

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

**“Be Not Far from the Kingdom of God”**

“Sometimes we get so distracted that the Holy Spirit provides us moments to recognize the thin places; the places where the Kingdom of God might just be breaking through.” Preaching at our Sunday Holy Eucharist, Trinity’s vicar the Rev. Michael Bird, uses an encounter with a fellow straphanger who mistook his clerical collar for a Halloween costume as a reminder to embrace “the thin places, where the earthly and heavenly Kingdom coincide.” Watch his sermon here. The readings are Ruth 1:1–18, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:11–14, and Mark 12:28–34.

**Sermon Transcript:**

There are those days where we get distracted, where the various vagaries or necessities of life take our attention from where it might want to be and fracture it, fractionalize it, spread it out all over the place. I'll be honest, I'm subject to those days. Saturday for me was one of those days in sharp relief. You may have noticed on your way into church this morning, you'll certainly notice on your way out if you look to your left, that we've got a big lift in Trinity Church yet again. One of those big pieces of heavy equipment, this one's got a cool name, it's a "spider" lift, which when you come upon it unsuspectingly, you begin to understand because of all the legs that are sticking out to stabilize it. I'm sure you also know that 100-year storms happened a lot more frequently these days, and often times those 100-year storms are accompanied by massive winds. In the particular case, at Trinity Church wall street, we began to see some of the results of these climatological shifts. We've had a little water damage, but taking care of it, which is to say I've been incredibly distracted by it. There was a wedding on Saturday. Nothing says wedding like a spider lift. Saturday morning, I got up, I had my list of things to accomplish. One of them was to drop by the church, see how things were going, make sure that the church was ready for the wedding, and then I had an appointment up on the lower east side. I was dressed, had my black shoes on, my black pants, my black shirt, I had this incredibly comfortable white collar on.

I left the church, I raced down into the four and five, I caught a four up to Union Square. I was on the subway, lost in my own thoughts, thinking about the things priests think about, lifts, and damaged plaster and leaking roofs. On the subway, and I felt this tap on my right shoulder, I turned and there was this person who's faced was not far from mine. We were of course both responsibly masked, and he started to talk to me and I had to lean in just a little bit and he said to me, "I really like your outfit." I've had a lot of conversations on the subway, they usually do not devolve to fashion choices. I had to stop and collect myself and look myself up and down to remember what it was I was wearing on Saturday. I looked at him and I said, thank you and he said, "No, really, your costume is so authentic." I took the coward's way out, didn't explain who I was, and just thanked him for the compliment, and in thanking him, took it half step back and realize that my conversation partner was dressed as Superman for the day. I say this because sometimes, we get so distracted that the Holy Spirit provides us moments to recognize the thin places, to recognize the places where the Kingdom of God just might be breaking through, just might be a little bit more apparent, a conversation on a subway that was non confrontational in every possible way, but lovely and thematically appropriate for the season.

The reading that we have from the gospel today provides us with exactly one of those thin places. We can place it at the feet of Jesus or we can place it at the feet of the scribe, I like to give it to the scribe. The scribe has witnessed Jesus be questioned, and cajoled, and challenged with trap after trap after trap and having recognized the authority, and the depth, and the authenticity of Jesus' answers. The scribe comes to him with a question that if we take the tone out of it, and I mean our tone, in fact may be the breaking open of the Kingdom of God. The scribe asked him which commandment is the first of all, and Jesus goes where one would assume Jesus would go, Deuteronomy Chapter 6, verses 4 through 9. "Hear o Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your," -depending on your translation- "might or strength." But in actuality, that's not quite. Well, that's just not precisely what Jesus answered. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." In the simplest little addition to an answer that is so deeply embedded on our understanding of scripture and our understanding of our relationship with God Almighty, Jesus helps the scribe to understand what the scribe might have understood all along, which is that our relationship with God begs of us our entirety. We cannot, we may not, we should not, we must not check our minds at the door, but leading with our hearts and our souls and our strength, bring our mind along that we might fully embrace the love of God and the potential that that relationship brings with it.

Then having done that, enlivened by the fullness of that relationship, then love our neighbors as ourselves. In that moment, Jesus both opens and expands the scriptures that we might see the possibilities there in, but also in that moment, the conversation between the Scribe and the Jesus. The Jesus that we know and love can also soften our hearts to the deepest way of living. The thing I love most about the summary of the law is that it is not written as an if then statement. It is not a contract; if you do this, I will do that. It is not some legalistic binding document that implies that one is subservient to the other or that one will do better than the other if we're not careful the summary of the law as we understand it from the Scribe and Jesus and their interaction is in fact a statement of covenant. It is a statement where no one gains an advantage, no one expects anything in return, but all are lifted and the world is changed. It's that covenantal sense of love that we find in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi in our reading this morning from the Hebrew scriptures. It is in these moments as we embrace the giving of our whole selves, where we recognize that sometimes we do things just because we love folks. Those are the sweetest moments. When I got to where I was going on the Lower East Side, The Loisaida Center a shelter and food bank and community center on Ninth Avenue in the alphabets, they gave me a wardrobe change. I was going there to meet our neighborhood support crew and mother Kristen.

I got there and they gave me the thing that I'm most want to wear with my clericals, a bright red hoodie. I was told in no uncertain terms by Lorelei Vargas and no one says no to Lorelai, at least no one I've met yet. She's the head of our Neighborhood Support team. I was told in no uncertain terms that I would wear that sweatshirt over my color while I was interacting with people and helping them to give them groceries and cleaning supplies and praying over them and getting to know them. I put on the sweatshirt because I want to live. After I put on that sweatshirt, I noticed it was appropriately branded Trinity Church Wall Street, and Neighborhood Support got a shoutout down over here. But the most operative statement on the sweatshirt was this, "How can we help you?" How can we love our neighbor as ourself through the formational depth of loving God with all our hearts, all our minds, all our souls, all our strength. There were incredibly beautiful moments on Saturday. Out of the sea of distraction, out of the sea of spider lifts, out of the sea of subway encounters, standing in line with a group of people who were so friendly and loving and prayerful, standing with a group of people who kept trying to get in line two or three or four times, yet in each and every one of those moments, recognizing the gracious

opportunity that we have to be of service in God's name, that we have to be living in places where the earthly and heavenly Kingdom coincide. I'm not going to commend you dress in clericals and ride the subway, I might recommend getting a hot red sweatshirt and working with neighborhood support, because that's what you said you wanted last week in our community discernment; more about that to come. But I will suggest I will pray that we fully take into account the summary of the law that it might do its work and that we might, wherever we find ourselves, as Jesus said to the Scribe, be not far from the Kingdom of God. There is great hope for our world in that.

Amen.