

"I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me and you will bear much fruit." John 15:5

Vine & Branches

Monthly News from St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, 720 N. King Street, Honolulu, HI 96817 • Phone (808) 845-2112

February 2019

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Stepping on Toes

The Rev. David J. Gierlach

Last Sunday before church started I was at my usual post over there by the side door saying hello to folks when Collette came walking up the ramp with her little 3 year old grandson, Aiden — who took one look at me, pointed, and yelled out:

"There's God!" — as he ran up and hugged my leg!

And while Collette was quick to correct him that no, that's Fr David, not God, I'm thinking that the youngster actually had a point!

Not that I'm not getting delusions of grandeur, but taking today's gospel to heart, that little boy is actually tuned into what gets Jesus in so much trouble today.

And it's all about God.

And where, and in whom, we encounter God.

Jesus has returned home today.

In a reading that began last Sunday, he's at his family synagogue, back home with the aunties and uncles and neighbors and childhood friends.

He picks up the scroll and begins reading a beautiful piece of scripture, telling everyone the day of prophetic promises has at long last arrived, and just as the people are ready to make him leader of the parade, just as the Mayor is about to name him Man of the Month, Jesus pokes a stick in their collective eye!

The name of that stick is the inconvenient truth that God is fond not just of us and our kind, but that God is fond of everyone!

Even pagan generals suffering from horrific skin disease, even Jehovah Witness widows — even illegal immigrants — even Muslims — even druggies — even the houseless — even over-dressed rectors in gold leaf robes!

And the folks in the crowd go crazy, because perhaps the most deeply held human belief is "I'm okay, but you're a mess!"

That's the thinking that gives us tribes and nations, races and ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations.

We love whatever distinguishes "us" from "them".

And Jesus says to this way of thinking: time's up, game's over, God exists in every human person and if you claim to love God, then start with loving every human person...

Which is, let's face it, fine for some pious but insincere lip service: "oh yes, how sweet that God lives in every person, uh, pass the salt please...."

But Jesus isn't about paying lip service to this central truth of our existence.

Jesus insists that we apply it to our daily lives; in which case, our toes are guaranteed to be stepped on...hard!

Because if every human being is indeed the image of God, then what does that say about our economic system that keeps so many trapped in poverty, not to mention the 50% of our population that lives in a never ending cycle of paycheck to paycheck survival, dreading the day when an unexpected bill, or government shutdown, throws their financial life under a train, while billionaires gasp in horror at the mere thought of a 2% wealth tax on their vast riches.

If every human being is the image of God, how can we possibly tolerate the continued racism and sexism and bigotry of all shapes and sizes that continues to infect our social relations?

What Jesus does today is frighteningly drastic because he rejects moderation and easy does it and live and let live.

Instead, today, he begins his ministry by taking up the achingly radical consequences of love.

Paul knows these consequences.

We hear it today in his letter to the folks at Corinth.

And while today's reading is one we're used to hearing at weddings, Paul isn't writing this ode to love for a couple of newlyweds.



He's writing this letter to folks who are at each others throats!

And what he's getting at is the politics of what a Christian community looks like.

Yes, politics: meaning, how we organize ourselves, how we set boundaries on acceptable behavior, how we in essence agree to live with one another.

Which is why those who insist that the church and politics don't mix fail to understand both politics and the church!

Because to follow Christ is not primarily about my individual keister — it's about the Kingdom of God, it's about God's royal banquet, it's about the cloud of witnesses!

In other words, it ain't about me — it's about us — all of us!

And Paul spells out what life is like when what matters is ... us:

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

What Paul knows, what Jesus died for, what we are called to live out is the truth that each and every human being bears the image and likeness of God - and therefore each and every human being is to be cared for, related to, interacted with as if he or she is the most profoundly significant thing in this world.

I don't do that.

Perhaps some of you don't either.

And I think what both Paul and Jesus are trying to drive home today is that while there is much harm in the failure to live up to our high calling when we deal with one another — the greater harm is when we fail to live up to our high calling — while pretending that we do.

We see this everywhere today in the fake moral codes that blame the victim and insist that the poor deserve their plight, when we withhold mercy and compassion to avoid "enabling" the needy.

Jesus, not so respectfully, disagrees.

"You see, Jesus goes and does the one thing you're never supposed to do, even to strangers, let alone to friends and neighbors:

He tells them the truth, the truth about their pettiness and prejudice, their fear and shame, their willingness, even eagerness, to get ahead at any cost, even at the expense of another.

And so they want him gone, permanently.

And let's face it; that's pretty much the way it usually is.

Jews or Romans, they aren't just about folks from Nazareth or Jerusalem.

No, the gospels are about every race and nationality, from every time and place who, when they meet someone who tells them the truth about themselves, will go to almost any length to kill the messenger.

From the prophets of Israel to our own prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr., the keepers of the dream are rejected, beaten, and shot, as are the truth tellers too.

And so here we are, at the very outset of Jesus' ministry, and already we see how it's going to end.

Because while Jesus escapes today, the day is coming when he won't. They'll listen a little longer, get a little madder, and then lay their hands on him and nail him to the cross.

So here's the other interesting question for the day: do you think things have changed all that much?

I mean, do you think Jesus' sermon about change and equity and release goes over any better today, in a nation tied up in knots over whether millionaires should pay higher taxes or whether it's fair to limit how many assault rifles one man can own?

Jesus, whenever and wherever he speaks, still makes people see red." David Lose, paraphrased.

When Martin Luther King sat in a Birmingham jail cell during the early days of the civil rights movement, it wasn't the KKK as much as it was middle class white preachers like me who really gave Dr King heartburn.

"I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace (which is the absence of tension) to a positive peace (which is the presence of justice); who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.'

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.

Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." MLK, Jr, Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

A little boy runs up the church ramp and pointing to the priest says: "There's God!"

Are we willing to join with that little boy and begin to see God in every human person?

If we are, then indeed the kingdom of God has drawn near.



Moses' first and last day as a lifeguard.



Happy Birthday

God's blessings on those with February birthdays!

Elsie Okubo	02/01
Myra Okimoto	
Zachary Okimoto	02/02
Andrea Sagucio	02/04
Inasia Thomas	02/07
Shiloh Ramelb	02/08
Alicia Ho Nakata	02/11
Doris Lam	
David Kaloi	02/12
Beatriz Timonio	02/15
Elyson Badua	02/16
Edward A. Fitzpatrick	02/17
Betty Wong	
Harlan Arakawa	
Sue Jean Chun	02/21
Faye Tsukamoto	02/24
Tulenkun Jr. Tulenkun	02/25
Kazner Alexander	02/26
Herold Unarce	
Ashton Ballesteros	
Ethan Anderson	02/27
Lilia Timonio	02/28

MAY IT REST IN PEACE

An inexperienced preacher was to hold a graveside burial service at a pauper's cemetery for an indigent man with no family or friends. Not knowing where the cemetery was, he made several wrong turns and got lost. When he eventually arrived an hour late, the hearse was nowhere in sight, the backhoe was next to the open hole, and the workmen were sitting under a tree eating lunch.

The diligent young pastor went to the open grave and found the vault lid already in place. Feeling guilty because of his tardiness, he preached an impassioned and lengthy service, sending the deceased to the great beyond in style.

As he returned to his car, he overheard one of the workman say to the other, "I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years and I ain't never seen anything like that."



Holy Ordination, Batman!!

Our pal **Mark Haworth** was ordained to the sacred priesthood on Saturday January 12 at St John The Baptist Church waaaaaayyyy out in Ma'ile!!! A whole gaggle of folks came out to call down the Holy Spirit and to celebrate this wonderful new ministry!! Naturally, the world famous **St E's Bell Choir** was on hand to bring heavenly melodies to the affair!! **Deep congratulations to Mark, Jill and their boys!** Thanks to all who made this a day to remember!!



AARP TO THE RESCUE!!



Need help with yer taxes?? Who doesn't?? Good news is the Afghani Ass'n of Resurrected Plutocrats (Oh, AARP means something else?)...is offering **FREE tax services** starting **Tuesday Feb 5** and then **every Tuesday and Thursday** thereafter in **Shim Hall** from **8:30-1 pm** — right up until tax day!!

READY FOR CHINESE NEW YEAR??



Come and **celebrate Chinese New Year** here at St. E's on **Sunday, February 17** when right after the Mass we shall have our outstanding **Dancing with the Lions** (it's the Foxtrot this year....) complete with totally illegal fireworks and all followed by scrumptiously delicious around the world buffet to welcome in the year of the ... swine!

PICKET FOR PEACE



And don't forget to remember the **FIRST WORKDAY** of every month...come on down to the State Capitol as we hold signs and sing songs asking folks to pray for the day when we shall beat our nukes into serving trays and our battleships into bottle openers. **11:30 A.M. till NOON!!!!!!!** Did we mention it's the **FIRST WORKDAY OF EVERY MONTH? AT 11:30?????????** YES, a.m. :)



News from Kenya

Hello Father. We are doing well. The Sawenge Young Women really appreciated and for sure their lives have changed from the projects you gave the not only them but all groups. The Sawenge young women have 3big cows and a calf. In a day they milk they milk 3 litres which they save to sustain the dairy. They still have the two brooders though they prefer the local one than the electrical one. They have napia grass for the cows. They have bought 20 chairs for hiring, and the money we have given they will use 38000 to buy another cow and 10000 to buy more plastic chairs for hiring. And the rest of the money 997.50 will be used for transport. The women are so happy. God bless the work of your hands. Mama Joyce.



A Message from the Youth Coordinator By Melanie Langi

Hello All,

Welcome February! **The month of LOVE!** In the blink of an eye Valentines Day is just around the corner! Originally, Valentines Day was to honor St.Valentine and express love to sweethearts. But, did you know that Valentines isn't just for lovers anymore! **February 14** has also become a celebration time for families in general. Almost like a second Christmas, but on a much smaller scale. More and more families are beginning to break tradition, to celebrate with their kids, their families, friends, or all three together. This year will be our fifth year celebrating this special occasion as a family. I always plan for memorable night of good clean fun, laughter and love. An unshakable peace overwhelms us, which reminds us of the **ultimate LOVE that was sacrificed for both you and I.** A love of great mercy and grace. Let's not forget our true Valentine, our one truest love! **JESUS!** This year as you celebrate February 14, try breaking tradition and spend it with the ones you love the most! **Remind each other how much you love one another and how much they mean to you.** Hope this reminds everyone of Gods ultimate LOVE and sacrifice. As my family and I celebrate at our usual eatery we'll not only show our love and gratitude towards one another, **we will also honor, give thanks to, praise, honor and glorify the one Man who made LOVE possible. Glory be to God!**

Quick reminder: Join us as we continue our youth bible studies **every Friday night @7pm.** Come fellowship with us! See you there!

For God
so lo(V)ed the world
That he g(A)ve His
on(L)y Begotten Son
That who(E)ver believes
I(N) Him
Will no(T) perish,
But w(I)ll have
Eter(N)al
Lif(E)
John 3:16



Peace be with you.

Sunday School News

By Sue Yap



Miss Ajaon leading the music class - assisting is Joshua Lino, and 3 visitors from Taiwan - Safulo, pianist; singers Teyhung & Wallis. They will join us in the Offertory hymn on February 3rd. The Lessons will focus on the Book of Luke, Chapters 5 and 6 through February - Jesus Calls His First Disciples, Jesus Speaks of Blessings and Love for Enemies.



On March 10, the children will participate in the start of the worship service with the lenten readings and preparation for Holy Week leading up to Easter.

The Sunday school and youth will sing the offertory hymn 'Deep and Wide' the first Sunday in February.



NOTES FROM THE CATHOLIC WORKERS

EMPOWER OR ENABLE?

Regular readers will know that on January 16, 2019, Barbara and David celebrated **one year since the opening of Wallyhouse**, a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality on the campus of St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Honolulu.



Recently a leader of our Church wondered aloud if, by providing our houseless community with basic necessities, we were enabling their indolent lifestyle, as opposed to encouraging them to improve themselves and, not incidentally, to leave our area. "After all," the thinking goes, "why should these people leave when they've got it so good by staying?" (By "good" they refer to the services we provide as Catholic Workers: food, hygiene kits, laundry, clothing, internet access, an art studio, and soon, a hot shower and a community peace garden; see our recent 2019 annual report for a complete list.)

This sentiment, spoken by one person, surely reflects the unspoken thoughts of many. This is America, a nation of hardworking, god-fearing individuals who succeed by getting ahead. We don't need to be enabling bad behavior by pretending to empower good.

Even we as Catholic Workers are not immune to this thinking. While our houseless guests encamped all around us are relatively peaceful, their very presence attracts youthful gangs from neighboring communities who prey on them, stealing clothing and valuables, sometimes even assaulting them. We are judged as enablers of this criminal activity, which spills over to us.



Reasonable people can differ on the meaning of "good" and "bad."

Which is why our founders, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, sidestepped these imponderables and focused their attention instead on the Works of Mercy found in **Matthew 25** of the Christian New Testament. Some of these are featured on two banners on either side of our main altar here at St. Elizabeth's (see photo). As example, "**I was naked and you gave me clothing**" does not ask us to judge the petitioner's appearance ("you don't look needy to me"), or to ask the purpose of a new outfit ("a job interview?") but rather to **respond out of mercy**.

Doesn't this set us up for abuse? In Brazil we used to honor requests for bus tokens until we found out our clients were exchanging them for shots of cachaça (Brazil's "rum") at a nearby bar. But what if one of those young men used his to go downtown to the public library?

Charity is hard if judging is required. **The good news is we are not called to judge, for we are not qualified.** Nobody is.

More good news. **Acts of Mercy do not benefit the receiver nearly as much as the giver.** This is underplayed so much people think it is a quaint notion from centuries past. Nor is it necessary to "**love your neighbor**," a high bar we sometimes cannot clear, given the nature of the people we serve. The only requirements are tolerance and a desire we all share to do good, to get out of ourselves for a bit and revel in the quiet joy of community. This is not enabling bad behavior, it is **empowering the good**.

Leo Tolstoy put it this way: "**Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service, and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.**"