

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

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*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, March 19, 2023**  
The Fourth Sunday in Lent

**Solemn Evensong**  
4 p.m.

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A Sermon by  
The Rt. Rev. Carlye Hughes, *Bishop of Newark*  
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**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

In the name of the God who loves us. Amen. This is a word of hope. For those with compassion fatigue. Who have been caring about people. And caring about situations that continue to happen. To the point where you don't know what else you can do.

This is a word of hope. For people with compassion fatigue. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they will be filled. This is a word of encouragement. For those who are worn down. And worn out.

With Division. With depression. With argument, with disrespect. This is a word of encouragement. Blessed are those. Who? Hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they will be filled. This is a word of promise. For those who cannot see a way out.

And long only for God's goodness to come and break open. The frustrating situations and systems that we seem to be stuck in that are embedded all around us. A part, a vital part, it seems, of the way that we operate.

This is a word of promise from God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. The Beatitudes, verse by verse, fitting by building. Promise by promise. Reorient us to Jesus. They force us to turn our face to Jesus.

They force us to see the world the way Jesus sees the world. They force this radical realignment, this shifting around the way we talk about mentioning or turning to Jesus, literally turning to Jesus. They force this on us.

By calling hunger and thirst a blessing. By telling us that this longing for righteousness is a good thing and that we will be filled. That promise, that blessing. That comes because we return and rely on God and God who is so much larger, so much more expansive.

Who can take care of things that seem impossible to us because we cannot help but see through our limited view. And our limited experience. And even when we think about God, we start shrinking God down to our size so that we can manage who God is and what God is trying to do.

And when we hear the Beatitudes, when we hear Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, it turns it all upside down. Our presiding bishop would say it turns it upside down so that Jesus can get it right side up the way that it is supposed to be in the first place.

What things upside down to us? It's ordered by forces that are not of God. The right side up. Is that part of us that is always longing, always wanting. What God has for us. It's like Saint Augustine says, a very simple way.

Our hearts are restless. They are absolutely restless until they rest with you. Oh, God. That is that sense of righteousness, of being in right relationship. We never feel quite right when we're out of right relationship with God. And when we're out of relationship with God.

It's not limited to God. It is limited to all of God's creation. It is all the people. It is the planet. It is the galaxy. It is the worlds. It is the other worlds. It is all of God's creation.

So being in right relationship with all of those things is something we can't help but longing for because we're created by God. We are in God's image. It is natural for us to want that which created us, which loves us more than anything. We can't help but want some of that. And when we fall out of that right relationship. We fall into this sense of discomfort. To the point of lethargy or not cry, not caring or skepticism or disbelief or simply shutting ourselves down.

This whole sense that has become kind of popular to talk about that it is a bad thing for us to feel bad when bad things happen. Well, what else are you supposed to feel when terrible things happen to other people?

We will feel terrible. They are part of God's creation. We are part of God's creation. We can't help but want for other people, not just our families, not just the people that look like us, not just our friends, not just the other Episcopalians or the other music lovers, but for all people.

We can't help but want good things for them. When we see somebody without, we can't help but want them to have what we have that is that longing for a right relationship with them, longing for a right relationship with God and with God's creation.

So when we fall out of that and we feel that discomfort, that discomfort to the point of hunger, that discomfort to the point where I just have to have something different. I'm wondering how many people here when you heard about the banking crisis last week, how many people just wanted to throw something?

Just had enough. We could use a break. The things just keep coming. And in the midst of that discomfort and that anger and that frustration in the midst of all of that, is that part of us that knows this is going to hurt other people, it's going to hurt me and my house, but it is going to hurt other people, too. We can't help but care. We can't help but feel that discomfort. We can't help but feel that frustration. That is the blessing of feeling hungry and thirsty for righteousness. It is a blessing to feel that discomfort, because that blessing of that discomfort lets us know just how much we care.

About being connected to God. And to God's people. In the late 1940s, early 1950s, a group of Roman Catholic sisters moved to Fort Worth, Texas. They were educators, and they were completely frustrated by being unable to teach groups of children that look somewhat like this, that were integrated.

Wherever they taught, they had to teach by color or by race. And they decided that they were going to do something different. They were going to move to someplace where no one knew them and they were going to open a school and they were going to integrate it.

Notice when I said the late 1940s, early 1950s. Where were the integrated schools in the United States? Nowhere. There was no such thing. This was before the Brown versus the Board of Education decision that theoretically started integration in our nation.

It took years beyond that before it actually started to happen. They opened their school in Fort Worth, Texas, which happened to be my hometown. Why they picked Fort Worth? I do not know. They had a rough ride starting that school.

But it was important to them because they had this incredible sense of intensity that left them so discomforted about teaching and not teaching all of God's children. That was their calling. That was their mission. It was not going to let them go.

They were not ever going to feel at peace. Until they started doing what it was. They kept them connected to God. And kept them connected to God's people. As it turned out, I entered the second grade in that school.

After having a year in a segregated school, in my segregated city, in the segregated part of town that I lived in, taking classes that were called separate but equal. But I am here to tell you there were separate and not equal at all.

The Good Sisters spent my year of second grade catching me up to the second grade because I wasn't at first grade level. When I entered after a year of first grade in that segregated school that I had been in.

I say this story for two reasons. We live in a complicated and I will say, dangerous time. And when God comes to you. When the Spirit comes to you. And that is what is coming to you and kicking up that discomfort and kicking in that sense of hopelessness and making you think, I'm just one person.

I can't get it done. Then it is time, my friends, for us to get on our knees. And bless the discomfort. And remind ourselves that Jesus gives us this blessing, gives us this promise, gives us this encouragement, and will show us the way.

I dare say I would not be here today. If those sisters. Hadn't listened to that sense of hunger and thirst for righteousness. And kept working towards it. They weren't the only ones filled. So as I. This is a word of hope.

This is a word of encouragement. This is a word of blessing. For all of us. For every single one of us. Blessed are we who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For we shall be filled. Amen.