



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

"What's In A Name?"

What might it look like if we invoke the name of Jesus right at the moment we feel like excluding others? Instead of defining ourselves in opposition to one another, Jesus challenges us to seek out "the lost, desolate, sad, unrepentant, healing, and broken ones," preaches the Rev. Michael Bird. To find them "and knit ourselves with them." What would it take for you to slow down and see Christ in the unfamiliar? The readings are Esther 7:1–6, 9–10, 9:20–22; Psalm 124; James 5:13–20; and Mark 9: 38-50.

Sermon Transcript:

This morning's gospel is quite a doozy. There's a whole lot packed in there and the part of it that stood out for me this week was the power of a name and the tone in which we use that name. I've been called a lot of names. The ones that I can share here in church roll like this. I've been Michael and if my mom is in the room, I will still be Michael, but there was a period of time where I could embrace "the Mike." I was Michael and I was Mike. When I started student teaching at a Quaker school, I was teacher Mike. I became Mr. Bird and upon ordination, father Bird and then father Michael, and then for a period of about six years, because I was responsible for the athletic conditioning of the football team in New Canaan, Connecticut, I was also Father Pain, a name I have tried to get them to forget which, however, appears on Facebook every now and again, from Father Pain back to father Bird, father Michael, Vicar, and in my own home because of my ministry with the people of Yonkers and Mount Vernon and our collective ministry to the people of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

In my own home, my kids don't call me daddy, they call me padre, lots of names. The reality is that if you use any of them, you're going to get my attention. The tone that you apply to that name will evoke in me any number of responses. When you call my name in some way, shape, or form, you have a little power over me. This was the concern of the disciples, this was their concern when John noted that someone was out there using Jesus' name, healing people, exercising demons in the name of Jesus, and how dare they do that? How dare they co-opt Jesus' power? How dare they insert themselves into the followers of Jesus when they weren't. John and the disciples were indignant. Jesus had a different take, Jesus said, "Whoever is not against us is for us." Jesus helped His disciples understand that the more that person used Jesus' name in an act of healing or wholeness, the more that person would be transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, Jesus did not allow for the fact that His name, His teaching, His love, His incarnation, would be powerless in the face of misuse. Rather, He recognized that the nature of His name alone and His presence among us pushes us towards healing, and possibility, and growth, and change, and transformation.

In that moment, Jesus, over and against the disciples put great faith in humanity and in the power of God to do work in this world. Because the disciples were so bound up in trying to figure out who could use Jesus' name and who couldn't, which was really about who was in and who was out, who was invited to the party and who had to sit outside, who understood what was really going on versus who's

trying to figure it out, because the disciples were so bound up in that, Jesus began to speak to them about stumbling blocks. Here's my favorite part of this. The Greek word for causing one to stumble is the same word as scandalize. Jesus looked at His disciples and He explained to them in very clear terms that they are not meant to be stumbling blocks. In fact, that was at odds with everything that He had been trying to show them. Now, I've preached the gospel more than a handful of times at this stage in my life, and I have prayed the collect for today way more than a handful of times in my life. The reality is I did not realize until this week how beautifully they go together. In the collect for the day, the prayer for the day, the theme prayer around which we gather, we pray, "Oh God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of your grace that we running to obtain your promises." That prayer gives us this incredible image of us booking it together to get to that place where we know love and share love, where we experience love and carry love. We are making it together.

In the gospel for today, we get stumbling blocks and in my mind, I have a Wiley Coyote moment. I have that moment where God's image for all of us is for us to be running not in separate directions, not running in competition with one another, not running to prove ourselves right over and against the other, but running in such a way that our arms are wide. Perhaps, our arms are linked and we are gathering the world into Christ's saving embrace as we move forward. Woe to us if we create our own stumbling block and end up head over heels taking the gathered community with us, woe to us if we help another stumble instead of helping them up. Jesus is very clear in this moment. He speaks to people like me who are preposterously competitive, did I mention father pain? Jesus speaks to people like me who feel like we just got to go and get these things done and forget why we're doing it in the first place. We're doing it because we've been saved, we're doing it because we have been so convinced and convicted by the words of Jesus and His saving acts of grace that we have chosen membership in something that has no boundaries because it's meant for all.

Instead of trying to define it, and restrict it, and package it, and isolate it, and set ourselves off from the other, Jesus challenges us not to be stumbling blocks for the other but to seek out these little ones, these lost ones, these desolate ones, these sad ones, and broken ones, and healing ones, and joyful ones, and unrepentant ones, to find them out and knit ourselves with them over and against our own tendency to win or define them away. In doing so by choosing them, choose Jesus over and over again. How many times a day do we find ourselves in the streets of the city confronted by someone who fits the category of the other? How many times a day do we assign them a name as other instead of seeing them as Christ? I am far from flawless and when I fall short, when I miss the mark, when I somehow think that membership in the Christian church is an executive key card to the good floor instead of what it really is which is the cross, the thing I fall back on is the fact that God loves me in my brokenness that if I speak the name of Jesus, if I check my tone, if I call upon him, if I yearn to lean towards goodness, I will be broken, open just enough to claim my place as a broken but beloved child of God. As we run the race to obtain God's promises, let us commit ourselves not to throw out any stumbling blocks, but let us also commit ourselves to gathering people along the way to not run so fast that we can't see the other. Let's stop and let's invoke the name of Jesus, and let us heal.

Amen.