

The Power of Narrative  
Sermon for Palm Sunday  
March 28, 2010 – The Rev. Torrence Harman  
The Passion: Luke 22:14 – 23:56

We don't usually get the whole story on a Sunday morning. Usually, it is a few pieces of scripture loosely threaded together. But today we have a powerful rich tapestry, full of different characters, playing out their parts on a big screen. It happens maybe twice in our church calendar. Once when we have a Christmas Pageant. The second when we gather and the Passion narrative is read. At a time of birthing and at a time of dying. Both stories include events and characters that flesh out the story. Stories of birth and death capture us. They are very human stories and ones we experience in our own lives and the lives of those around us. And like all our stories these big ones in our faith include threads of humanness and threads of the divine.

Today we are invited to a death. Invited into the last week of someone's life – someone who becomes very important both in his dying and in the ways he lives in and with us after what seems to be his death.

“Remember, remember, tell your stories together, hold images in your heart, share them, remember, remember.” This is what I encourage family and friends to do when someone they have loved dies. And so one who dies continues to be real in their lives.

In a way that is what we are asked to do today and during this holy week. Remember, remember, relive the events and let the ageless story give us wisdom and courage to move forward.

As one preacher has said, “This isn't an outdated story. This is life.”

I ask something special of you this week. I'm inviting you to create your own sermon this week. A sermon is the retelling of the Old, Old Story looking for the connections with our lives today and the life of this on-going world around us. Searching for repetitive themes and trying to find a timeless truth in it all that can help us live good lives today.

At the heart of the stories, old and new, is “relationship.” How we relate to each other, how we relate to authority in our lives, how we relate to the question of why we are here and what do we do with this one precious life we have been given.

So, I ask you to take home the Gospel Passion narrative. Each day carve out some time, maybe half an hour, maybe more or less. And each day read through it, in whole or in part. The narrative is powerful. And consider whether or not there are pieces in it, little stories within the bigger story, a character here or there which connects with you and your life. It is a story with timeless themes: betrayal, denial, greed, protectiveness, violence, sacrifice, celebration, pride, communion, forgiveness, judgment, death, trial, love, loss, pain, passion, brokenness, healing.

Take the story home with you. Honor it, study it, live it, reflect on it this week, day by day. Let this story and the story of your life become a sermon that really connects with you, then live it and let it connect with others.

I offer you an example, of a connection between the Old Story and a personal story. Fred Craddock, now a Biblical scholar and commentator, tells of an event in his life and offers reflection and connection on a timeless theme.

Craddock tells of how, when he was in graduate school at Vanderbilt, he used to take late-night study breaks at an all-night diner. One night while worrying about his New Testament oral exams, he happened to overhear an exchange between the man behind the counter and a ragged, down-on-his luck customer.

“Then I noticed a man who was there when I went in, but had not yet been waited on. I had been waited on, had a refill, and so had the others. Then finally the man behind the counter went to the man at the end of the counter and said, ‘What do you want?’ He was an old, gray-haired black man. Whatever the man said, the fellow went to the grill, scooped up a little dark patty off the back of the grill, and put it on a piece of bread without condiment, without napkin. The cook handed it to the man, who gave him some money, and then went out the side door by the garbage can and out on the street. He sat on the curb with the 18-wheelers of the night with the salt and pepper of the street to season his sandwich.

I didn’t say anything. I did not reprimand, protest, or witness to the cook. I did not go out and sit beside the man on the curb, on the edge. I didn’t do anything. I was thinking about the questions coming up on the New Testament exams. And I left the little place, went up the hill back to my room to resume my studies . . . . And off in the distance I hear a cock crow.”\*

Take this story home with you (holding up the Passion Narrative).  
Look for connections with your life.

Or not. Of course, you have a choice.

\*Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, Chalice Press, 2001, pp 48-49