

*"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

**April 2019**

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## The Maternal God

*The Rev. David J. Gierlach*

The other day, my daughter gave me the hairy eyeball when she heard me referring to God as "she."

She was quite sure I misspoke and told me to be more careful in the future, because, as she explained, "everyone knows God's not a girl, dad."

Which gave me my in to talk to her about the book of our earliest times, Genesis, where our mothers and fathers in faith imagine the beginning of all things; and there is God, creating humanity last of all, creating "humankind in God's own image, in the image of God they were created, male and female, God created them." Gen. 1:27.

My daughter was a bit startled by this, and since I rarely startle her, I decided to keep going.

I took her to the poetry of the prophets, starting with Isaiah, through whom God implores:

"Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

How then can I forget you, oh my people?"

And again, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you..." (Isaiah 66:13).

The prophet Hosea sings the same song:

"How can I give you up?

It was I who taught you to walk.

I took you up in my arms; I healed you, led you with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I bent down to you and fed you..." (Hosea 11:3-4).

I understand my daughter's discomfort, her unease in thinking about God as somehow soft, somehow vulnerable, meaning, in our still sexist age, somehow female.

Perhaps some of you share that unease.

How, after all, can we think of Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, as soft, as vulnerable?

Eli Weisel, a concentration camp survivor and Noble peace prize laureate, tells of the horrific day when the Nazi's hanged six teenagers to make some

ghastly point.

As the boys hang, dying, twitching on the gallows, a man in the crowd roars out:

"Where is our God?!"

And an old rabbi standing nearby replies, looking at the boys on the gallows,

"There is our God."

I share this story just about once a year in one homily or another.

I keep returning to it because perhaps more than any other story in modern times, it tells us a profound truth about God, a truth we often shut our eyes to, because it seems to ask too much of us.

The sense of a suffering, vulnerable God is not widely accepted by many of the Jewish faith, and after the holocaust, many simply walked away from the faith of their parents.

Because God does not swoop in for the rescue, many now say, God either doesn't exist, or worse, God is indifferent to human suffering.

It seems that same rejection of God is consuming modern life: among those who simply chalk up the world's horrors to a non-existent or indifferent God, as well as those who tout a God of revenge or retribution, of "our God is badder than your God" tribalism and nationalism.

And what about us?

How do we grapple with this notion of a vulnerable God; a God who doesn't rescue us from our crosses, but who comes and hangs there with us?

And yet, the vulnerable God is as ancient as our faith. You heard it today in Abram's encounter with God.

One thing in the story that is particularly strange to our modern ears is this whole business of cutting the cows and goats in half, and arranging the bodies to form a pathway between



the split corpses of the animals.

This isn't about sacrifice, it's about how agreements get sealed.

While we seal a deal with a handshake or our signature, back then, the parties to the agreement both walk between the dead animals – sending this message:

“If I welsch on this deal, may what happened to these cows happen to me.”

In this way, the parties submit to one another.

But not today.

Today, only God walks between the split animals.

Only God calls down the consequence: “if I welsch on this deal, let me be like these mutilated cows.”

Only God, in his covenant with Abram, binds himself completely to us; only God puts God's neck on the chopping block for us.

And what about Abram while this vulnerable God lays herself out for us — in love?

He's asleep. Sound familiar?

Which, in a sort of round about way, brings us to the question somebody asked me just the other day about why the flags that used to be up here by the altar are now in the back room?

And I replied that in our 2000-year history as a church, the practice of allowing national flags in the sacred spaces of the church is a very recent concession to national pride and patriotism.

It seems to have started during World War I but really took off during World War II. The flags are somewhere else now -- not because I'm anti-American -- but because the American eagle – at the top of every church flagpole, is the wrong bird for us Christians to focus on.

Eagles, as we Americans know, as the Roman Empire knew before us, are majestic birds of prey.

It is a fearsome bird that's beautiful and imposing but just out of place here — because the bird that our faith calls us to look to as our role model, the bird that actually looks like and acts like God: the bird that ought to be at the top of every church flagpole, isn't the majestic eagle -- it's the chicken!

Don't take my word for it; listen to Jesus!

He's telling us so in today's gospel, as he laments the hard hearts of his own people. He's not longing to carry them off on eagle's wings. No, Jesus, is the mother hen – protective yet defenseless – loving, yet totally vulnerable to the teeth of that wily old fox.

Chest out, wings spread wide, the perfect target to be eaten by the foxes of this world: all the while, safeguarding her young brood behind her. And at the same time, grieving for the chicks: especially for the Herod's, the Pilate's, the Trump's, the ones who have it all together, who refuse to seek the safety she offers in her death...

And this is why Jesus is so maddening!

Just when we think we have a God of power and might, just when we think God invites us to live lives of power and might, here comes Jesus, the mother hen.

“Imitate me,” Paul says today, “as I imitate Christ.”

In other words, be a chicken!

And that's why you can't have an eagle staring at you from up here – because your God and mine isn't like an eagle at all, your God and mine — is like a chicken.

“Imitate me,” says Paul, “as I imitate Christ.”

Sit with that for a minute while I tell you one last story.

Most of you remember back in 1991, a couple of years after the Berlin Wall fell, and shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed.

“Perhaps you'll remember on August 20, 1991, when martial law is declared in Russia, and Boris Yeltsin is holding on to civilian power by a thread.

The army is mobilized and a coup begins: everyone is told to go home and it appears the old guard is making a comeback.

Just then, the babushkas, the old Russian ladies who for nearly 80 years kept the church alive in a country that was officially atheist; these old ladies who are laughed at and mocked for years -- the babushkas come out that night.

Some of these old ladies feed the pro-democracy supporters, others help out at medical stations, some kneel and pray for a miracle, and still others climb on top of the tanks and, staring into the slits at the army men inside, tell them that now they have new orders, orders from God:

“You shall not kill.”

The young men, listening to their grandmothers, get out of their tanks. The attack never comes.

And three days later, the tide turns, and the old guard creeps away.” T. Long, Talking Ourselves into Being Christian (paraphrased).

Mother hens save the day for Mother Russia.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

Once there, he will spread his wings, and bare his chest, and the fox will indeed devour him.

The chicks will scatter, not one stands with him.

“Where is our God?!”

The shout goes out from so many lips.

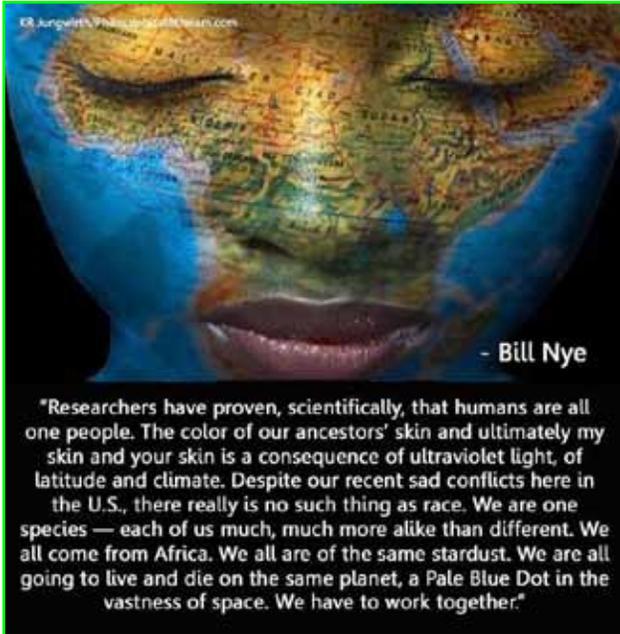
He is there, hanging on the tree.

Perhaps during this season of lent we might reconsider our love affair with eagles and foxes.

Perhaps we can instead seek to nestle tightly into the bosom of this loving God, who is our mother, and our father, who is indeed, our best friend.

+amen

# We are One



## Tuesday Treats!



Aunty Pearl Kau stopped by to help our Catholic Workers prepare and serve the Tuesday weekly hot lunch and talk story with the houseless and financially challenged housed in our neighborhood. Thanks to EVERYONE who continues to make this ministry a wonderful example of serving one another!!



### Happy Birthday

*God's blessings on those with April birthdays!*

Nora Kurosu	04/01
Imelda Padasdao	
Anau Tokomaata	
Shawnalyn Sunagawa	04/02
Brillan Tulenkun	
Apolonia Madriaga	04/03
Sharon Oshiro	
Kit Hawkins	04/06
Ka'alaneo Blaisdell-Higa	
Joelynne Tagle	04/07
Tasy Robert	04/08
David Gierlach	
Santereen Kom	04/09
Sulieti Lotaki	04/10
Alberta Eng	04/11
Belinda Chung	04/12
Michael Young	04/14
Lauren Ho	04/16
Puanani Woo	04/17
Kenneth Nagamine	04/18
Herminio Resurreccion	04/19
Juan Ramos	04/22
Siaosi Tokomaata	04/24
Ellen Tom	04/25
Craig Kokubun	
Chan Anaya	04/27
Joey Gierlach	04/28
Darrell Lum	
Gilbert Batangan	04/29
Kayli Ho	
Richard Ching	04/30
Ralph Arellano	

# HUH???

And Jesus said unto the theologians,  
"Who do you say that I am?"

They replied, "You are the  
eschatological manifestation of the  
ground of our being, the kerygma of  
which we find the ultimate meaning in  
our interpersonal relationships."

And Jesus said "...What?"



# Signs of the Times

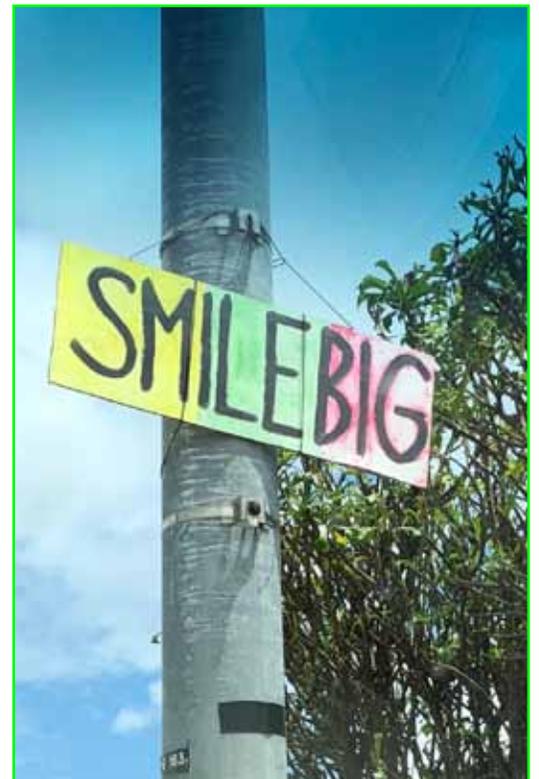


Some unknown genius has been painting and hanging signs like these around East Honolulu and we here at U and B Central think it's a teeeeeerrrrific idea!!!!!!!!!!!!!! So, during EASTER CAMP, come and join our campers and paint a sign yerself, in as many Woodstock colors as tickles your tonsils.....and then we're gonna secretly post them around the neighborhood here in lovely downtown Palama!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

# ARTFELT



Catholic worker and Third Order of St Francis and artista magnista of the year barbara bennett is heading up out Artfelt program aimed at not only our neighborhood teens (trying to encourage art on the paper rather than art on the walls!) bit also at ANYONE wanting to scratch that itch of budding artistic talent!!!! Tuesday and Thursday mornings it's open and ready for you to jump in!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



# A BEVY OF VOLUNTEERS!!



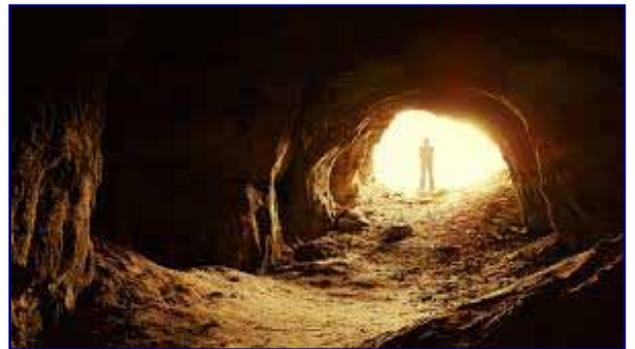
It's truly amazing who and how many come by every Saturday for the **Breakfast with the Houseless**. Whether it's the new president of the **Kamehameha Schools**, **Dr Chun**, and his family (members of the Latter Day Saints) or the **Amazing Aiea Football Team** who come by several times a year, or the many lawyers (who woulda thunk?????) or Native Hawaiian outreach folks or **Aunty Lani** and **Aunty Lynette** or or or or..... This ministry seems to draw folks like bees to pollen and we are **MOST GRATEFUL** to one and all for your loving service, easy going egg flipping and always wonderful advice!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## Resurrection

Let us not mock God with metaphor,  
analogy, sidestepping transcendence;  
making of the event a parable,  
a sign painted in the  
faded credulity of earlier ages:  
let us walk through the door.

Let us not seek to make it less monstrous,  
for our own convenience, our own sense of beauty,  
lest, awakened in one unthinkable hour, we are  
embarrassed by the miracle,  
and crushed by remonstrance.

~ John Updike, from 'Seven Stanzas at Easter'



# Sunday School News

By Sue Yap

The Sunday School continues to participate in the Lenten Service, each Sunday morning with opening prayers and extinguishing one candle on the Lenten wreath leading up to the dark days of Holy Week! The children are learning some of the parables that Jesus taught. They are all looking ahead to the Alleluias of Easter!!!

On Palm Sunday, April 14th, the Sunday School will help distribute the palms and olive branches to the congregation and lead the palm Sunday march through the streets of Palama! No donkey, just very spirited souls waving their palm branches! Please join us as we begin Holy Week and walk with Jesus through his darkest days.

After the Good Friday noon service, the children will dye easter eggs with Jamie Chock in Shim Hall. The older youth will be 'stuffing' the plastic eggs with treats of all kinds! (If you'd like to help with donations of 'treats', please drop them off on Palm Sunday! We have the plastic eggs, just need the fillers!!! If you'd like to donate plastic eggs already filled, please do!)

The long awaited Easter Egg Hunt will be after the Easter service! Children of all ages are invited to participate! The youth will be hiding the eggs under the direction of Miss Seine, Joshua Lino, Tea and Kama!!!! Easter treats for all the children!

## Blessed Lent!



Children start the service with the opening readings and participate in the Lenten wreath - each Sunday counting down by extinguishing one candle on the Lenten wreath leading to Holy Week and the Alleluias of Easter.

# A Message from the Youth Coordinator



Hello All!

Welcome to April. They say "April showers, bring May flowers!" Well, we've had our share of February and March showers that brought on **Car Wash season!** BUT it's been pretty dry lately and **WE LOVE IT!** Because... our youth have been the busy bee around here lately. Why, with "tons" of car washes of course! Twice a month to be exact! Let's pray for the sun to shine more often than usual...at last on Saturdays! Soooooooo on the **second and last Saturdays of every month** it's on like Donkey Kong (am I showing my age?) Hehehe! Me, and all my homies ages 0-100 are out here in the hot and sometimes unforgiving sun getting your cars all Spic and Span! Let out little professionals get the job done! Come join us, help and support! Oh and did I hear someone say PIZZA! Always a well earned meal at the end of the day! Don't miss out!

I hear it rumored that someone mentioned an **Easter Camp?** Its TRUE and its just around the corner! For the fourth year in a row, the Tongan group will again host this years Easter Camp right **here at St. Elizabeth's. April 18th - April 20th.** EVERYONE and EVRYONE (not a typo) is invited to this weekend long event, planned with fun-filled activites, biblical lessons and teachings. This year I've also added an **Easter CrossWalk.** No, not the crosswalk we use to cross the street. It's a walk where everyone shares in taking turns carrying the cross while walking. The walk will begin at church, up Pua Lane, along Vineyard Blvd, down Liliha St. onto N. King and return to the church. Everyone whose anyone is welcome to tag along. Set for **Good Friday morning.**

**CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!** Our wonderful, very talented, hard-working, dedicated but humble Boys and Girls Late Night Basketball Leagues are still in **need of volunteer coaches and assistant coaches.** If yourself or someone you know would be interested in volunteering dont be shy to give your girl a hollah! Season begins soon, so no be shame ah!

Did y'all hear about that **radical bible studying happening every Friday night at 7pm** with the fresh and refreshing word from Papa God? Well I heard it's off the chain! Haha! Its the new cool! Bible studies, before hoodlum buddies! Shine Gods light in them after! Get involved, meet new faces, journey and fellowship with other youth as we all share in our walk with Christ! **Learn His teachings and Gods powerful wisdom!** New lessons every week. Refreshments anyone? Maybe juice or something! Wheres the youth coordinator at? If you guys see her this weekend can you let her know the youth deserve refreshments after.

Be there or...**JUST BE THERE!!**

Teach the youth the way of salvation. Godly wisdom and knowledge gets you into Heaven, not a college degree! Attend God's University! "Store up your treasures in Heaven!"

Till next time...

Your friend, Melanie Langi



# NOTES FROM THE CATHOLIC WORKERS



## WISDOM FROM CHICKENS

in response to Fr. David's "God is a chicken" sermon

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" It's three a.m. and the rooster right outside my window has decided to make his presence known... again. The three a.m. wake-up calls usually do not keep me up long, but the sudden unwanted alarm clock does bring out a certain murderous intent that I do not have at another time in my day. Yet after an hour or two more of sleep and saying our communal Daily Morning Prayer, the thoughts of eradicating all chickens vanish and my appreciation for their determination and consistency returns. That is what it means to live in community: loving the good, tolerating the annoying, and communicating about both.



"Mom told us the story" by Liejun Wu

"Chirp, Chirp, Skua!" It's noontime when I hear the chirping of a lost chick followed by the clucks of a worried mother hen. The chick is reunited with it's brood and together, the group starts foraging for food in our backyard. Sometimes I feel like that lost chick crying out for comfort, looking for a hug. Other times I feel like the worried hen running around ensuring my brood is safe. One time I had to find a wheelchair that had been stolen, another time I rushed to open our gates so a woman could hide from her boyfriend who was yelling at her. Living in community means adapting to the situation that is presented.



"Stand taller and see the father" by Liejun Wu

"SKWAAAAAA!" It's three o'clock in the afternoon and a chicken is screaming bloody murder. I turn to look out the back window and see a child chasing a chicken around the yard. I'm furious because the child had to jump the fence in order to reach the chicken, shattering our privacy boundary. The poor chicken has been harassed by these children for weeks. The children catch the chickens and sell them to people who use them in cock fights. This particular chicken is bigger than the other males, and stands out as a prize amongst the youth in our neighborhood. The chicken is currently huddled in the corner of our yard and is even being harassed by other chickens. Being different is hard, finding communities that will love you for your differences is even harder. Wallyhouse is a place for the lost chickens of the world to find community; a place to roost for as long as you need.

Special thanks to neighbor artist, on Banyan Lane, Liejun Wu who allowed us to use two of his