<https://enfleshed.com>

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