

A Family Affair

We are all delighted to have so many folks join us this year. From Uncle Gene Naipo and LeeAnn to DC and Susie and Helen and Barry and so many more.

As newcomers to St. E's, I have the obligation to let you in on a few things; things that might not be so readily apparent.

You see, our *official* motto at St. E's is "A House of Prayer for All People."

It's on our signs and it's symbolized in the stained glass above the entry door; with all of the markings of the world's major faiths intertwined.

But it's our *unofficial* motto that I want to clue you in on.

Our unofficial motto is:

"Don't talk stink about anybody here, 'cause we're all related!"

It's the first piece of advice I got when I showed up as your deacon in 2006 and I've been reminded of it from time to time ever since.

What I've learned over the years is how true our unofficial motto is.

Not only are the Kaus related to the Aus and the Shims related to the Woos, but even a haole like me is related to you all because my wife is half Haka Chinese from Tahiti with ties to the Ings and the Yees.

It won't be long before we figure out how you who have recently joined us are blood relatives too!

What's true in our Chinese community is also true in our growing Chuukese community.

We hear it all the time: "she's from my island, my neighborhood, he's my dad's first cousin, my auntie's third child."

It's no different in the Tongan and Filipino communities, or in the Hawaiian and Japanese communities.

But lest we think it's just about island living,

"I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation between us and everyone else on this planet. The President of the United States, a gondolier in Venice, just fill in the names. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people." Memorable quotes from *Six Degrees of Separation*.

It doesn't end there either.

Astronauts return from outer space, profoundly changed, having seen our fragile earth alone against the cold vacuum of space.

A crew of international astronauts reports: "The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were all aware of only one earth." Johnson, *Quest For The Living God*, 181.

Another astronaut, while walking on the moon, holds up his thumb in front of his face and blocks the whole earth:

"Then you realize," he says, "that on this beautiful warm blue and white circle is everything that means anything to you; all of nature and history, birth and love. And you are changed forever." Id.

Today's the day to ponder our connections with each other because today God is putting the human family back together.

We split ourselves apart at the Tower of Babel, way back in Genesis, because humanity proudly reached up rather than reaching out.

God scattered us at Babel to show us we are not God; that we are children of God.

Our reading from Acts today tells us that God's first children, Jews from around the world, are gathering in Jerusalem.

They have for years lived in and learned the cultures and languages of other people in distant lands.

Now on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the holy days, they speak their native tongues: a mix of strange and different languages: only to hear the disciples bursting with the Good News of Jesus; each hearing it in their own tongue.

The same Spirit that moves over the face of the waters at the creation now blows over and through simple fishermen, men and women frightened and confused, cowering behind locked doors in a secret room, and creates in them a new way of God acting in the world.

At Babel, humanity pretended it was God.

At Pentecost, the Spirit anoints us as children of God.

Babel scattered us so we might, in humility, discover who we are; Pentecost unites us, and enables us to live out who we are called to become.

And here is the best part: the unity that the Spirit creates is not uniformity.

My dear friend Pua Hopkins used to wonder about the famous American ideal of the melting pot:

“That’s all well and good,” she would say, “but who’s doing the melting?”

In God’s unity, no one is melting.

In God’s unity, our diversity, our differences, our distinctions are all drawn together into a dance that celebrates what is unique in each of us.

In God’s unity chaos is transformed into chorus.

This is the miracle of Pentecost!

It’s so crazy that the disciples are accused of being drunk!

St. Paul says it perfectly, explaining to the young community at Corinth that though they are many members, there is but one body.

“And so, the eye cannot say to the hand, I don’t need you, nor the head to the feet, I don’t need you. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem the weakest are the most indispensable.” ¹
Cor. 12:20-22

This is who we are becoming today, right here in Palama.

A group of relatives from far and wide, related, even though we may not know all the connections, speaking many languages, offering different customs, all within the harmony of God’s great mercy for each and every one.

God invites us into a life that tells the truth about God's love for all creation.

By loving each other, as Jesus loves us, we in turn invite the world to say hello to this God of limitless love.

Like the very first witnesses, we not only have a story to tell, but in the telling, we are the story being told.

It's why we're gathered today in this "House of Prayer For All People."

This house, where we can't talk stink about each other, because God's reckless Spirit has made us, one and all, family to each other.

Thanks be to God!

+amen.