

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Palm Sunday, 2025

The Rev. Alan C. Murchie

I have a friend named Audrey who is a person of deep and constant prayer and whose luminous faith shines in and through her for all to see. Audrey is a friend from my New York City days. The last time I saw her, I was working at Calvary Church in Stonington. We were excited to see each other after many years, and as we were catching up I told Audrey enthusiastically about beautiful Stonington village and how it lies just beyond the Sound on the coastline and is the first town truly on the Atlantic. She smiled and said, "I'm happy for you; it sounds so lovely." I told her about the constellations at night I saw so vividly while walking home and the soothing sounds of the ocean waves. She smiled again gently and nodded. And then she asked me the name of my new church. I said "It's called Calvary". This time she responded much differently. As I said it, her eyes opened wide and she sat up fully and she breathed in; and as she exhaled, she said, "Calvary! Oh how beautiful."

I have to say at first I didn't know quite what to make of her response. Generally my friends were most interested in hearing about the coastal village and the restaurants and shops that lined its main street, the cool breezes, the unbelievable sunrises. But for Audrey, while all of that seemed lovely, none of it compared to that name. *Calvary*. "Oh, how beautiful," she said.

Calvary, how beautiful. I let Audrey's words sit with me for a while. She had such insight and I wanted to see what she saw. And so I thought about it. Calvary of course is a place, a place we've just named here today. It's the place where Jesus died. It's also known as Golgatha, or "Place of the Skull." Calvary is the Latin name for the hill just outside the city walls where Jesus died. And my friend isn't alone in finding it a place of great beauty. She shares that with the hymn writers who offer moving images of the hill "far away" where the cross stood and where the "dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain." That's Calvary. It's the place where "our dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all" in the words of another beloved hymn. And that too is Calvary.

I remembered that my friend's response to Calvary is shared by hymn writers. It's also shared by the saints over time, all the way back to our Church Mothers and Fathers for whom it also was a place of great and consummate beauty. This is the place for them where they saw Love, radiant raw Love revealed in its ultimate fullness. This is the place for them where we might in fact finally be made right with God. This is the place where *everything we've ever hoped might be true* - true about God, true about our world, about ourselves and each other - is shown not just to be true but to be Truth itself. And for them this was seen most beautifully and radiantly in the final words Jesus utters somehow as he takes his final breaths, having offered his life, everything he has, to us as gift, words we've just beheld together here.

Father forgive them for they know not what they do, Jesus says, and as he says it we can know with them finally and fully that yes, forgiveness and mercy *are* the ground of love and the heart of God, just as he showed us in his life, just as he showed us as he breathed the breath of love and peace and

reconciling mercy on the friends who betrayed him and even those who murdered him. And in this moment we see and we know that everything we ever hoped for is real and true.

Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise, Jesus says, and as he says it we can know with them finally and fully that yes, the kingdom is real and *the kingdom is now* and that we are invited to find a home there with him, just as he told us over and over again, even in the face of our stubbornness and resistance. This is your home, he says, join me here, and in this moment we see and know that everything we ever hoped for is real and true.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit, Jesus says, and as he says it we can know with them finally and fully that yes, we live for one thing and that thing is dedication; the dedication of our lives to service, to love, and to the God in whom all is made whole and new; the God in whom there is no darkness, only light; in whom there is no division, only unity and union; in whom there is no hate, only love; in whom there is no death, but only the redeeming, reconciling life-force whose raw, inextinguishable energy pulsates through even through this troubled moment, offering Paradise, breathing mercy, showing us home.

Calvary, oh how beautiful.