

“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

## Unicorns All

### Weekly Edition January 5, 2021

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A few weeks ago I preached about transformation. One of my seminary classmates, with his tongue firmly in cheek, responded that it's too early for New Year's resolutions, we have to get through Christmas first!

But whether we think of transformation as a year round effort, or, on this second day of the new year, merely a short-lived effort to get our act together (known as New Year's resolutions), transformation is at the heart of where we are today.

Today is the feast day of the Epiphany. The day when God, through Christ, is made known to the Gentiles. To us. To those who aren't Jews.

It's a day when the wisemen from a far country, who come to worship and adore, realize that the path they're on will lead to death. And so, as today's gospel lesson concludes, they went home “by another way.

Going home “by another way” is what we are called to do, this 2nd day of January, 2022. For if we don't, unnecessary, avoidable, death awaits us too. These dangers lurk in our political lives, in the climate emergency facing Mother Earth, and in the great challenges faced by people of faith these days.

In the world of politics, it was fascinating to read the other day that Alex Jones, the infamous conspiracy theorist who, among other things, may owe millions for lying about the horrific shooting deaths of children in Connecticut, is now being quoted as saying that former President Trump “is either stupid or evil,” because of his recent support for COVID vaccines. Truly an excellent example of how one man's truth becomes another man's lie, while another man's lie can somehow become “truth.”

But truth is not so malleable. Because: “Civilization is first of all a moral thing. Without truth, respect for duty, love of neighbor, virtue, everything is destroyed. The morality of a society is alone the basis of civilization.” Henri Amiel.

And so for us today, as we begin a new calendar year and a new church year, perhaps more than ever it's imperative that we rededicate ourselves to discovering what is actually true. And find the courage to speak it.

And defend it. And embrace it. It's a time when all people of goodwill need to reclaim the essence of a society that is rooted in truth. Rooted in service to others. Rooted in the acknowledgment that we are all limited in our vision and therefore ought to be humble in the face of disagreement or opposition.

Perhaps then our precious republic can be saved. The urgency of this transformation stares us in the face in the undeniable fact of climate change. Changes that we thought might take centuries to unfold are occurring today.

And the world that we leave to our children and grandchildren, absent dramatic and painful changes in the ways in which we produce goods, travel, and eat, will be a travesty that will haunt our progeny for generations.



Making the necessary changes means changing our own consciousness about the reality of nature. We are emerging from two centuries that have raped and pillaged the earth.

It cannot continue. For example, many of us see trees as large inanimate vegetation that exist solely to provide humanity with wood for fire, furniture and other “useful” items. Amazingly, a number of scientists have now discovered that trees are not only alive, but they are alive in a sense that suggests a form of consciousness.

Dr. Suzanne Simard studies the deep life of trees, and the connections between them.

She writes: “I was tapping into the messages that the trees were relaying back-and-forth through a cryptic underground network made of fungus.

This network runs throughout the entire forest floor, connecting every tree in a star-like constellation of tree hubs and fungus links.

Stunningly, the biggest, oldest trees are the sources of these amazing connections; connections that actually regenerate seedlings.

Every neighboring tree, young and old, is connected to the whole body of the forest. A miraculous jungle of threads and synapses and nodes.” Simard, *Finding The Mother Tree*, paraphrased.

That trees are profoundly alive, perhaps even conscious, and connected to one another, is simply another example of God practically shouting at all of us that ALL THINGS are connected.

We are connected to each other. To Mother Earth. To the universe. When Paul speaks of the “body of Christ” — that’s what he’s talking about! The Cosmic Christ who eternally connects all people and all of creation — with God.

When we reject that connection, by creating false choices between “us and them,” we thereby create the terrible predicament that faces our planet today.

And while our faith can be crucially important in at long last helping us rediscover the unity of all people and all things, for far too long our faith has been reduced to simply being the tail on the dog of the mainstream culture.

In Russia, the Orthodox Church is practically a department of the Kremlin. Here in the United States, too many supposed Christians have linked their faith to racist, misogynistic atheists who cynically give lip service to faith, but whose lives demonstrate a complete absence of faith.

Just the other day, one of those cynics observed that while Jesus says “turn the other cheek”, said cynic bleated: “it’s gotten us nothing!” “Cultural critic bell hooks tells us that ‘the heart of justice is truth telling. One cannot build justice on falsehoods.’

Those who are engaged in lies cannot also be engaged in justice making.

Currently our culture seems to be going through a truth crisis with ‘fake news’ and incendiary news and very often cold indifference to the truth.

Perhaps that’s why Satan is called ‘the father of lies.’“ Fox, *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas*, 101, paraphrased. And while it may seem that all of this leads us to nothing but despair, one priest offers a different take: “I’m convinced we are living in a time of unveiling.

When reality is being revealed as it always has been and always will be.

Systems of evil have become both more brazen and ridiculous. Our sense of ‘normal’ is completely upended. And yet in the midst of it, God gently invites us into deeper, trusting, love.

When the pandemic began, some folks even said that it’s the beginning of the apocalypse.

Often, that word is used to scare people. To become frightened. Or tribal. Or to lash out at those who are “other.” But the word ‘apocalypse’ simply means ‘unveiling.’

When things are ‘unveiled,’ we stop taking so much for granted. That’s what pandemics like the COVID-19 virus do for us.

They reframe reality in a deep and profound way. They offer us an invitation to discover a life of greater depth and breadth — and compassion.

If we trust the universal pattern, the wisdom of all times and all places, including the creation and evolution of the cosmos itself, we know that every ending is also the birthplace of a new beginning. Because every death promises new life.” Rohr, paraphrased. And a new kind of life can happen!

But only if we recognize that we’re not called to be the tail on the dog of any prevailing culture.

We are called — to be unicorns! Why unicorns? Because WHO we’re called to become, and WHAT we’re called to do, most folks dismiss as mere fantasy. We’re called to forgive endlessly. To pray for our enemies. To serve the least. To look out for the common good. Everyone knows these are crazy things! And yet, because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, not only CAN we live this way, if the planet is to survive, we MUST.

May this season of the Epiphany not only be a time of God revealing God’s self to humanity, but of humanity finally opening its eyes to God! May we discover our common unity. Our solidarity with one another. With Mother Earth. And with the God.

# THANK YOU & ALOHA MARIE!



## Certificate of Gratitude

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Palama, Hawai'i

### Mei-Li Marie Wang

For your continuous service as our Organist, Pianist, Bell Choir, Teacher, Supporter & Friend

from April 29, 2005 – December 31, 2021

*"What gives moments meaning is not the moments themselves but the presence of Christ with us in the midst of them."  
- Emily P. Freeman*

		December 26, 2021
The Rev. David J. Gierlach Rector		Date



Our trusty Parish Administrator Bill has been a real trooper in becoming a TV production expert for our Sunday Services all through COVID. That means he works every Sunday!

We could really use someone or someones to take up this task so poor Bill can have his Sundays back!!

Are YOU that someone???

Do YOU KNOW who might BE that someone???

We can PAY \$50 per Sunday!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

