

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

Vine & Branches

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

Weekly Edition
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Changing Our Minds

Our nation appears to be heading for a possible civil war. Climate change is causing unprecedented fires throughout the western part of the nation.

The economy for most folks is in shambles. Relations among the races is nearing all time lows.

Given this long list of horrors, there's no better time to take stock of Jesus — and his urgent invitation that we change our minds about just about everything we ever thought we knew.

The consequences of not ... are perhaps catastrophic. The fuel leading to a seemingly impending civil war is nothing less than fear.

Fear that some idyllic past (which never actually existed) is being taken away by those who don't think, look or smell like me.

The fuel leading to catastrophic climate change is greed. Evidenced by our love affair with fossil fuels and the billions of dollars it generates. Dollars that are exchanged for power and privilege.

The fuel that has caused economic collapse began with a pandemic, itself made more likely by crowded cities and poor sanitation.

But its dramatic effects have been worsened many times over by a stupefying refusal to accept facts. To listen to experts. To wear masks. To care for our neighbor's safety instead of fretting about some supposed lost "freedom."

The fuel leading to our abysmal race relations closes the circle, with fear once again the motivating force which keeps us from seeing one another as fellow human beings -- equally, the beloved of God.

Add to this crazy mix the recent death of Justice Ginsberg and a whole new round of political warfare is in full swing.

And into all of this comes Jesus, who calls us to metanoia. To enter into the larger mind of God. To change our minds.

And maybe we need to stop right there for a second. After all, who's actually going to change their mind these days?

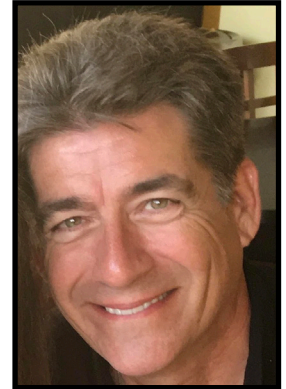
Isn't that precisely what these days are known for? Certainty? Black and white thinking? My way or the highway?

So perhaps the first step in this journey of changing our minds begins not so much with our minds, as with our fists. As in, unclenching them.

And perhaps next comes our breath. Releasing the temptation to use our breath to blow holes in others arguments.

Instead, simply focusing on inhaling. Then exhaling. And as we relax our bodies, slow our breathing, I invite you to close your eyes for a moment — and listen again to Paul's hymn about the majesty of Jesus: who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.



Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. How different God's ways are from ours!

During World War II, a brilliant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, argued that the United States had a moral obligation to fight the Nazis.

He criticized as naive, and even dangerous, those who said Christianity must reject war in all circumstances.

Flash forward 75 years. We live in a country armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons capable of destroying all life on the planet.

In the 1950's, the parting words of the retiring president and former 5 star General Dwight Eisenhower, were a stark warning about the power of the military industrial complex, a complex in its infancy back then, but not anymore.

Today, we have a president who mimics the divisive, blame-centered, race and religion baiting talk of an earlier fascist.

And nearly every president in between Eisenhower and Trump has engaged in wars nearly every year since the end of WWII — and due to those wars, small nations from Asia to the Middle East to Central America have been consumed with death, destruction and destabilization.

So the question Jesus poses to all of us is: how well is our way working? Is it at long last time to change our minds about power, about prestige, about fame and fortune?

To put a finer point on it, do we Christians really believe what we pray each and every week?

Do we believe that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to the crucified one?

Do we believe that in order to find our life, we must lose it, for the sake of Christ and his gospel?

Do we believe we must love our enemy, and pray for our persecutor? In short, are we the first son or are we the second son in today's gospel lesson?

And if we are the second son, what does it mean to do the Father's will? What exactly is that will?

Jesus defines for us the Father's will in another gospel: "For this is my Father's will, that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life." Jn 6:40.

What is it to believe in Jesus? It's not a head thing. It's not a "signing on the dotted line" or simply "saying it" thing. It's a heart thing.

To "believe in Jesus" is to sign on to this great adventure we are all invited to be part of, and to sign on with mind, body and soul!

And when we do, we come to see that "there are two sets of principles.

They are the principles of power and privilege — and the principles of truth and justice.

If you seek truth and justice, it will always mean letting go of power and privilege.

If you seek power and privilege, it will always mean letting go of truth and justice." —Chris Hedges, paraphrased.

We live in a world in which power and privilege is the air we breathe, the water we drink.

People either have it and cling to it or seek it with abandon. Only the few reject it, and almost always at great cost.

Which is why the heart of our faith, indeed, the source of our faith, is scandal.

Everything you've heard today, from the readings to this homily, are intended to scandalize, to incite, to challenge.

How else can God choose to make a crucified criminal the ruler of all of creation?

Thus, the brilliant religious leaders in Jerusalem are left befuddled and upset by the question Jesus lays at their feet.

Thus, some listening today may be irked that the military industrial complex that so many Americans worship has been called into question.

There's a reason that scandal is the lifeblood of the gospel, the very fuel for the ministry of Jesus.

Without scandal, there is no faith. Scandal breaks us out of our socially acceptable, make-no-waves blinders.

And even though scandal may not lead us to fully embrace the kingdom of God, at least it has the chance to lead us to faith.

If this is hard to take, or even understand, it's okay! You're in great company!

Listen to this prayer by one of the great religious thinkers of the last 200 years.

"God in heaven, I thank you for not requiring a person to understand Christianity, for if that were required I would be the most miserable of all.

The more I seek to understand it, the more incomprehensible it becomes...

Therefore, I thank you for requiring not understanding, but faith. And I pray that you will continue to increase that faith." S. Kierkegaard,

Sickness Unto Death, paraphrased. In these days when the whole world seems to be coming apart at the seams, can we trust the scandal that is our Lord?

This scandal that shatters every human expectation? This scandal that brings love and light — to life?

+amen

Falling Apart Or Being Transformed?

Me: Hello God.

God: Hello...

Me: I'm falling apart. Can you put me back together?

God: I'd rather not.

Me: Why?

God: Because you're not a puzzle.

Me: What about all the pieces of my life that fall to the ground?

God: Leave them there for a while. They fell for a reason. Let them be there for a while and then decide if you need to take any of those pieces back.

Me: You don't understand! I'm breaking!

God: No, you don't understand. You're transcending, evolving. What you feel are growing pains. You're getting rid of the things and people in your life that are holding you back. The pieces are not falling down. The pieces are being put in place. Relax. Take a deep breath and let those things you no longer need fall down. Stop clinging to pieces that are no longer for you. Let them fall Let them go.

Me: Once I start doing that, what will I have left?

God: Only the best pieces of yourself.

Me: I'm afraid to change.

God: I keep telling you: YOU'RE NOT CHANGING! YOU'RE BECOMING!

Me: Becoming, Who?

God: Becoming who I created you to be! A person of light, love, charity, hope, courage, joy, mercy, grace and compassion. I made you for so much more than those shallow pieces you decided to adorn yourself with and that you cling to with so much greed and fear. Let those things fall off you. I love you! Don't change! Become! Become who I want you to be, who I created. I'm gonna keep telling you this until you remember.

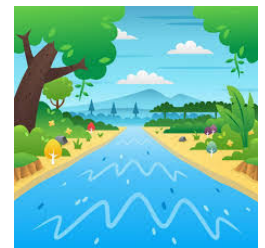
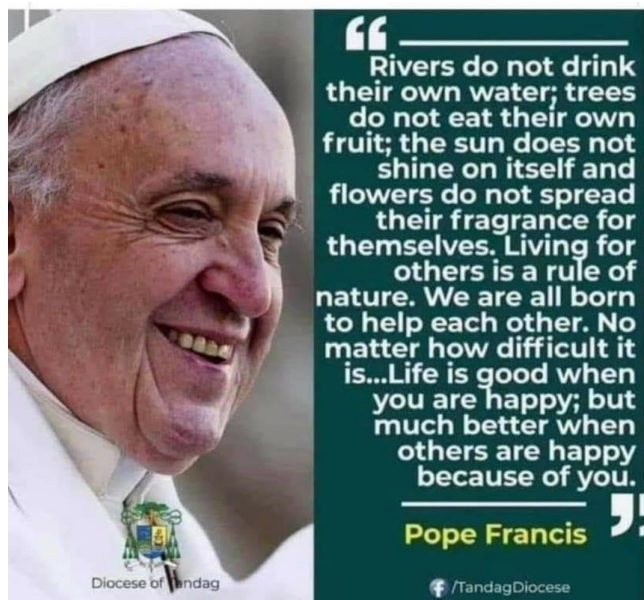
Me: There goes another piece.

God: Yes. Let it be like this.

Me: So... I'm not broken?

God: No, but you're breaking the darkness, like dawn.

It's a new day. Become!! Become who you really are!!"



The Blessing of St. Francis

In last week's Vine and Branches article, I suggested that the genius of St. Francis of Assisi was his ability to experience the world as his cathedral. He saw God's divine DNA in all creation. Therefore, St. Francis saw that we, all created things, are brothers and sisters. Out of his conviction that all creatures form one family, in 1225, he composed the first great poem in Italian, The Canticle of the Sun or The Canticle of the Creatures. In his heartfelt hymn, based on Psalm 148, St. Francis invites all his brother and sister creatures, mineral, plant and animal, to praise our Creator. He begins by praising **God alone**, then moves on to **various creatures**, then he brings about reconciliation between Assisi's disputing mayor and bishop with his words on **pardon and peace**, and ends befriending **death**. Here is the poem:

Canticle of the Creatures

Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord
All praise is yours, all glory, all honor
And all blessing.
To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy
To pronounce your name.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,
And first my lord Brother Sun,
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.
How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars;
In the heavens you have made them, bright
And precious and fair.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods,
By which you cherish all that you have made.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
Through whom you brighten up the night.
How beautiful is he, how merry! Full of power and strength.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our Mother,
Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces
Various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon
For love of you; through those who endure
Sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death,
From whose embrace no mortal can escape.
How dreadful for those who die in sin!

