

## Sermon for Easter Sunday

The Rev. Brooks Cato

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Happy Easter, folks! It's good to have you with us. I hope our pew aerobics aren't too confusing. What can I say, we like our synchronized sitting. I know, Episcopalians are kind of a weird bunch, but if you stick around, I think you might come to like us. Now, onto the Jesus stuff.

Sometimes when we tell the Easter story, the focus ends up on the empty tomb, but that kinda buries the lede. 'Cause what matters most isn't what they find there. It's what they don't. Jesus is supposed to be there. He's not supposed to be gone. Even with some angels to explain, these folks are left with more questions than answers. And that makes me wonder about all the people this Easter who look to a pillow, a driver's seat, a sidewalk where someone they know or love is supposed to be. Right where they left them, right where they always see them, all those people who have every right to expect their loved ones to be exactly where they always are...but now they aren't. So many empty tombs with notably absent people, as Mary Magdalene puts it, that've been taken away and 'we know not where they've put them.'

That's the world we're in this Easter, but thankfully our story's very clear about who Christians serve. I'll give you a quick hint. It's not Babylon, it's not Rome, it's not any empire. It's whoever's getting crushed by Babylon, Rome, or any empire. Let's go on and make that explicit. If what the emperor tells us to do contradicts what God tells us to do, we follow God. God calls us to serve the needs of the poor, not the whims of billionaires. God calls us to care for widows and orphans, not chip away at their social security. God calls us to seek Christ in all persons not demonize brown skin. God calls us to serve, not to be served; to hope not to despair; to love not to hate.

Now, where I'm gaining hope even under the shadow of the empire is that Jesus' story didn't end with the cross or with the empty tomb. His unjust punishment isn't the end; his stark absence isn't the end. He returns, full of life, physically there, really real and tangible and hungry even. In spite of the terrors of Good Friday and his days among the dead, he's brought back to us. And because of that, there's a real hope that comes with Easter. That things broken can be made right. And those who've been taken from us can be brought back. Empty tombs don't get the final say. Pillows and driver's seats and sidewalks can be full again. That's what matters, knowing where your loves are and knowing that where they are is safe. And it's our job to help.

This is the Good News Christians love to talk about. The Good News that yes, we know this world's broken, but we refuse to let it stay that way. The Good News that, with the help of God and a whole bunch of folks like y'all, we can make Jesus proud he bothered to come back. The Good News that if we love God and love our neighbors like we really should, we can do "infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." The Good News is that good wins. Evil lurks always, and every so often it steps more boldly into the light, but good always wins. I know things feel rough right now, I know that. My God do I know that. But y'all, the Good News is right here, that as long as we stay centered on Jesus, we have hope. As long as we seek to serve, seek to love, seek to heal, we have hope.

Now look, this collar doesn't give me a secret view into God's mind, but I can tell you a few things our scriptures say we outta be getting up to. If we're prophets, we're filling the streets with demands for the just treatment of the poor, the foreign, the weak, and the otherwise oppressed. If we're poets, we're helping those who have no helpers and saving the weak from the strong. If we're storytellers, we're saved by women and eunuchs. If we're letter writers, we're demanding abusers face their consequences and act right. If we're gospellers, we're telling the truth. If we're ... well maybe you're getting the point. That's what I'm talking about, the whole point of the Good News is that Jesus clears the way for us to become fully alive, fully open to serve, fully open to sacrifice if it comes to that. I know our world's chock full of nastiness and danger, and

sometimes it's worse for those who stand up. I fear it may get worse, still. But maybe in a weird way, I'm kinda looking forward to hearing your stories of faithful heroism. Maybe we all are, all looking forward to the boost that comes with watching regular old friends and neighbors pull off extraordinary things.

Ya know an Episcopalian senator just traveled to El Salvador. He went to check on a wrongfully deported constituent many thought had died. But in perhaps the best news of the week, he found not an empty tomb, not a tomb at all, but the man very much alive. That's extraordinary. What else are people gonna do, what other life-giving, hope-swelling examples are yet to come? What are people gonna do? Better yet, what will we do? Better still, what will you do? As long as this heart beats, I will serve the justice and mercy modeled by Jesus. Thank God, the Good News is that I'm not alone. And if you join me, you won't be either. Because while there is no Christ in that tomb, there's plenty out there to serve. And serve we will. Evil may step boldly into the light, but we're on our home turf here. And here, good always wins. Alleluia! Christ is risen!