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*Hope in spite of because of it all*

*I am writing this on Good Friday. Tony Lewis, one of the best teachers I ever had, is preaching at our parish, St. Thomas', up on Dupont Circle. He's busy reminding us that we are not here for a funeral, that we are not attending a wake. Jesus undermined all of that, and Good Friday is not simply waiting for the resurrection to offer us hope.*

*That's a tough one, given what I read every day. During Holy Week I've reviewed the latest reports on Talisman Oil, and how profits from oil exploitation in Sudan are making it possible for the Sudanese government to sustain its war against its southern citizens. I've spent some time trying to hear the concerns of our Botswana friends that our campaign to prevent the marketing of diamonds from the rebel-held territory of Sierra Leone may hurt their own legitimate diamond trade, while reading how, without diamond sales, the rebel movement in this West African nation will be unable to continue its brutality against the people in that sad place. I've read about refugees trapped in that most vulnerable of human realities all over the continent. The literature along these lines seems endless.*

*I've also read about a government — our own — that day-by-day, policy-by-policy, places economic profit ahead of the common good. I've listened to those choices this administration outlines as the only two that are viable: Returning money to "the people" or having it wasted by the government. Thomas Friedman wrote the other day about a third possibility, viz. that government provides essential services in our lives, that we have a collective responsibility to our children's future, and to the less fortunate, and to — I might add — a world from which we secure immense profit, a world which we mercilessly exploit, and a world, certainly an Africa, that for all the strengths of its people, suffers stunningly. As Friedman points out, being a part of a nation and society does not embody a transaction about how much you paid in taxes and how much you get back. It's rather affirming a life together, in a world together, where governments at their better moments consider ways to meet the challenges of that common life, not the demands of the powerful living privileged lives.*

*During the time I've been reading all of this, this Holy Week, I wonder how many Africans have died of AIDS. It will be in the thousands.*

*The theme of hope has had a checkered history in Christian theology. It's been offered as a palliative to those who suffer, an excuse for those who ignore their brothers and sisters. That's why I marked out "in spite of it all" in the title, for it suggests — to me at least — that all of the human tragedy toward which my readings direct me can be neatly set aside. Ah, yes, God is still with us, Jesus' death is testimony to his life, his disciples still sense his presence. Why not, without enough food, lacking a limb, or dying of AIDS... why not embrace the hope of the resurrection anyway?*

*Of course this is put more brutally than is fair, for rooted in our theology is a spiritual understanding of our hope in the resurrection, one that opens us to encounter God in richness beyond imagining. And yet, perhaps "Hope because of it all" remains right, for in the transformative power of Holy Week we may feel the suffering of one another, we may find the voice we need to confront the injustices in our world, we may struggle once more to be a community that hears, and acts, and is. Hope is a tough thing, these days, but Tony Lewis is right, Good Friday is not a funeral.*

*Yours faithfully,  
Leon Spencer*