

God's Oddball Family

This past week a bunch of us had the chance to have lunch with dear Mother Jodene, your previous rector, my mentor, and our friend.

She's having some health challenges and asks all of us to keep her in our prayers.

That lunch was, for me, a good reminder that you who were there enjoying the dim sum are also most of the folks who saw to it that this wonderful parish stayed alive, especially during the difficult days of a decade or so ago, and for that we are all deeply grateful to you for your faith, your hard work, your financial support and your love.

The thriving place we have become in these last 10 years is very much your gift to this community, to the church and even to the world!

And I'm nearly certain that during the lunch — someone piped up about our church motto.

You see, our official motto at St. E's is "A Community 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 someone (was it you Aunty Nancy?) reminded me of during the lunch.

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 in the nearly 6 years I've served as your priest.

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 kids are part Haka Chinese with ties to the Ings and the Yees.

In one way or another, it seems we're all related to one another!

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 out 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 is Pentecost!

Today's the day to celebrate 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; that God is a God of love and compassion and forgiveness, each hearing it in their own language.

The same Spirit that moves over the face of the waters at the creation now blows over and through simple fishermen, women and men who just a few hours ago are frightened and confused, cowering behind locked doors in a secret room, now fearlessly proclaiming the new way God is 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 becomes chorus.

This is the miracle of Pentecost!

It's so crazy that some think the disciples are drunk!

And in a sense they are: drunk with the power of the Spirit of God, drunk on this power that works through weakness, through simplicity, through the very least among us.

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, in large part because you elders, who have been here for a long time, had the vision and grace and sheer gumption to welcome in this same Spirit.

We are all of us 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, for all people, for all creeds.

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 "Community of Prayer For All People. "

This place, 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.