

Sermon preached at OCC, 23 November 2025

O God, our guide, set your path clearly before us and lead us to follow you willingly for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Jeremiah 23:1–6; Luke 23:33–43

The Reign of God, the Cross, and the White Ribbon

Many of us may know someone who carries silent wounds. White Ribbon Day becomes a moment to ask: what does love require of us?" Each year on 25 November, communities across the world mark White Ribbon Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness and encouraging action to prevent violence against women and girls. The white ribbon is worn as a symbol of a man's pledge to oppose violence, to refuse to condone it, and never to remain silent when it occurs. What began as a handful of men in Canada saying 'enough' has quietly grown into a movement spanning more than 60 countries—a reminder of how small acts of courage can ripple far beyond what we imagine.

For us in the PCANZ, White Ribbon Day cannot be separated from the gospel—it rises from Jesus' healing ministry, His fierce protection of the vulnerable, His call to be reconcilers in a fractured world. This year's theme, Sacred Spaces, Sacred Lives: From Silence to Action, sits closely with the scriptures we read today. So today, as we mark White Ribbon Day, perhaps the Spirit is nudging each of us: Where do we need to speak? Where do we need to listen? Where must we refuse to remain silent?"

God the Shepherd

Both Jeremiah and Luke tell us that the reign of God is already active among us and reaches its deepest meaning through the crucifixion of Jesus. In Jeremiah 23, the prophet speaks strongly against the leaders of Israel—the shepherds who were meant to care for God's flock but who instead scattered and harmed them. The people suffered under leaders who misused their authority. Yet God does not remain distant. God responds with judgment against corrupt power and with a promise of restoration. God vows to gather the scattered sheep, shepherd them with tenderness, and raise up leaders who will guide with justice and integrity.

Thinking about this passage through the lens of White Ribbon Day brings the message close to home. What happened to Israel on a national scale also happens within individual households. Around twenty years ago, I watched the movie *Once Were Warriors*. The film speaks powerfully about the deep wounds of colonisation on Māori communities and the strength of Māori culture in the face of hardship. Yet another theme stands out: the devastating impact of family violence when a man uses his power to harm his wife and children.

Many Māori elders and historians say that, traditionally, relationships between men and women were built on balance, equality, and shared responsibility. When that balance is broken, when care turns into control, and respect dissolves into fear, violence follows. The same pattern appears in Jeremiah's message: when leaders abandon their duty, people suffer; when power is misused, harm spreads. But God intervenes—not with more violence but with compassion. God steps in as the true Shepherd who protects the vulnerable, gathers those who have been scattered, and restores what has been broken. This is the heart of the reign of God.

The Reign of God and the Cross

The reign of God begins with God's promises. In Jeremiah 23:1–6, God announces that Israel will be restored from exile. Jeremiah describes almost nothing about the physical pain of exile—its death, hunger, and loss of home. Instead, he focuses on the cause: leaders who failed, systems that became corrupted, and God's decision to set things right. Even while the people are still living in exile, God promises a renewed future. Hope is spoken into the middle of despair.

Luke's account of the crucifixion reveals the same pattern. The cross is a scandal in every way—an instrument of torture, humiliation, and death. It represents the worst that human power can do. It exposes the cruelty of those who mock, harm, and destroy the innocent. Yet through this very symbol of suffering, God reveals the depth of divine love that is offered freely, without condition and without limit.

Luke's description is striking. The people stand watching. The leaders mock Jesus, calling him a failed Messiah. The soldiers join in with their own insults. There is no majesty, no earthly power, nothing that looks like a king. But then Jesus speaks: "Father, forgive them;

for they do not know what they are doing.”¹ He extends forgiveness to those who hurt him. He offers mercy to those who misuse their power. And to the criminal beside him—a man with no hope and nothing to offer—Jesus gives a promise: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”²

From a human point of view, Jesus is defeated. Violence seems to have won. Yet at the darkest moment, when injustice tries to silence him, Jesus speaks words that cannot be stopped. Forgiveness is proclaimed. Salvation is given. The reign of God breaks through the very act meant to extinguish it. Only God can take something as cruel as the cross and turn it into a sign of unshakeable love. The cross shows us that the reign of God is not revealed through domination but through mercy, not through silence but through courageous love.

The Reign of God and White Ribbon Day

White Ribbon Day invites us to bring this vision of God’s reign into our own lives and communities. The scriptures reveal a God who confronts abusive power and who heals through sacrificial love. The cross reveals a Messiah who does not strike back or retaliate, but who meets hatred with forgiveness and injustice with grace.

Family violence stands in complete opposition to God’s reign. Like the failed shepherds of Jeremiah’s time, violence in the home is a betrayal of trust. It is an abuse of power that shatters safety and silences the vulnerable. Homes are meant to be places of refuge, warmth, and peace—sacred spaces where love can grow. When violence enters, it destroys that sacredness.

White Ribbon calls us to shift from silence to action. Silence allows harm to continue. Silence protects abusers and isolates victims. But action breaks those cycles. Action opens doors to support, protection, and healing. Action says: This is not acceptable, and we will not look away.

As Christ’s people, we are called to embody this action in practical and compassionate ways. One helpful way may be to listen deeply to those who share their stories. Intentional listening often becomes an excellent support for them. Without great activism, we can still challenge attitudes and behaviours by speaking out ‘no’ to the abuse. It helps us to encourage each

¹ Luke 23:34

² Luke 23:43

other to respect and kindness in all relationships. Every act of courage—small or large—reflects the Shepherd who gathers the broken and the Christ who forgives from the cross.

Following Jesus means choosing the path of healing over harm, restoration over fear, and justice over silence. Small voices and quiet actions are still helpful to protect those who are vulnerable. Through all these small or big actions, our homes, churches, workplaces, and communities are becoming truly safe places where every person, especially women and girls, can live free from violence. May God help us commit ourselves to the way of Christ so that our homes and churches become sacred spaces where people feel safe, valued, and respected. And may the reign of God take root among us as we move from silence to action, trusting that Christ still brings healing and restoration to a wounded world. Amen.