

What Then Shall We Do?

April 19, 2026 Easter 3

Luke 3: 1-23a
Walker

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Early this week, US President Trump posted an image of himself as Jesus, wearing a white robe and red stole, healing someone with an orb of light coming from one of his hands.

This was following a post of him complaining about Pope Leo's comments challenging his war on Iran. The Pope had said or posted statements which indicated that God doesn't hear the prayers of those waging war, on Palm Sunday he preached about Jesus as a King of peace who rejects war and violence, and later said that negotiations are the only way to real peace. Trump called the Pope weak on crime and supportive of nuclear weapons and then posted the image that makes him look like Jesus. He later deleted it after very strong backlash including from many of his supporters who found it offensive, blasphemous, and some even naming him as an antichrist.

When asked about it by reporters he said he wasn't presenting himself as

Jesus but as a doctor and healer. However, very few if any were buying it. There was even a post later circulating, of the traditional image of Jesus knocking at a door wearing the similar white robe and red stole Trump depicted in his image. Increasingly there seems to be a deterioration of moral compass and an increase in arrogance when it comes to the US President and administration. I



would think John the Baptist would have something to say about this.

John the Baptist, in our reading today, is in the wilderness at the river Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke sets up the story with naming all the powers in play at the time: it was the time of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. This is named to contrast the power of the ruling authorities, powers which ruled with violence, fear, and a lack of compassion, with the power which is to come in Jesus, the power of love and compassion, and peace and equity. John received the word of God and proclaimed it in the wilderness, where much of God's prophetic work and liberation for the people happens in the Bible. He calls out the crowds who came to hear him, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" and tells them to bear fruits worthy of repentance. Repentance means to turn around, to change your ways and in this case to turn toward God and live more faithfully. Wanting to be clear about how they should turn around they ask John, "What then should we do?" John replies to them, that if you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have one, and the same with food. They are to share with the poor to make a more equitable community. Tax collectors ask the same question, what then shall we do? Now tax collectors were despised in the community as they were all corrupt. They collected taxes for the empire but also collected more than was required and the authorities did not care, as long as they got the required taxes, knowing the corruption helped keep the people in line. So, John tells them to collect only what is required of them and no more. Basically, to stop stealing from and cheating people.

Roman soldiers were there also, which were the agents of the Empire, enforcers of the tyrannical rule. They too asked, 'What then shall we do?' The fact that they even asked this indicates how they, caught in the system of oppression were also looking for a better way of being, of living. They were known for their violent threats and lying to get more money from

people as well. So, John tells them to be satisfied with what they had and do not try to get more money, by threats and lies. Imagine what it would be like for the common people to see those who oppress them, ask what they should do to repent. This would have created an immense expectation and hope for change. John was challenging the whole system by encouraging them all to build a different kind of community. What John calls upon those who have repented and been baptized to practice are threefold. First, they are to be compassionate in working for justice for others; they must really care about the poor. Second, they are to be both intentionally ethical and just in their actions, not just helping people out. Third, they are to be content with the amount of wealth they have accumulated and not lust after more. What John is interested in (and so is Luke) is justice and equality, practically acted out.

This also will disrupt the system of oppression that that empire is built upon. If these three simple actions were done, Rome's power of fear over all the people would be utterly destroyed. It builds on both Mary's and Zechariah's songs and proclamations at the news of pregnancy. Mary upon learning she is pregnant with Jesus, declares the mighty will be brought down from their thrones and the rich sent away empty; Zechariah, John's father, in part of his song, praised God for sending one, John, who would make them "free to worship without fear, in holiness and righteousness all our days". This is what John, and later Jesus, is working towards.

Given all of this, what then should we do? We are called to the same. We are called to live out justice and equity for all. We are called to turn away from our complicity with the system and resist it as we can. There are many ways this can happen. We began with the story of president Trump reacting to the Pope's message. The Pope is resisting the system of violence and war. As many are concerned with our sovereignty being threatened by the US, overall travel to the US has dropped 22% from last year and car border crossings have declined 32%. We are resisting by reducing our travel to the US, and avoiding US products. We can resist by providing a meal for Food for Thought and Thursday I took about 15 meals

of leftovers from the Community Dinner to houseless folk outside of Carmichael Outreach. We can resist by doing what we can to reduce our carbon footprint and use less fossil fuels. We can resist by not participating in the stock market, and by investing ethically, choosing what companies our retirement and other funds are invested in. We can resist by participating in protests that stand for peace and justice and support the marginalized, or by writing our government representatives on issues that concern us. We can resist by supporting one another, knowing our neighbours, and building communities of love and compassion where we can.

Too often we hear that the church, and this week, the Pope, should not be political. As we hear John's words today, and as we hear and understand more about the gospel message and the message of the prophets in the old testament, of which John the Baptist follows that tradition, we learn that the message of caring for the poor, the marginalized, the stranger, the widow the orphan, cannot help but be political, especially when the systems that are in place do not always support these most vulnerable people in our society. We are called to resist the callousness and lack of compassion and lack of morality that wants us to think that this suffering is OK.

At the end of the reading for today, Jesus is baptised, and a voice declares "You are my son, with you I am well pleased". God affirms that Jesus is the son, whom John has been declaring is coming. John's message of baptism and repentance is also affirmed. The message of repentance calls us to turn away from the systems of injustice and violence and the leaders who perpetuate them. May we be bold and courageous to repent of and resist the systems that diminish people's humanity and continue to choose to live with love and compassion, seeking justice and peace, always. Amen.

