

## **Sermon – Easter Vigil 2026**

*Scripture Texts: Story of the Flood; Story of the Binding of Issac; Story of Israel at the Red Sea;  
Story of a New Heart and a New Spirit; Matthew 28:1-10  
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church*

**Focus Statement:** *In the cross of Christ we see the myth of redemptive violence revealed as a lie. However, through the cross and resurrection, God redeems the victims of our violent history – and even the perpetrators of violence are called to new life.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Outline:**

1. The myth of redemptive violence
  - a. American myths
    - i. George Washington and the apple tree; we were founded as a Christian nation; the Liberty Bell cracked on Independence Day; trickle down economics will enrich everyone
    - ii. Die Hard – regarded by many as a Christmas movie, and I'll admit that I usually turn it on while wrapping presents late at night. It features an off-duty cop who foils the plans of terrorists who have taken over a corporate skyscraper.
  - b. Die Hard exemplifies the American myth of redemptive violence
    - i. This myth says that a good guy with a gun is the solution to evil.
    - ii. Die Hard even has a redemption arc for another officer, someone who has been sidelined by the trauma of accidentally shooting a kid while responding to a crisis. Al is unable to draw his weapon because of what had happened, but he overcomes his trauma in the last minutes of the movie to kill the last terrorist and save John's life.
    - iii. However, neither Die Hard nor the myth of redemptive violence deal meaningfully with the aftermath. They fail to recognize the cyclic nature of violence – not to mention all of the collateral damage!
  - c. Countering the myth
    - i. Scripture sometimes plays into this myth, with its valorization of warriors like King David and Joshua (whose name is actually the same as Jesus'!). However, there is also a counternarrative woven throughout the pages of Scripture.
    - ii. The Story of the Flood challenges this myth. It depicts a world gone mad with violence – to the point that the seams of the world are starting to come undone. In this story, God attempts to wash the world clean with a violent flood – but it doesn't work. In the end, God repents, promising never to again to try to fix violence with violence. (To be clear, I am not

- saying that God made a mistake here; rather, this is how humans have portrayed God as we have wrestled with this myth of redemptive violence. When we portray God as learning and promising to do better, our understanding of God is deepening – we are getting closer to knowing the reality of a God who never uses violence to cure violence.)
- iii. The Story of Abraham and Isaac makes this point as well. As we saw last night, this story rightly challenges the idea of human sacrifice – which has too often been a response to violence. If we read the story correctly, God does not demand human sacrifice (even if we too often do).
  - d. The myth of redemptive violence dies at the cross of Jesus.
    - i. God comes into the world in Jesus with love and mercy, healing the sick, welcoming the outcast, calling us to love one another. But, instead of welcoming this act of grace, we nailed God to a tree.
    - ii. The story is explicit about this. The high priest says it is better for one to die than for all of his nation to perish. Pilate insists that the only truth that can rule the world and set it right is the power of Rome – the power of the sword.
    - iii. Here, the falseness of the myth of redemptive violence is exposed. Any system that would claim to bring healing through the brutal murder of God is fundamentally broken.
2. God's Solidarity with the victims
- a. In the place of this myth, we get a vision of God in solidarity with the victims of violence across human history.
    - i. Every Holy Week, I am put particularly in mind of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, by Black theologian James Cone. This book draws the parallel between the cross of Jesus and the lynching of well over 6,000 Black Americans between the end of the Civil War and 1950.
    - ii. In Jesus, God stands in solidarity with those victims. In Jesus, God stands in solidarity with all the innocent victims of the flood, with the groomsmen in Pharaoh's army, with poor Isaac. Their lives are not forgotten, but are recognized and honored.
  - b. And yet, even with that recognition and honor, their stories would still be tragedies if we left things at Good Friday. The good news of Easter is that their stories DO NOT end in death. Just as Jesus rose from the grave, God will raise up these victims.
  - c. Cross and Resurrection are a defeat of death itself!!
3. Redeeming the Guilty
- a. We are wrapped up in systems of injustice
    - i. Pinter quote about collateral damage
    - ii. Our dollars are funding strikes on Iranian schools and central / South American fishing boats and children in Gaza

- b. Even if we could have a perfect war, violence is not redemptive. Killing just the bad guys still leaves us with so many dead bodies - people loved by their parents and created to be image bearers.
- c. The good news of the cross and the resurrection is that it is not only the innocent victims who are offered salvation
  - i. The cross exposes the unjust systems of the world and the futility of violence – and it offers us a better way.
  - ii. Jesus descends into death to conquer death and to rescue the captives, innocent and guilty. This is the harrowing of hell, depicted in the icon on the booklet of readings for tonight.
  - iii. Jesus goes into hell itself on behalf of Pharaoh and his armies, and on behalf of the violent warlords of Noah’s time, and even on behalf of the warmongers of today.
- d. As Ezekiel tells us, God offers a new heart and a new spirit: even the guilty can be redeemed, if we will only turn away from the myth of redemptive violence and turn to the prince of peace.

***Amen.***