



**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Palm Sunday
The Rev. Elizabeth Blunt Transcript**

“The Passion in a Day: A Story We Need to Hear”

With almost no transition, we make a precipitous drop on Palm Sunday: from the jubilant procession into Jerusalem right into the senseless brutality of the Passion. Why do we do Palm Sunday this way? “The answer is pretty simple,” offers the Rev. Elizabeth E. Blunt. “For some of us, Palm Sunday is the only opportunity to listen to the story of Jesus’ death in the context of worship all year. And it is a story we need to hear.”

Not because the joy of Easter has to be earned, but because today is when we come to fully understand exactly what kind of a King we follow: one motivated not by personal gains but by sacrificial love; one who forgives the unforgivable and chooses to operate not through might, but through weakness; and one who keeps faith in the most dire times of trouble.”

The readings are Luke 19:28–40; Isaiah 50:4–9a; Psalm 31; Philippians 2:5–11 and Luke 23:1–49.

Sermon Transcript:

May I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Please be seated.

"Nature's first green is gold. Her hardest hue to hold. Her early leaf, there's a flower, but only so an hour. Then leaf subsides to leaf. So Eden sank to grief. So dawn goes down to day. Nothing gold can stay." Now, if you've been to church and heard me preach at all in the last couple of years, I feel like you've had a fair amount of Robert Frost from me. I promise, I do know and love a lot of other and probably cooler poets, but Frost has in my head, the longest. I learned those lines I just recited when I was a kid. And so they're stuck now in my imagination and in my memory, always ready to jump out and present themselves on cue when I'm on my neighborhood walks pondering the questions of life, which happens more frequently lately. This poem, I actually don't mind having stuck. It's short and easy to remember, and it's just perfectly accurate. I look forward to standing in my favorite park and reciting it to the trees at this exact time, every year. This moment at the first breath of spring when everything growing is misted in that almost imperceptible yellow green. When pear trees are covered with those little white flowers that will in fact become leaves, when magnolias are blossoming. I also like this poem because that line it walks between beauty and melancholy, resonates with me. This is the radio frequency where God dialed me in. I've always heard this as a poem about diminishment, about the fleeting nature of things that are pure and perfect, about mortality. And to me, all of that seems uniquely applicable today as we consider what could've been the highest point in Jesus' story, his triumphant procession into the holy city of Jerusalem. A charismatic hero. Some thought, maybe a king.

Think how the apostles hearts must have filled in that moment when they crusted the hill and saw those multitudes of people convicted by Jesus. Over the months and the years lined up, cheering, welcoming him to what should've been his own. But then reality. Powerful people mobilize and conspire to crush what they perceive as a threat. With almost no transition today, you and I made a precipitous drop from that jubilant royal parade, right into the passion; brutal, sorted, senseless. Nothing gold can stay. Why do we do Palm Sunday this way? Important things did happen. We know between Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem and his trial, and our services this week are really designed to take us in chronological order through those events. From today's procession to the upper room for the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, and the nighttime vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then on Good Friday, the crucifixion. So why the double down today? Why are we trying to do so much in this one service? The answer is pretty simple. Not everybody is able to go to church Wednesday through Sunday in Holy Week. For some of us, Palm Sunday will be our only opportunity to listen to the story of Jesus' death in the context of worship all year. And it is a story we need to hear, not because it engenders some essential sense of guilt or because the joy of Easter has to somehow be earned, but because this story is where we come to fully understand exactly what kind of a king we follow. One motivated not by personal or even by national gains, but by sacrificial love. A supremely powerful ruler who chooses to operate not through might, but through weakness. A king who forgives the unforgivable. Who keeps faith in the most dire times of trouble. This story is where we learn what kind of lives we're called to lead if we decide to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

All those good and rich lessons notwithstanding, Holy Week is also about the heart, maybe even more so in some ways. Today and in the days ahead, you and I are really being called into a protracted exercise in empathy. We're being asked to imaginatively inhabit places and situations. To inhabit the experiences of people we think we understand and people who really challenge us. Disciples, grieving women, angry authorities, criminals, Jesus himself. Those who stood at the foot of the cross and scoffed, and those who stood at the foot of the cross and were changed. A lot of spiritual energy is asked of us in this strange annual ritual. It can feel overwhelming to walk the path of decay that comes before Easter, especially in a season of life like the one we're currently living. And again, we could ask, why do we do it this way? What does this exercise accomplish when it too seems so fleeting? The work of a few days in April. The thing about carrying a story with you, like carrying a poem. The thing about repeating it through seasons and years and allowing it to present itself to you at opportune moments, is that the way you hear it changes as you change, as you live life and bear trials and acquire wisdom. Every year, for many years, as said, I have spoken my little springtime poem and enjoyed it's gloomy accuracy. Only this year, did I think about the repetition itself. Only this year, did I understand it's ironic hope. Nature's gold can't stay, but it always returns. Year after year, according to the cycle of life ordained by our creator, we dream of it in the dark of winter. We carry its beauty with us. When all is said and done, what's fleeting? Our glimpses of life or the unremarkable progress of decline? What happens when we carry a story together? Not just you and I, but a whole people living lives on every continent, in every city and nation, in every age. And not just any story, but a story of how the world was meant to be. What happens when we remember together, year after year, for centuries, for millennia? The way we hear the story changes, yes, the story changes us as individuals, but we're also made more and more capable of seeing and saying how the story changes everything. You and I are part of a living organism that has borne witness to the way God's insistent compassion transforms the world generation after generation. Every day, every season, every Holy Week, and every brief lifetime, we trace circles within the one great cycle intended by God, accomplished in the life of God's word, sustained by God's Spirit, the cycle of love leading us from paradise back to paradise.

Amen.