

"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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Is God a Woman?

The Rev. David J. Gierlach

Is God a Woman?

Both this week and next, Mary, the mother of our Lord, takes center stage.

Today we hear her deeply moving song, shouted out as she and Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptist, meet in their unexpected pregnancies — Mary, the teenage virgin; Elizabeth the old woman ready for retirement.

Next week we shall hear Luke's telling of the visitation to Mary, by the angel who announces the strange things that shall happen; as all of creation waits for Mary's answer, as even God leans down in anxious anticipation for the response of this young woman; a response on which all things hang in the balance.

So it is with some irony that while within these sacred walls, women are lifted up as the literal channels through whom God enters the world — just outside, on the front page of every newspaper and the lead story on the evening news are repeated stories of men treating women as little more than objects, as little more than playthings.

From our president to Roy Moore, who make up the "deny and defame" branch of these outrages, to Al Franken and Harvey Weinstein, the Hollywood and entertainment side of this mess, what is at long last seeing the light of day is something nearly every woman has experienced for decades: a persistent, consistent dehumanizing of half the human race by huge numbers of my half of our race.

Whether it's construction worker cat calls or white collar managers with leering looks, a persistent and very dark underbelly finally sees the light of day.

It's not a pretty sight.

And the question that comes to mind in the midst of all of this overt chest pounding of maleness is: What if God is a woman?

What does God as a woman say to this male dominated world, to our male dominated values, to our male dominated truths?

Is the God so loudly proclaimed by our conservative Evangelical friends, a God wrapped up in the flag, in our wars, in our economic system, is this the God of the gospels, the God of Jesus, of

Mary?

And might we find answers to these questions by sitting for a while with women, especially with the women of holy scripture?

We don't need to look far to find the many women of scripture who seem to embody the upside down, anti-alpha male, ways of God; women like Tamar, who disguises herself as a prostitute, sleeps with her father-in-law and gives birth to twins, who become great great great granddads of King David.

Women like Ruth, the illegal immigrant from Moab, who casts her lot in with her Jewish mother-in-law, sleeps with a drunken Boaz on the barnyard floor (before they get married), and gives birth to the grandad of King David.

Like Bathsheba, whom King David spies taking a tub on her roof top in all of her naked beauty, who has her husband killed and she gives birth to the wisest king ever to rule Israel, King Solomon, and the list just keeps going, until we get to today; with Mary, the newly pregnant teenager and Elizabeth, the six months pregnant old timer, who meet together not in shame or fear, but with joy and amazement at the audacity, the wildness, of God.

And these two marvelous women kick up their heels and sing songs of God lifting the lowly and telling the rich to hit the road because they are both squarely within the bloodline of the savior — not a line up of the pious and squeaky clean, but a long story of creative, sometimes cunning, often brave, and always alive to life women who are immersed in the complexity and uncertainty of our daily existence.

What if God is a woman?

A young poet has this to say...
have you seen the things we can do
we lose enough blood in our lifetimes
to die of blood loss ten times
the pain we endure during childbirth



Rector's Message, continued

is equivalent to being
burned alive

we hold up half the sky
our arms are exhausted with the pain of it all
but we will never surrender
women hold the weight of the world
on their shoulders
as if it is as light as a feather
women hold the seas in place
with the palms of their hands
i hate to break it to you
but the ocean is a woman
only a woman could be so destructive
and yet so effortlessly beautiful
no wonder the sky fell in love with her

have you ever seen your mother cry?
do her tears ever remind you
of waves crashing against crumbling cliffs?
we fight wars with lipstick and love
we heal hearts with tight hugs and kind words
we mend souls by giving up pieces of our own
-tth

What if God is a woman?

Another writer of beautiful prose has this to say, in her recent reflections about Mary...

"In this time of great brokenness, we are reminded of the capacity we each have to repair that brokenness that we encounter wherever we are.

We are reminded by Mary of the grace of simple acceptance.

Mary is the original grassroots citizen.

She makes no claims for herself.

Yet she is extraordinary in her willingness to let herself be an instrument of events that will change the course of history.

We need to remember that our world today is not without hope when there are so many Marys working quietly, unfazed by power, whether it is manifested by the wings of an archangel, or the wings of Air Force One.

Mary takes the world as it is handed to her and becomes the bearer of the Word that will become man.

Might we too recognize the Divine, not where princes play
and the powerful exert their sway, but

where there is no power except the power of faith.

And grace.

Unlooked for.

Often undeserved.

Yet always there...

Yes, grace.

But only if we can somehow surrender as simply as Mary did." Dawn Webster

What if God is a woman?

In her song today, in the simple "yes" that she shall utter next week to Gabriel's question...will you bear the son of God?, Mary tells us all about God.

God is the One who favors the lowly, who scatters the proud and casts down the mighty from their thrones, who fills the hungry with good things, while the rich are sent packing, whose name forever and for all time, is Mercy.

What if God is a woman?

Might such a reality be the end of our alpha male proud as peacocks strutting?

Might such a reality force us, individually, communally, to change direction: to put compassion ahead of competition, mercy before money?

We are living in times when these questions demand our attention.

With nuclear saber rattling on the Korean Peninsula, a politics that cannot even agree on basic matters of observable facts, and a growing fear among some among us of those who are different, it's no exaggeration to suggest that unless we change course, unless we rediscover the compassion and mercy that lies at the center of our faith, then indeed we are inviting hell, not in the next life, but here, today, in this life.

So, is God a woman?

No, no more so than God is a man.

God is God, who has poured out God's attributes on all of humanity, male and female and transgendered too — all with the invitation that we submit, with humility, to the truth of our circumstances: that love is stronger than hate, that unity is more powerful than factionalism, that beneath different skin colors or cultures or the shapes of our eyes, we are all of us, and each of us, beloved children of this God who creates all that is, who holds all things together - whose only desire is that we accept with gratitude this love, this grace, this mercy, forever and ever,

+amen

Another kind of multiplication of the Loaves & Fishes!



"Kahu, Many thanks to you and Nancy for picking up the clothes from St. Elizabeth's. Those 4 bags were organized into 11 bags and total weight of all was 144 pounds. Mahalo Aloha Ke Akua." ~ Portia



Throughout advent the Sunday school collected money for Icodei



Happy Birthday

God's blessings on those with January birthdays!

Lynette Shim	01/01
Enriqueta Haller	
Akimasa Eis	
Awaeliery Farata	01/02
Grand Olobwy	01/03
Leo John Pangelina	01/05
Serenity Michael	01/06
Vernon Anaya	01/07
Kama Wong	01/08
Donella Kleinschmidt	01/09
Rebecca Kleinschmidt	01/10
Charles Steffey Jr.	01/11
Genevieve Hayakawa	
Harry Kurosu	01/12
Charlotte Jarrett	01/13
Troy Esaki	01/14
Soo Kil Park	
Sylvia Rowland	
Tarla Francis	
Dawn Yadao	01/16
Shaienne Sunagawa	01/18
Elyas Badua	
Sharlene Yap	01/19
CharleySue Steffey	
Jane Leong	01/20
Bonnie Lu	
Melba Meyshine	
Rachel Marlow	01/21
Jennifer Beckham	
Jack Simpson	01/23
Mark Anderson	01/25
Imensy Eichy	01/27
Kermelo Cadee White	01/28



A Message from the Youth Coordinator

By Melanie Langi

Aloha All!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

Well December was filled with back to back events, now we can take a little rest.

The Neighborhood Children's Christmas party was another huge success! Youth and children from the surrounding area j I need us for some pizza and Franks fun, along with a bounce house that children of all ages enjoyed, and a special visit from non other than that jolly ol' man himself...Santa Lee! Whoops I mean Santa Claus! 100+ children received a gift that day. Merry Christmas!

I would like to thank the youth for decorating the hall and christmas trees, the women and youth who helped wrapped what seemed like an endless stream of presents. To Maile Nicoles, thank you for the generous donation and decoration of your beautiful white Christmas tree! I would also like to thank Caren, Collette, Ken, and Ignacia who helped make and serve the food that day. And lastly, thank you to James and Sarah for helping plan this event. Everyones helping hands helped make this a successful event!

A few of our young ladies (Glory, Anau, Alina and Sivale) showed off their talent and love for our Lord on Christmas Eve with a hula to O Holy Night. They practiced and learned the dance in less than a week, I think the all did an awesome job! It was beautiful!

Well it's time for me to take a little vacation or should I say stay cation from an eventful December. Maybe going into hibernation is better. Haha!

From my family to you we would like to wish you all a Happy New Year! Wishing you all love, peace, happiness, joy, abundant blessings, prosperity, good health and success!

Aloha,
Melanie Langi



November Attendance


Sunday, December 3,	217
Wednesday, December 6,	15
Sunday, December 10,	204
Wednesday, December 13,	15
Sunday, December 17,	201
Wednesday, December 20,	18
Sunday, December 24,	346
Wednesday, December 25,	155
Sunday, December 31,	207



The Mood of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart."



What a great time by All for the 200th annual Neighborhood Christmas Party!! Over 100 children received gifts, Santa was there in all his red suited splendor, and....was that reindeer droppings in the lawn?? Thanks to all of Santa's elves who made this such a fun day!



Thanks so much to our St E Ohana who donated \$3,000 to our friends in Bungoma Kenya! With these funds, 5 micro enterprises will each receive about \$600 to help with their poultry, cow, goat and bee projects! Yayyyyy!!!!

Welcome David and Barbara!

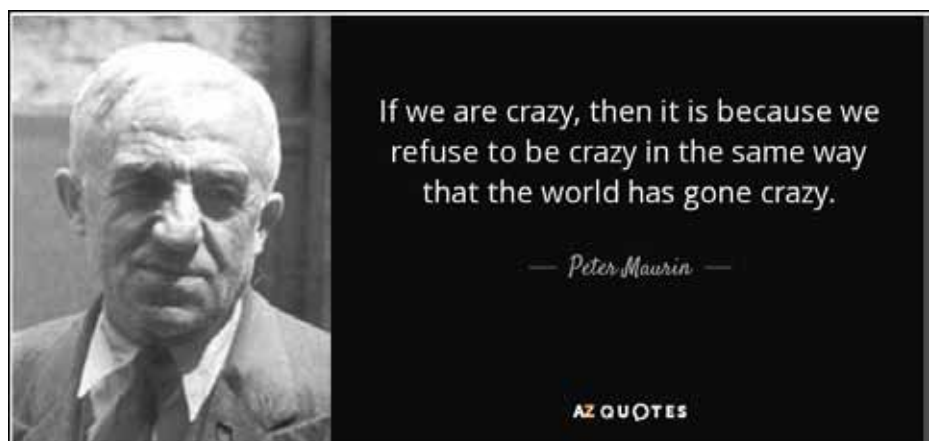
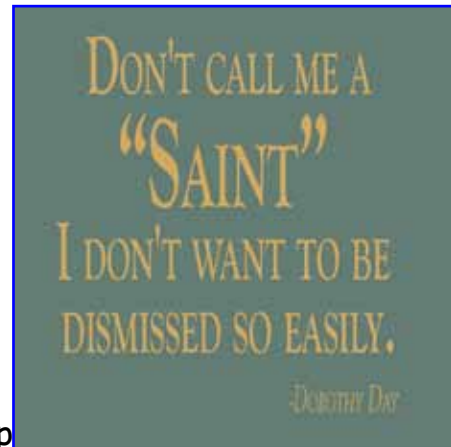
Please welcome on January 10 Barbara Bennett and David Catron to our community! Who???? Why???? Well, here's the skinny! Barbara and David are members of the Third Order of St. Francis (of Assisi) and are arriving to begin the first Honolulu based Catholic Worker in our rectory.

They are lay people, not ordained clergy. Many years ago they left comfortable middle class lives and traveled to Brazil, where for 15 years they operated a Catholic Worker in Rio. Out of an abandoned train station! They've also lived and worked at various Catholic Worker houses on the west coast.

What's the Catholic Worker, you ask? Well, here's the skinny!

The CW was started back in the Great Depression days in New York City by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. They opened what became several houses of hospitality, welcoming anyone in need. These are intentional Christian communities, dedicated to living the life of poverty and simplicity that Jesus invites us all into. David is an accomplished linguist (I expect he'll be jiving in Chuukese and Tongan any time now) and Barbara is an accomplished artist. Both are wonderful writers. To allow this to happen, the Coalition for Creative Housing gave us grants totaling \$100,000. This dough allowed us to bring the rectory up to code, replacing aluminum wiring with copper, plastic plumbing for copper, and our own intrepid Charles Steffey has done the rest. It also leaves us with enough money to subsidize this ministry for the next 5 years.

So what kind of ministry will this look like? Well, here's the skinny. We don't know yet. David and Barbara will spend a few months getting to know the neighborhood, talking story with the community both inside and outside the walls of St Elizabeth's, chatting with the Vestry and your rector. Why it that way? 'Cause that's usually how the Holy Spirit guides us into ways that are best suited for us all...So please welcome these new friends and feel free to ask questions, share feelings and give advice as we continue to deepen our response to the call of God in our lives. And that's the skinny my friends!



Sunday School News

By Sue Yap



When you see so many faces of so many youngsters flitting about the church, it really is a time to say thank you! Thanks to the parents who haul sometimes still sleepy children to church. Thank you to our gaggle of dedicated Sunday school teachers.



Thank you to our oldsters who get such a kick out of the kids and our deacon and seminarians who work so well with them. After all, the youngsters are the future of this place!



"Whatever state we find ourselves in, whether in strength or in weakness, in joy or in sorrow, whatever we find ourselves attached to, we must abandon.

You must give up yourself, altogether give up self, and then you have really given up ... By renouncing yourself first, you then have renounced all things.

... A man who loves God could give up the whole world as easily as an egg."

Meister Eckhart (Speech 30, DW II)



WHAT'S COMING UP IN JANUARY?

A whole lotta stuff!!!! The last Sunday of the month is the long anticipated and highly longed for Annual Meeting of the Church! So, as usual, the doors will be barred, guards posted and we shall elect a new set of convention delegates, 3 new vestry members, a new Senior Warden will make his debut and we shall also review what happened in the past year as well as other thrilling and chilling business of the church!

A new roof coating is going on the church roof in early January as we prepare to be part of the diocesan wide Photo Voltaic (PV) switch to more earth friendliness. We are not paying anything for the PV itself, rather, the company installing it shall pay the cost and we will purchase our electricity from them at a rate at least 20% cheaper than we pay HECO. Since our electric bill easily exceeds \$1000/month, and since HECO rates nearly always defy gravity (by always going up!), this should be a good thing for our finances as well as reducing carbon use by the church.



This year we need to gather some qualified folks to talk story about the future capital improvement needs of the church and our property. Our church was dedicated in 1951, meaning her 70th birthday is coming soon. Like all 70 year olds, the bones are a little creaky and some of the plaster needs redoing...While over the last 8 years we have repaired the roof and the main air conditioner and put in new tile floors and changed our pipes from lead to copper, and created the new and glorious sacristy, we do need a good capital reserve for future needs (um, like the ceiling tiles that love to fall down during the sermon....) Innerested in taking part???? Let us know!

Thank you to everyone who made 2017 just another bang up year for our various ministries at St E's! From the senior luncheons to the Hunger Walk to the weekly Saturday breakfasts to Food Pantry to Altar Guild to our First to Work volunteers to the youth ministries and home visits and letters to shut-in folks to lobbying for affordable housing to prison reform and totally cool Bible study and the choirs of so many cultures — from voices to bells; well, this is a very special place indeed! Here's looking forward to an even groovier 2018!!!!!!

