

## Sermon for Good Friday

The Rev. Brooks Cato

The crucifixion itself was not enough for them. It takes too long, so better to break the legs of the tormented to hurry the process along. Notice, they start with the people around him, not with Jesus himself. They start with the others, flex their strength, wield power over death's arrival. Ease their way in so folks know what's coming. First they came for the bandits, then for Christ, and maybe then for you and me. This is about sending a message, the message that hope dies with the thrust of a lance. At least, that's the message the people in power want to convey. Christ has died, end of story. And for a time, they have every reason to believe that to be true. But his followers hold onto something, some little ember. The loving burial, the careful wrapping, the costly perfume, the anointing of the dead. There's love there, and there's a longing for, a hope to see him again, albeit on the other side of the grave. There are few left who truly believe he'll come back any time soon. Pretty much all the men are resigned to their sorrow and their fear. But the women, the women will have the gall to go outside, to brave what the world holds, to return to his final resting place, maybe to lay flowers, maybe to water the garden with their weeping, maybe to see for themselves if he really meant all that talk about coming back. It will be women who find the tomb empty. It will be women who see him first. It will be women who tell the world, and what they will tell the world will change the world. It'll inspire hope for the hopeless across the millennia, and it'll land right here at our feet in Hamilton, New York in the year of our Lord 2026. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Truth be told, I'm not sure if I've ever really appreciated that witness. For most of my life, the promises God makes've been great, don't get me wrong, but they've been distant. I've had the privilege that much of that message has been true already. Jesus already died for my sins. Freedom meant little more than a theological pledge of allegiance. Grace and love and kindness are lovely, but they weren't new for me. Most people already called 'em admirable. I guess what I'm saying is that I've taken God's promises for granted. Of course we should treat others how we want to be treated. Of course we should love God and love our neighbors. Of course we should help those less fortunate than ourselves. That I could ever say "of course" shows just how little I knew. These days it's nearly impossible to take those promises for granted when empathy is called a sin, love unmanly, grace naive, peace weak. Neighbors apparently deserve to be hunted. God waves a flag, now. The structures holding up our lives are crumbling, and I can still count myself lucky that the world is more devoid of hope than anytime I've personally known. In some ways, I'm catching up to what so many've already known to be true.

I'm seeing a whole lot of truths revealed that hurt my soul, and knowing others've been on the receiving end of so much hatred for so long breaks my heart. That I never knew (or never bothered to look) breaks it further. And as my unexamined comfort crumbles around me, I'm losing sight of how I'm supposed to go about saving the world. Which is not a great thing for a priest to say 'cause it's tempting to think it's up to me to save the world. But thanks be to God, that is not my job. I can help. I can step into a role or two. I can pay attention where I've failed before. But it is not up to me to save the world. Though I love the altar guild and the choir and the flower folks and all the people who volunteer to make these services happen, it's not up to them, either. And it's not up to y'all, though if any group could make a dent, it'd be the good people of St. Thomas'. But no, it's not our job to save the world. Jesus does that today. Our story's packed full of promises that he will save it again and's already started the work. Show up, of course. Do the work you're given to do. Answer the call when it comes. But know it doesn't rest on your shoulders alone. Christ stretches out his arms on the hard wood of the cross and takes that weight for us. And with him carrying the weight, we're free to work unburdened.

I know it's a little gauche to talk about the rest of the story before Easter arrives, but if you'll humor me, I've got a little teaser for ya. You know the story doesn't end today. You know those disciples hid in fear, had hope ripped from their lives, witnessed the heartbreaking failure of regular people just like them, failed themselves with unbearable shame and grief. You know they worried who saw them go into their hiding place, who spotted Thomas out getting groceries or whatever he's getting up to, who they worried would betray them just as they betrayed Jesus. And you know, even the ones who believed most deeply, you know there was a part of them scrambling to figure out how they'd gotten everything so wrong. But they didn't succumb to their despair, not completely. You know even the tiniest ember of belief remained, if not in all of them, at least in some. You know they wondered, argued even over what Jesus meant about rising again, about resurrection, about going where we could not follow. You know that little, weakened ember remained. You know they didn't give up, though they were close. You know things couldn't've been darker, scarier, more hopeless. And yet, you know that it was in that darkest place that the story changed.

Y'all, the story doesn't end here. Sunday's coming. Easter's coming. And the world will never be the same. Don't lose hope. Let today do its work on you, but don't lose hope. Even in the darkest of places, even in the scariest of times, even when hope seems most distant, the story can still change where embers still burn.