

"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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Faith and Mercy

by *The Rev. David J. Gierlach*

Today God tells us a new management team is in place.

Referring, of course, to God's management of humanity, which leads to how we are called to manage ourselves, and each other.

And yet, this management isn't so new after all; it just seems that way to us, because it's a style of management we find so abhorrent or just plain ridiculous.

I shall explain!

We are back in Genesis this morning, and here's God, making yet another totally one-sided deal with yet another fellow who may or may not deserve such a deal.

Last week it was Noah.

This week, it's Abram.

Here's the deal: "You are mine forever."

"I am your God forever."

A marvelously one sided deal that says "trust in me and you will be well;" which we then almost immediately, for reasons that mystify nearly everyone, reduce to a mere tit for tat contract, ignoring the power, the beauty and the sheer grace of covenant.

There is something deep inside we human beings that needs to feel we deserve the things that come our way; good or bad.

So we invent Karma, a very human way to think that we get what's coming to us — good or bad.

We insist the just will be saved and the bad guys condemned.

All of which is completely at odds with the bizarre, upside down and inside out mystery that we call the Christian life.

Paul is all over this in today's letter.

"Getting what we deserve" is what Paul calls the Law.

Tit for tat.

Karma.

Earn God's blessing or God's curse.

It's all summed up by Paul in one three letter word: Law.

We love the Law!

It makes sense, it is predictable, and it satisfies something very deep-seated in every one of us: you get what you deserve.

A fellow was convicted of armed robbery at the age of 22.

Somehow, before he was put in jail to serve his 13 year sentence, the system lost track of him.

He ended up getting a job, getting married, having children and becoming a model citizen.

Many years later, the system found him, and promptly put him in jail to serve his 13 year sentence.

Folks holding tight to the law said: "Serves him right, do the time!," while others wondered what possible purpose was being advanced.....

Faith, and her sister Mercy, are the opposite of Law.

Faith and Mercy are unpredictable.

They reward the wrong people, at the wrong time, for behaving in the wrong way.

You can't nail down Faith, or her sister Mercy.

The Law says "have your kids early, because before you know it, your parts will stop working - then you're sunk."

But Faith and Mercy find a way to make 90



Rector's Message, continued

year old women pregnant, and 100 year old men fathers.

If you think we're the only ones who find that ridiculous, well, we're not.

In our lesson from Genesis this morning, there is a verse that is skipped by the genius' who put together the reading.

If you check your reading for today, you'll notice we read Genesis 17:1-7; 15-16.

Missing from today's reading is verse 17, the verse right after God says of Sarah: "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her, and she shall give rise to nations, and kings shall come from her."

The very next verse has Abraham falling flat on his face — NOT out of joy or out of reverence or out of fear at the great power of God; the very next verse has Abraham falling on his face LAUGHING!!

I quote:

"Abraham fell flat on his face. And then he laughed, thinking, "Can a hundred-year-old man father a son? And can Sarah, at ninety years, have a baby?"

Faith and her sister Mercy do wonderful things, outlandish things!

Not only do the nearly dead elderly give birth, but Faith and her sister Mercy forgive unforgivable crimes — welcome people who are not worthy of being welcomed.

The Law fights wars and battles and other people.

It separates the good from the bad.

The Law is best seen in shades of black and white.

But Faith, and her sister Mercy, suffer and die in response to violence.

They see good and bad as completely tangled up with one another, right down to the very roots of it all.

They see life, not as black and white but as the blended colors of the rainbow, bleeding into one another, where all that is finds itself contained within the One who always was.

What God set out to do with Sarah and Abraham — a one-sided deal in which God takes on all the obligations, well, that's what Jesus comes to restore.

It's the new management of what it is to be human, of where we come from — and to whom we belong — and where we are going.

It rests on Faith, and her sister Mercy.

The calculating, stultifying "I got mines" of the law is put back in its place — yet this new management gives the first disciples as much heartburn as it gives us.

Peter, this morning, is beside himself, as Jesus explains how this new management system works:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

These are the things that Faith, and her sister Mercy, do.

This is God's way, and it is the way God invites us to be, if we wish to discover what it truly means to be a human being.

It has less to do with piety, and more to do with practice.

Less to do with purity than with perception.

Chris Wiman tells this story:

"One day when I had gone to a little chapel near my office at lunchtime and was once more praying, while wondering how and why and to whom I prayed, a man came in and eased into the pew directly across the aisle from me.

As we were the only two people there his choice of where to sit seemed odd, and irritating.

Within a couple of minutes, all thought of God was gone into the man's constant movements and his elaborate sighs, and when I finally rose in exasperation, he stood immediately to face me.

He had the sandblasted look of long poverty, the skeletal clarity of long addiction, and that vaguely aggressive abasement that truly tests the nature of one's charity.

Very cunning, I noted, failing the test even as I opened my wallet: to stake out a little chapel to prey upon the praying!

For days then it nagged at me — not him — but it, the situation — which, I finally realized, was precisely the problem; how easily a fatal complacency seeps into even those acts we undertake as disciplines, and how comfortable we become with our own intellectual and spiritual discomfort.

Wondering how and why and to whom I prayed?

I felt almost as if God had been telling me, as if Christ were telling me (in church no less): get off your mystified ass and do something."

-My Bright Abyss, 84.

Rector's Message, continued

It's why Mark tells us so little of what Jesus actually taught.

There are very few parables in this gospel.

There are no long speeches.

Just a series of action scenes — just a travelog with Jesus.

Meaning, perhaps, for Mark, what matters most isn't learning what Jesus says or figuring out what Jesus means, as much as coming to see that what might matter the most is being with Jesus — and doing with Jesus, then and now.

Mark seems to be saying that the whole world is permeated by and of and with Jesus — that he is not merely some historical figure who lived and died nor is he merely some spiritual figure who lived then went off to a far away heaven — but that he lived and died and is raised again to become one with all creation, one with all of our lives — not only then, but now, today, this moment.

That, by Faith, and her sister Mercy, we can catch glimpses of the living Jesus in any part of life — whether it's in the midst of frantic office work or over beer in the bar or on our knees in church, and even face to face with the street guy in that quiet city chapel, hand outstretched.

In the very life we live, so lives Jesus.

So we come here, week in and week out, to develop the eyes to see him, the ears to hear his call.

And that felon who got locked up after all those years of becoming a new man?

After a few months inside, they let him go.

Faith and Mercy, God's new management team, still work their wiles, even today, in these, our times.

+amen



Holy Week and Easter

Holy Week comes earlier this year, with **Palm Sunday** and our traditional march around the neighborhood set for **Sunday, March 29**, followed by **Maundy Thursday** with foot washing on **April 1**, **Good Friday** with Stations of the Cross and Solemn Mass on **April 2**, with a joyous **Easter** morning on **April 5**!

* Stuff Happens

in various World Religions:

Taoism: Stuff happens, go with the flow.

Hare Krishna: Stuff happens Rama Rama Ding Ding.

Hinduism: This stuff has happened before.

Islam: Stuff happening is the will of Allah.

Zen: What is the sound of stuff happening?

Existentialism: Stuff doesn't happen; stuff is.

Buddhism: When stuff happens, is it really stuff?

Confucianism: Confucius says, "Stuff happens".

7th day Adventist: Stuff happens on Saturdays.

Protestantism: Stuff won't happen if you work harder.

Catholicism: If stuff happens, you deserved it.

Jehovah's Witnesses: No stuff happens until Armageddon, and it won't happen to us.

Unitarian: What is this stuff?

Mormon: Stuff happens again & again & again.

Judaism: Why does this stuff always happen to us?

Pentecostalism: Praise the stuff!

Atheism: There is no stuff!

New Age: Stuff happens and it happens to smell good if you open your heart to it.

Rastafarianism: Let's smoke this stuff.



Kung Hee Fat Choy!

Look what the lion did to his hair!



The lion is greeted by 10,000 firecrackers!

Chinese New Year at St. E's!

Yes, it's that time of year again, celebrating our heritage at St E's with another fantabulous Lion Dance with a zillion firecrackers (the deafness is only temporary, they say) and of course a broke da mouth pot luck featuring fare from around the world. Many many folks joined in, Shim Hall was bursting at the seams and yet, with a miracle or two, everyone had plenty to eat and even several baskets of leftovers found their way to homes hither and yon. Did someone say Lent????? Okay, NOW we're ready!



A full house to enjoy every bite!



Many thanks to the great volunteers!



Great potluck for Chinese New Year!



Aunty Lani and the girls sizing up their appetites.



Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday, *aka* Fat Tuesday, *aka* Mardi Gras is that night before Lent when all the goodies we're supposed to relinquish during Lent get EATEN! So, sweet pancakes and french toast, delicious sausages and of course several tons of chocolate.

Many thanks to all who made this evening so much fun, particularly to head chef **Doug Ing** on French toast, the **Jong Family Trio** on the pancakes, and **Aunty Lani Kealoha** on the sausages, and of course the chocolate queen herself, **Ms. Sue Yap!**

The Chefs



Jerek and Bonnie Jong

“People must not only hear about the kingdom of God, but must see it in actual operation, on a small scale perhaps and in imperfect form, but a real demonstration nevertheless.”

- Pandita Ramabai.



Shrove Tuesday was a blast!

First Sunday in Lent

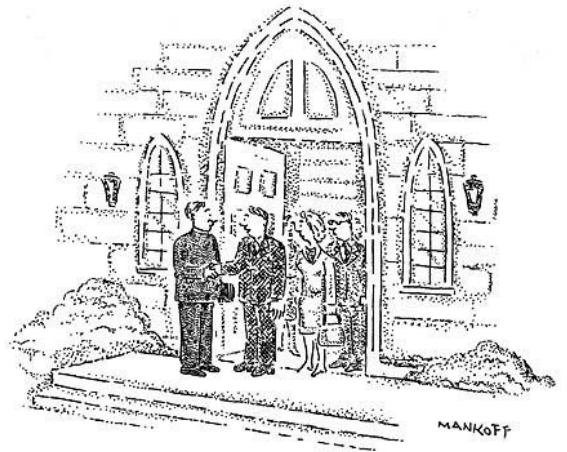


The narrator, Kama Wong, and four Sunday school students began the service with readings about Lent and snuffing out one candle from the Lenten wreath. Six candles, representing the six Sundays in Lent were lit at the start of the service. The weeks get darker as we get further into Lent and each week another candle is extinguished. On Easter Sunday only the Christ candle will burn brightly!



“Do you want to be totally united to the Crucified? If you are serious about this, you will be present, by the power of his Cross, at every front, at every place of sorrow, bringing to those who suffer, healing and salvation.”

-Edith Stein



“Oh, I know He works in mysterious ways, but if I worked that mysteriously I’d get fired.”



Happy Birthday

God’s blessings on those with March birthdays!

Colin Wong	3/1
Kifenin Dopich	3/1
Obeyi Helly	3/3
Damien Ballesteros	3/4
Roy Chee	3/5
Doreen Ching	3/7
Marites Unarce	3/7
Aadriana White	3/9
Arleen Young	3/12
Lillian Tyau	3/13
Yonlene Simpson	3/13
Istina Eichy	3/13
Annalei Badua	3/13
Sarah Bush	3/14
Ongolea Sungalu	3/14
Ruthann Sorcey	3/16
Haku Blaisdell	3/17
Miriam Hue	3/17
Miranda Young	3/17
Ensen Repaky	3/22
DC Eichelberger	3/23
Isabel Padasdao	3/23
Anaseini Lino	3/28
Gerald Lau	3/29
Jefirtson Nixon	3/30
Brian Kau	3/31



Basketball Team Practice!



Daniel Yuen-Schat and **Viliani Lino** will be at the head of the world championship St. Elizabeth's Saints Basketball team. Practices to start very soon so check with the coaches for more details.

Also, our pals at the University of Kentucky are donating real Basketball shoes to our gang and for that we say MAHALO!!



Attendance

Sunday, Feb. 1 Eucharists & Vespers	208
Wednesday, Feb. 4 Eucharists	48
Sunday, Feb. 8 Eucharists & Vespers	182
Wednesday, Feb. 11	41
Sunday, Feb. 15 Eucharists & Vespers	207
Tuesday, Feb. 17 Shrove Tuesday	27
Wednesday, Feb. 18 Ash Wednesday	78
Sunday, Feb. 22 Eucharists & Vespers	204
Wednesday, Feb. 25 Eucharist	19



We said *aloha* and *until we meet again* to **Tom Young**, the dad of **Sharon Oshiro**, and to **Harriet Harris**, mother of Dawn, Hope and Brooke and wife of the late Fr. **Walt Harris**. May they and all the departed move from glory to glory in the nearer presence of God.

Something different for Lent?

St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church – A Community of Prayer for All People

Understanding that the Lenten Season calls us to spiritual growth and enhancement through prayer, reflection, and involvement, I/We will participate in the following "Lenten Opportunities" program(s)

Worship: _____ Handbells _____ Usher _____ Lay Reader (Adult and Youth)
_____ Acolyte/Crucifer (Youth and Adults) _____ Altar Guild

Evangelism: _____ Bring a friend to St. Elizabeth's Stewardship: _____ Tithe during Lent

Sunday School: _____ Teller (after church): _____

Outreach: _____ Tutoring (various afternoons) _____ Weekly gift to Food Pantry

Grounds: _____

NAME _____ PHONE NUMBER _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

A Modern Day St. Francis



We were honored to host not only a really cool shipping container, reconfigured into a two room apartment, but we also got to spend time with the **Rev. Lorenza Andrade-Smith**, pictured above with the **Rev. Alan Mark**. Lorenza is a Methodist minister who, nearly 4 years ago, after her congregation said no to housing the houseless, decided that if the houseless can't come to church, the church needs to go to the houseless! And so she has lived on the streets, all across the US and even across the world, as a witness among the least among us to the presence of God, a presence that indeed has a preference for the poor.

Please keep her and her ministry in your prayers.

Babies come from Where?

"Six year old Annie returns home from school and says that today she had her first family planning lesson at school.

Her mother, very interested, asks: "Oh... How did it go?"

"I nearly died of shame!" she answers. "Sam from down the street says the stork brings babies. Sally next door said you can buy babies at the orphanage. Pete in my class says you can buy babies at the hospital."

Her mother answers laughingly, "But that's no reason to be ashamed."

"No... but I can't tell them that we were so poor that you and daddy had to make me yourselves!"

