

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Palm Sunday Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Michael A. Bird Sermon Transcript**

“The Liberating Pain of the Passion”

We may celebrate Palm Sunday as the joyful return of Jesus to Jerusalem, but the liturgy also contains the Passion; a story full of pain, despair, and utter heartbreak. “God came as human to the bone,” preaches the Rev. Michael A. Bird, “which means human enough to experience human doubts, bone-deep despair, and betrayal.” As we remember and retell our story this Holy Week, he encourages us to embrace this pain and allow it to liberate us. Because our story does not end there. “The light is meant to shine through, if we have the courage to allow it, and see it, and serve it.” The scriptures are Isaiah 50:4–9a, Philippians 2:5–11, Psalm 31; and Mark 15:1–39.

Sermon Transcript:

This is the week we tell the story. This is the week we tell our story. Story and narrative are how we construct meaning in our lives. We construct meaning out of the flow of events, it is the essence of who we are as meaning-seeking animals. As Barbara Hurd wrote in *towards the poetics of fiction*, “we dream in narrative, we daydream in narrative. We remember, we anticipate, we hope, we despair, we believe, we doubt, we plan, we revise, we criticize, we construct, we gossip, we learn, we hate, and we love by narrative.” I come from a family of storytellers. My father is a priest, my brother tells stories, my mother benignly listens with not much commentary or criticism, we are a story-telling people and the nature of our story-telling has been revisited upon my children, Patrick and Edelawit. We have things that we do, we engage story to try to make meaning of what's going on in the world. Sometimes we engage story because we just need a break. It's just too much. Last night our family sat down to do something we had not done before, which was to begin a 63 episode single season of a Telenovela on Netflix. Yes, I have just crossed from sublime to ridiculous and I know it. We jumped right into this Telenovela called “The Road to Love”. It's the story of a truck-driving family who live outside of Bogota, Colombia. Like all Telenovelas it has as much disaster and laughter, and a plethora; a seemingly unending plethora of bad choices by human beings.

We sat there on the sofa, all four of us covering our eyes, covering our ears, yelling and screaming at the television, laughing at the top of our lungs being brought to tears by decisions that just shouldn't have been made. We ran the entire roller coaster, the full spectrum of human emotion and obviously it does not come close, even in its most difficult moments to the heartbreak, the heart break, that we have just heard in the passion. Jesus cries out to his father, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” No matter how I read it aloud or inside, no matter which piece of this proclamation I choose to emphasize, I cannot get away from the heartbreak and the despair. But I also cannot escape the deep reality in the midst of that sentence that proclaims to us at the top of its lungs that Jesus came to live among us not as God in a human suit or a costume that could be shed quickly on difficult days, but rather in Jesus, God came as human to the bone. Which means human enough to experience human doubts, bone deep despair, and betrayal. There is such pain in this story. There is also a danger when we encounter pain or heartbreak or despair, and that danger is that we choose to identify ourselves by it, cling to it, white-knuckle it, declare it as the defining story of our lives, or blame someone else for it, because it makes us feel more righteous. That's the danger, but I do not believe that is God's intention for us.

Rather when we experience heartbreak in our world, our addiction to violence by guns are inability to care for the poor or to make deep and purposeful strides toward racial justice are regular failures and setbacks each time we dare to open ourselves up again and find ourselves broken yet again, there is the possibility that if we don't shut down, if we have the courage to embrace our heartbreak, if we open up to the pain and the reality of what's going on around us, we will not be oppressed by that pain or heartbreak, but we will be liberated by it. Because the light is meant to shine through. The light is meant to come in if we have the courage to allow it, and see it, and serve it. There's a prayer written by Richard of Chichester at the end of the 12th century or the early 13th century, nobody knew that prayer in any way, shape, or form till in 1973 it was incarnated yet again in the classical musical moment that is Godspell. That prayer is as follows: "Thanks be to thee my Lord Jesus Christ for all the benefits which thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for me. Oh most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know the more clearly, love the more dearly, and follow the more nearly." The heartbreak that I hope we experience in this liturgy today, the heartbreak that I hope we allow to open us on this first day of Holy Week, is the story of a God willing to experience hopelessness so that we might have hope. Today we own the heartbreak, and we know the story does not end here. Amen.