



## The Episcopal Diocese *of* Southwest Florida

---

8005 25<sup>th</sup> Street East  
Parrish, FL 34219

Phone: (941) 556-0315  
Fax: (941) 556-0321  
episcopalswfl.org

### **A Pastoral Message for Holy Week and Easter**

Bishop Douglas F. Scharf

April 2, 2026

*“We are witnesses of these things.”*

Acts 5:32

To my brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Southwest Florida:

Grace and peace to you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years ago, a movement began that changed the trajectory of human history. The movement began with a small group of uneducated fishermen and merchants who came from an obscure outpost of the Roman Empire. They had no political influence, no military authority, and no economic infrastructure to support their efforts. And yet, this movement overcame religious, cultural, socio-economic, geographic, and even linguistic boundaries, and within a single generation, the message of this movement had been proclaimed in almost every major city of the ancient world, including the city of Rome, the very heart and capital of the Empire.

I’m referring, of course, to the expansion of the early church, which was extraordinary in its speed, scope, and transformational impact on society. **How did such a tiny movement possess the capacity to so dramatically alter the course of human history? How can we possibly explain the extraordinary success of this Jesus movement?**

Theologically, we can answer these questions by pointing to the powerful presence and activity of the Holy Spirit that propelled and sustained the mission of the early apostolic leaders. But *practically* speaking, the mission of the early Jesus movement was based on a very simple model – *those whose lives had been changed by Jesus shared their experience with others*. The New Testament describes this practice as *bearing witness*. The earliest followers of Jesus understood they were called to be *witnesses*, to share their testimony of what they had seen and heard, to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to anyone who would listen.

As Episcopalians, we are guided by the solemn promises and vows of Holy Baptism, most of which focus on what *we will do* as followers of Jesus. However, as part of our baptismal covenant, we commit ourselves to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.” This particular promise is less about what *we will do* and more about *what God has done*. We are committing ourselves to be *witnesses*, to tell the world *what God has done* through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**Sin has been forgiven. Dividing walls torn down. Humanity reconciled to God and each other. The powers of darkness disarmed. The last enemy, which is Death, trampled underfoot. And a new creation has been born. We are witnesses of these things!**

My brothers and sisters, the early Jesus movement burst onto the scene and, against all odds, “turned the world upside down (Acts 17.6). Empowered and compelled by the Holy Spirit, the first Christians set out to *bear witness* to the Good News of *what God has done in Christ*, to tell the world that everything has changed because Jesus has been raised from the dead. The first followers of Jesus understood themselves to be an outward and visible sign of God’s healing and reconciling love for the world.

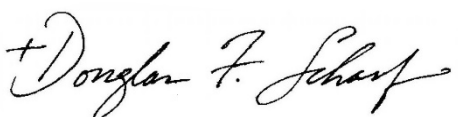
**Our vocation as Christians has not changed.** We are called to be *witnesses*. As we face significant and mounting challenges, our world desperately needs the faithful and compassionate witness of the Church. This public witness does not begin with human agency and human ingenuity, for as we prayed on the Third Sunday in Lent, “we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves” (BCP 218). Our *witness* as followers of Jesus must continually point to God’s agency and power – to *what God has done for us for our salvation*.

In this present moment, the atrocities associated with war and global conflict; the continued degradation of human dignity; the ongoing deterioration of public discourse; and the disregard for the vulnerable and those who have been marginalized all require a robust Christian response. This response must be grounded in the Good News of the Gospel that injustice, violence, suffering, and ultimately death itself, are not the last word. We are called to boldly proclaim by word and example that the cross and empty tomb stand forever as signs of the decisive victory of God’s love over the forces of evil.

**We are witnesses of these things!**

May God give us strength and courage to be bold and faithful *witnesses* for the Gospel. I pray that God will grant us grace to go forth in faith and to “let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, Jesus Christ our Lord” (BCP 291).

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas F. Scharf". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Douglas F. Scharf  
Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Southwest Florida