



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Maureen Martin, Associate Priest**

**The Fourth Sunday of Lent
10 March, 2024**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So yesterday afternoon, a company, I will call them, of outrageous, wise, witty, loving, servant hearted folk from Christ Church went to see the Oscar nominated short films. You know, from the signs you see around the building, this group of women and men as the OWLS, a ministry for those of us who are 55 and better. Don't laugh, it'll happen to you someday too. The needs are many as we age. But two fundamental needs were met yesterday. The need for deep engagement with the issues of our times and the need for friendship, laughter, love, affection, and stories of cakes carried six flights by friends in the dark. Beautiful stories. This year's Oscar nominated short films, they're heavy. At lightning speed we saw the destruction of a young family in London, incest, rape, the oppression of women, capital punishment. Just people filled with remorse, unresolved grief, anger. But we also saw friendship and beauty, optimism, solidarity and hope in the worst of circumstances.

Now, for us, the effect of having this material coming at us seemingly from all directions, felt so much more like real life than a long film does. We were almost as exhausted when it was done, as if we had lived through some of that ourselves. Because these filmmakers, they waste no time. They don't name characters, they don't situate them in a time or a location. And the effect of that is that there aren't buffers between us and them. And so therefore it is just easier for us to become them rather than being given the opportunity to settle into the narrative context of a single event. It's natural tension and then resolution. The stories poured out on us like a series of unexpected and unrelated tempests. Sort of like if you've ever been driving across Iowa in July, one minute, everything is wonderfully relaxed as you are secretly enjoying the number of country music radio stations. And then the next, (someone here has also done that) and then the next you are suddenly disoriented and frantic to remember what county am I in? Because suddenly that same radio is telling you that you need to take shelter because there's hailstones the size of golf balls and tornadoes everywhere. It happens in a split second. And every time I've driven across country, it happened in Iowa.

I didn't want to die in Iowa. Neither did I want to die in Iowa with our car pulled up tight against a building that wreaked of sauerkraut. Quite the afternoon for our family. So these were the Oscar shorts this year, and they tell the story of where people's hearts are right now. Remember, these were the films of many films that were nominated. So they spoke to the nominating committee or whatever that body is, the Academy. And as people, we want to talk about what is real, the real dehumanization of violence or what it means to be a child who is victimized by the same grandfather who also teaches us her how to fly fish. But also that we can be



surprised by the joy of the resilience and hope that was shown to us in a film produced by a veiled woman in Tehran. It's powerful.

So over dinner afterwards, we talked through the movies and our reactions to them, and in doing so, we became writers, directors, actors, producers of the second act of each of the shorts. So in a mood of mutual affection, we dissected the events of each short film. And you know what? I think we discovered that the human story does not end in darkness and depravity. It ends in light and love. The star of this show, this thing that we call life is not the evil we sometimes inflict on one another. It is the good that is happening all around us. Even when the good is a seemingly insignificant as a single cupcake held out to a sister in pain with the littlest of birthday candles, there is the goodness of life. So today is Rose Sunday, the day during Lent, when we get to take a break from the darkness of the season and remind ourselves that Easter cannot be held back for long.

Today in our service, we pray twice, both in the Lord's Prayer and the collect of the day, we pray for our daily bread. Not the bread of tears, but the living bread that we share with one another, the bread that came down from heaven to bring truth and goodness to the world, to feed and sustain us and give us hope, and teach us that the story we inhabit is ultimately God's story. And that in the end, all manner of things will be made well.

In Christ, we are shown the way forward through the painful truths in our life. And in friendship, we turn to another and tell our stories too, so that we may be seen and so that we may see. Every week we come and we kneel together to receive this bread of life for many reasons. But one that really presented itself to me in reflecting on our fellowship yesterday is so that when it is our turn to share in one another's difficulties, we can take and eat the bread of another's sorrow and pain. We can eat it ourselves so that they're not stuck with nothing but a plate of heaviness, grief, and worry. As Christ has done for us, we do this for one another as members of his body. We learn to recognize that life itself is sacramental, that the meals we share every day can become holy moments, deeply and truthfully connected to God's greatest gift to us, the life of his son.

That all is the second act of the world's story that people are hungry to hear. So as you go about your life this week, listen for stories that are only being told in one act. Stories that are waiting for us to step in and begin to write the second act, the act of sacrificial love, hope, and beauty. You might just be the person to write that next chapter and tell the good news that it is time to turn the page on some of these old stories. Because on the next page, we will find God's story already written there, waiting for all the world to see. Amen.