

"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

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Bookends

The Rev. David J. Gierlach

As a kid growing up, my mom's mom and step-father were very nonobservant Roman Catholics.

Maybe they made it to church when a child got baptized or married, but not much beyond that.

Yet one thing that was strange about them in their non-observance was this: every year they'd wait to put up their Christmas tree until Christmas Eve.

Which struck us observant family members as strange indeed, because of course our tree went up soon after Thanksgiving!

And yet, my non-observant grandparents actually had it right.

Hidden in the deep recesses, they held a memory about Advent, and its importance as a season, a season not to be intruded upon by an early celebration of Christmas.

In our overall culture, we barrel in from Halloween to Thanksgiving to the high holy days of Black Friday and Cyber Monday (did you remember to make an offering to the god of conspicuous consumption last weekend???), and then right into what we call "The Christmas Season."

And if we Christians aren't mindful, whelp, there's no doubt we shall be swept up in the storm of it all, joining our neighbors and friends like lemmings marching over cliffs as we spend and splurge and freak out at the shortness of time as we and they try to outdo one another for yet another year of consumer madness.

Which gets us to Advent — this offramp from the craziness of what popular culture has done to the mystery of Christmas — so that when Christmas does arrive, we are prepared to welcome the unspeakable mystery that is given to humanity.

In a sense, Advent is about bookends.

The left bookend is the remembrance that at a certain day and time in human history, the creator of all things became a human being, to live among us, teach us, to suffer and die at our hands, all for the purpose of showing us what a truly human life looks like.



The right bookend is about what's to come, namely: "The second coming of Christ, the second eruption of eternity into time, which will be immediate, sudden and conclusive, ending the human experiment, as illusion gives way to reality, and the king will be seen for who he is." JB Phillips (paraphrased).

Today, we live our lives between these bookends.

And in this in between time — what is it we are called to be?

How are we called to live?

What is our response to this Jesus who, as Paul reminds us last week, is "all in all?"

The gospel today speaks of stars falling and moons blackened — which is another way of describing what happens when a whole new way of living and thinking and feeling is thrust upon us.

We are used to a life that is measured by the Gross Domestic Product, by military power, by the value of our pension plans and the glories of

Hollywood — and these forces do their utmost to co-opt the message of our faith, to bend our faith to look like our culture — rather than bending the culture to look more like our faith.

We need only look at that large swath of Christianity that is selling out faster than lemonade on a hot summer's day to the powers that be — seeking not faithfulness to Christ — but an inside track on political power and access

Rector's Message, continued

and prestige.

During Advent, we are invited to remember that left to our own devices, our goose is as cooked as yesterday's turkey, as Yogi Berra once said.

Where can we turn for help?

We hear it this morning in Isaiah's lament:

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

Such is the prayer of the church every Advent season, it is a longing for the often silent, seemingly absent God, to show her face, in ways that are unmistakable, bold and convincing.

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!"

It is a lament that also says much about how we understand God's relationship to us.

It is the common view that God is to be found somewhere "up there."

Many of us have a picture of that God, white-bearded, sitting on the sidelines of the world, peering over the rails on the 50-yard line, a bag of popcorn in hand, watching what we're up to.

And yet, on this first Sunday of Advent, as we gather in the midst of so much strife, so much acrimony, so much fear, we Christians are coaxed to remember that the old way of thinking, of God "up there,"

just ain't so.

I'm reading Eli Wiesel's first book.

It's called: "Night."

It's the story of when Wiesel was a youngster, barely in his teens, when the Nazi's came to his small village in Transylvania and kidnapped every Jewish child, woman and man, and in railroad cars barely suited for cattle, delivered these human beings into the furnaces and slave lines of Auschwitz.

It is a book one can read only slowly, just a few pages at a time.

It was during holocaust that the Jewish people came face to face with where to look for God: was God "up there" or was God somewhere else?

Some answered that God was neither up there nor anywhere else, that God, in fact, does not exist.

The horror and unspeakable sufferings of holocaust was the end of faith for many; with the greatest irony being that many of the perpetrators of these horrors believed themselves to be good and faithful Christians!

But a few of the victims were able to see God in the very midst of incomprehensible suffering.

Wiesel recounts the horrifying day when the Nazis hanged several young boys; they took a long time to die on the gallows.

An old man yells out in the midst of this horror: "Where is God?!"

And Wiesel hears his heart answer: "God is here, hanging on the gallows."

remember, to re-experience, that ours is a God who gets down in the muck with us.

We'll hear it in the coming weeks.

"He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

We turned our back on him and looked the other way. He was despised and we did not care." Isaiah 53:3.

And we'll hear this: it is the response to Isaiah's king who wanted God to provide an army to Israel.

Rather than an army, the prophet promises that: "The Lord himself will give you a sign.

The young woman will conceive a child and give birth to a son; she will name him Immanuel, God with us." Isaiah 7:14.

Rather than an army, God gives a child.

Rather than brute force, our God is with us in weakness.

For reasons we may perhaps someday come to understand, the Living God chooses not to enter our lives from a high and mighty place, but at the edges, in the midst of what is troubling, confusing, even confounding.

That the new creation, which even now intrudes into our world, comes through surrender and forgiveness and mercy, because the Living God is gentle, not rescuing us from life's travails, but walking with us through all that comes.

As folks line up in the early morning hours to get the best deal at

Walmart, we are called to look for a star, the sign of the one who is coming.

As the powers and principalities invite us into the wilderness of fake cheer and blown budgets, we are invited to kneel quietly in prayer, that we might be filled with the peace of God.

As nations continue to rattle sabers and politicians worship at the altar of redemptive violence, we gather together to remember who we are, to commit ourselves yet again to become a people created by the suffering God — who is nearer to you than your breath — who brings the dead to life!

+amen

Sunday School News

By Sue Yap

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas... the students in classroom A have been busy discussing the Lord's Table, the Holy Sacraments, the bread and the wine... and with Miss Heather, skillfully crafting a tiny baby Jesus learning about the manger He was born in! Thanksgiving was full of thanks for our families and thoughts of those who are not as fortunate and blessed as we are. Thank you to all who shared your bounteous fruits, vegetables, non-perishable food and love with our ohana worshipping in church on Thanksgiving Day! Mother Imelda did superbly with the homily ... wide-eyed children looked surprised at the pulpit... not Fr David...not Dr. Gifford...!!! The kids had the most fun walking up to the altar picking up a fruit or vegetable with a big smile on their faces showing us their 'harvest'!!! An awesome display, thanks to the altar guild who did wonders with all that was donated!!!!

Moving quickly into Advent - the children will participate in the Advent services each sunday, the acolyte lighting a candle on the advent wreath after a short reading by a sunday school student to start the service. The Sunday School children will then go to their classrooms.

Look carefully at the Advent wreath, How many candles do you see? The children will tell you, 3 purple candles, 1 rose candle and 1 white candle = 5 candles!!!! The 4 colored candles represent the 4 weeks in Advent! The 1st purple represents hope (also the patriarchs), the 2nd purple - peace (prophets), the 3rd rose - Joy (John the Baptist), the 4th purple - love (the Virgin Mary) and the 5th - white - Christ the Light of the world!

The countdown begins... four weeks til the birth of the Christ child! The excitement is already in the air, their thoughts are turned to noah's ark, the animals walking two-by-two, the rain-rain-rain and God's promise with the rainbow! Advent - The season of giving and preparing... This year the children will sing 'Let There Be Peace On Earth' as they collect money during the Offertory

for our wonderful friends in Icodei!



Blessed Advent to all!

Happy Birthday

God's blessings on those with December birthdays!

Jeffrey Starkman	December 1
Gillian Batangan	December 2
Cheryl Mitsuka	
Alan Scroggie	
Peter Fan	December 3
Charles Steffey	December 4
Nip Repaky	
ShellieAnne Steffey	
Dexin Lu	December 6
Kais Eis	December 8
Christopher Lau	December 10
Lynn Pascua	December 11
GloryAnn Tokomaata	December 17
Jonathan Lau	December 18
Carla Pacupac	December 19
Carol Abe	December 20
Kaylen Hayashi	
Christine Toli	December 21
Catherine Chan	
Elizabeth Chan	
Susan Won	December 22
Gelacio Timonio	December 23
Delphine Shea	
Lisa Arakawa	December 27
Laureen Zane	December 28
Rally Muludy	December 29
Aaron Arakawa	December 30
leichy Mako	
Mildred Goo	December 31
Otega White	
Saimone Neset, Jr.	



A Message from the Youth Coordinator

By Melanie Langi

Hello All!

HELLO DECEMBER! I can hardly believe that we're already approaching the New Year and Christmas is just around the corner. Who has sugar plums dancing around in their heads? And, who still has pumpkin pie in their fridge? ME, I DO!!! So, if anyone knows what I can do with the surplus of pumpkin pies, please let me know.

Speaking of pumpkin pies, I would like to extend a huge thanks to the many, many, many hands and hearts who gave their time to come out before the roosters, and the sun. To help volunteer at our annual Thanksgiving feeding. With over 200-plus plates delivered in record breaking time. The feeling was very overwhelming, I sure the house less communities we serviced were appreciative and very thankful. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOU BIG HEARTS!!!

Many of our elves young and young at heart took part in this year's Kalihi Business Associations 71st Annual Christmas parade on Friday Nov. 25. Beginning from Kalihi Union Church and ending at Kamehameha Shopping Center. Not even the rain could stop our hard core elves from spreading joy!

Now that the Christmas season is upon us, I'm excited for our Neighborhood Children's Christmas Party! Right here at Shim Hall December 16th from 11am-2pm. Hope to see you all there!

In other news...

Youth Sunday School is in session each Sunday mornings beginning at 9am. Parents please encourage your children to attend.

Friday Nite Bible Study is still on-going. 7pm in Shim Hall. Come fellowship with us!

Lastly, I would like everyone a safe and fun holiday season and wish you all a very happy holidays and a very Merry Christmas!

See you next year,
Melanie Langi



The annual Palama parade!!



Hey Lee, looking good!

November Attendance

Wednesday, November 1,.....	25
Sunday, November 5,.....	231
Wednesday, November 8,.....	23
Sunday, November 12,.....	212
Wednesday, November 15,.....	130
Sunday, November 19,.....	208
Wednesday, November 22,.....	20
Thursday, November 23,.....	63
Sunday, November 26,.....	172
Wednesday, November 29,.....	18



The Courie family & pal Alan hard at work!



Mel & Mark, Caren, Ken, Collette and Doug!

What do you get when you mix a gaggle of friends from all over the island, from a million ethnic, income and religious backgrounds? You get the fantabulous St E's Annual Turkey Dinner Madness when over 200 fully loaded thanksgiving plates are cooked, prepped, doled out and galloped (it's a word, trust me) with gravy here and whipped cream there....all with the help of and for the tummies of our houseless friends!



Sylvia Rowland folded 2 kajillion forks!!



The whole gang is here!!

We're thankful for...



These are three (Roy Chee, Bill Eng and Liesl Eng) of our four silent servants (Stu Ching is traveling) who faithfully, week in and week out, count the offerings, ensure every giver is credited, and gets the loot into the correct account. Next time you see 'em, give a purr or a hug or a wink of thanks for the tedious but crucial work they do on behalf of us all!



On thanksgiving day the altar overflowed with bounteous blessings, fruits, vegetables, non-perishable foods and love!



Every year we support the good people of Kenya in their various micro enterprises. The generosity of the people of St. Elizabeth's has gone a very long way in dramatically improving the lives of these friends. This Advent our children will be collecting coins and cash for Kenya, as usual wearing their scary animal masks! Please do what you can. It's amazing how far even just a few dollars can go to make a big difference in people's lives.



These are a few of the cows we have been able to help our Kenyan friends purchase. Cows provide years of milk, cheeses and butter and eventually meat for hundreds of people. One cow costs \$600. What a buy!!!!



Sunday School News

By Sue Yap



Looking good, Uno!



Nativity craft with Miss Heather!



"What if on Christmas Eve people came and sat in the dim pews, and someone stood up and said, "Something happened here while we were all out at the malls, while we were baking cookies and fretting about whether we bought our brother-in-law the right gift: Christ was born! God is here! And we, hushed and awed by something greater and wiser and kinder than we, would kneel of one accord in the stillness."

~ Ross-Gata



And thanks to Mark Haworth, our acolyte group is slowly filling up! Nice to see the children rotating duties! Handsome Tanner never missed a beat on Thanksgiving Day!!!

Crooked Lines

God writes straight
with crooked lines
we say
to remember
that we are broken
yet God can fix.

Presuming straight lines
is what God
has in mind...

But what if
crooked
is indeed the
way
that we are made
not by error
but because crooked is the only way
to get to where we need to be?

What if our lives are written
in our foibles and mistakes
our pettiness and our heroics?



Perhaps it is in complexity
and grayness
and muddy waters
where Truth herself abides
and only the crooked life
with nooks and crannies
and doubling back
and time seeming wasted
is able from time to time
to stumble upon her
much to the
chagrin
of the straight line
brother
who passes her by
without even
knowing.

djg



REFUGEES

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(Now read from bottom to top)

~ Brian Bilston

