

“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
May 26, 2021

The Cosmic Christ



The horrific warfare happening in Israel these last weeks is only compounded by the irony of its timing. Here we are on the feast of Pentecost! And while it's a day that celebrates the birth of the church, far more importantly, it witnesses to the fact that God's spirit is poured out over the whole wide world.

The Jewish people also celebrate Pentecost this week. For them it's the anniversary of the day when God gives Moses the Law: that set of instructions intended to create a just and compassionate society.

Instructions particularly concerned with the least, the lost and the left behind. And all this fighting began just as our Muslim sisters and brothers wrapped up their celebration of Ramadan.

A season dedicated to “self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and empathy; all aimed at fostering generosity and charity.” Wikipedia, modified.

And what was the apparent trigger for these latest horrors descending on the Palestinian and Israeli people? According to the New York Times: “Twenty-seven days before the first rocket was fired from Gaza, Israeli police officers entered the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, brushed the Palestinian attendants aside and cut the cables to the loudspeakers that broadcast prayers to the faithful from four medieval minarets. It was the night of April 13.

The first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. It was also Memorial Day in Israel, which honors those who died fighting for the country.

The Israeli president was delivering a speech at the Western Wall, a sacred Jewish site that lies below the mosque, and Israeli officials thought that the Muslim prayers might drown out the speech.” NYT, 5/15/21, modified.

And so here we are, at the intersection of three great celebrations of what is high and holy and gracious about the world. As we somehow manage to turn these occasions into excuses to blow each other to smithereens.

Perhaps this Pentecost, more than any other, we need to at long last acknowledge, and heed, what this day is actually all about. It's not enough to have a cake and balloons celebrating the church's birthday. Pentecost is something far more magnificent, far more baffling, than that. You heard it in the readings today.

Pentecost is about the essential Oneness of all that is. The separation of peoples that happened at Babel, is undone. From Acts, people from every time and place hear the Spirit speaking in their own language. People from every time, because some of the folks listed as being there, died out hundreds of years earlier.

People from every place, because then as now, many Jews lived far from the holy land. They're like seeds scattered everywhere — seeking to give rise to the just and compassionate society that the Law intends. And then there's Peter, witnessing the fulfillment of Joel's hope for the day when “all flesh” shall see visions and dream dreams.

The Right Reverend
Robert L. Fitzpatrick
V Bishop of Hawaii

The Reverend
David J. Gierlach
Rector

The Reverend
Imelda S. Padasdao,
Priest Associate

The Reverend Peter S. M. Fan,
Cantonese Language Priest

Fr. Mafi Vakameilalo,
Priest Associate

The Reverend Deacon
Viliani Langi, Deacon

Hsiao Ying “Ajaon” Chen
Choir Director

Marie Wang
Organist

Bill Slocumb
Parish Administrator

—
Cathy Lowenberg
Senior Warden

Charles Steffey
Junior Warden

Doug Ing
Secretary

Caren Chun-Esaki
Treasurer

www.stelizabeth720.org
stelizabethhawaii
@gmail.com

Paul steps up next! He's writing to the Romans, because he, along with "all of creation, is groaning with labor pains." Longing for the day when we shall finally see that all things exist in Christ. And that Christ exists in all things.

Because unity, solidarity, and community; these are the truth of our destiny. The truth we are so often blind to. Forgetful of. Even hostile to.

Indeed, the deepest truth that our western church has buried for far too long is the truth about the Cosmic Christ. And yet it's a truth that's as old as our faith.

It's what pushes Paul to suddenly realize that Christ "is the image of the unseen God and the first born of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth. Everything visible and everything invisible... Before anything was created, he is. And he holds all things in unity." Col 1:15-17.

Today, scientists struggle to find a theory that explains the unity of all things, from quantum mechanics (which deals with the smallest of subatomic particles) to the grandeur of large scale physics (that seeks to understand dark matter).

Yet what does our faith say about that which holds all things together? It is the Cosmic Christ! Jesus comes among us, eats, sleeps, sweats, and dies among us; as he enters and sanctifies all of the misery and shame and failure that so often marks our human condition.

And yet out of the violent torture he endures, comes peace. Out of injustice, comes supreme justice. Out of death, comes life. For he is raised! The One who is All in All! The Cosmic Christ.

"Connecting light and darkness. Heaven and earth. Past and future. Divinity and humanity! All of creation! Everything in heaven.

And everything on earth!" M. Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 133-4. As Matthew Fox puts it: "The Cosmic Christ is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ (and yet, it is not limited to that person).

This divine connection was made flesh — and set up its tent among us. Importantly, the 'us' includes the dispossessed. Those least connected. Those least established. Those least part of the connections that the 'Establishment' has to offer. Jesus offers connection to the dispossessed in particular. To women. Slaves. Sinners. To the outcasts of society.

He connects with them not only with conversation and scandalous meals, but by undergoing the death reserved for the unconnected. The death of the dispossessed — at Golgotha.

The historical person of Jesus offers a 'pattern that connects' quite different from the 'soul of the world' tradition of Plato and the Greek philosophers.

The Greek philosophers don't focus on the little and forgotten ones, or the oppressed victims of social injustice. But the Cosmic Christ does, liberating all people.

And like Moses of old, he leads a new exodus from the bondage and cynicism of our flattened, mechanical universe. A universe filled with pointless competition. A universe obsessed with winners and losers. A universe drowning in the sheer boredom that comes when mystery and mysticism are dismissed.

And yet, the ineffable Cosmic Christ, through Jesus, is also right here. Intimately connected to human history. The Cosmic Christ lives right next door. He lives within your deepest and truest self. Isn't that why the reign of God is indeed among us?" Id. at 135, modified. Our task as Christians is to witness to the essential Oneness of all people and of all things.

That's why we are called to turn the other cheek. To forgive our enemies. To hand over shirt and coat even if only the shirt is demanded. Because when we live in this way, we begin to see in every human person, no matter their color or creed, no matter their politics, no matter their gender, the essential dignity that dwells within every human person.

Simply by virtue of their humanness. And if we can begin every interaction from that place of dignity and respect, then perhaps we might find those paths within relationships that lead us away from division and conflict, and toward some kind of common ground. So this Pentecost, can we open our minds to the truth of our existence?

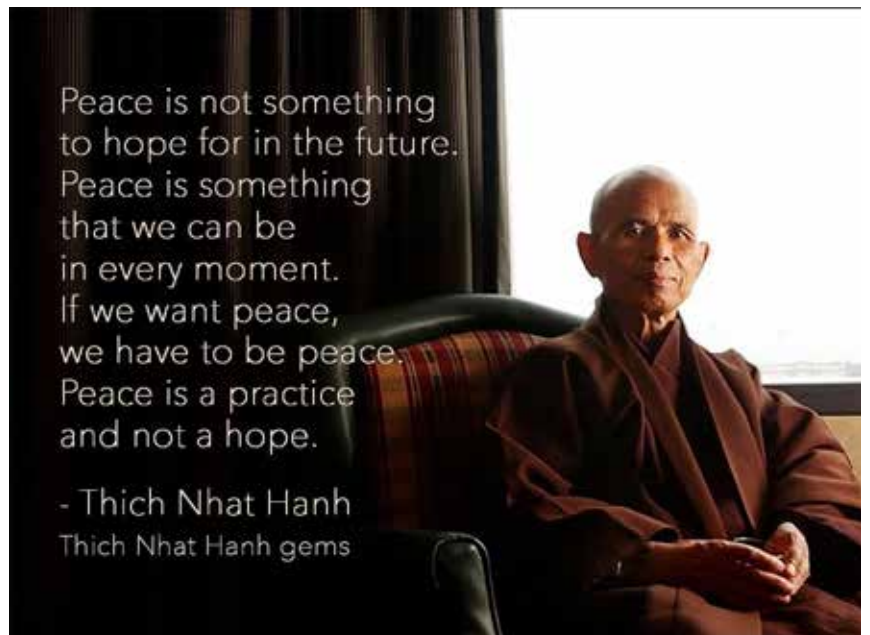
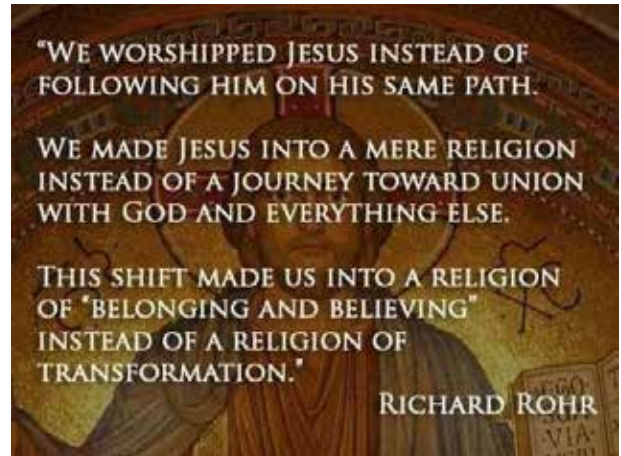
Can we pray for the grace to see and hear the beating heart of the Cosmic Christ in which all things live and move and have their being?

Jesus said to his friends before he left them, "I am the All. And the All has gone out from me. And the All has come back to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there." Gospel of Thomas, Logion, 77.

And as the mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg delightfully discovers: One day I saw with the eyes of my eternity In bliss and without effort, a stone. This stone was like a great mountain made up of countless colors. It tasted sweet, like heavenly herbs. I asked the sweet stone: Who are you? It replied: 'I am Jesus.'

+amen

Quoteable Quotes from Notable Folks



SHIM HALL UPDATES

Shim Hall is painted on the outside and this week we get to work on the inside. The exterior color matches the color of the church and the painters are doing a wonderful job so far!



From Acorns to Oaks

Once upon a time, in a not so far away land, there was a kingdom of acorns nestled at the foot of a grand old oak tree. Since the citizens of this kingdom were modern, fully westernized acorns, they went about their business with purposeful energy; and since they were mid life, baby boomer acorns, they engaged in a lot of self-help courses. There were seminars called "Getting All You Can Out of Your Shell." There were woundedness and recovery groups for acorns who had been bruised in their original fall from the tree. There were spas for oiling and polishing those shells and various acornopathic therapies to enhance longevity and well-being.

One day in the midst of this kingdom there suddenly appeared a knotty little stranger, apparently dropped "out of the blue" by a passing bird. He was capless and dirty, making an immediate negative impression on his fellow acorns. And crouched beneath the oak tree, he stammered out a wild tale. Pointing upward at the tree, he said "We ... are ... that!"

Delusional thinking, obviously, the other acorns concluded, but one of them continued to engage him in conversation: "So tell us, how would we become that tree?" "Well," said he, pointing downward, "it has something to do with going into the ground ... and cracking open the shell." "Insane," they responded. "Totally morbid! Why, then we wouldn't be acorns anymore."

—Cynthia Bourgeault's version of Maurice Nicole's metaphor