

*"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

**August 2019**

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## A Different Way

*The Rev. David J. Gierlach*

We humans are masters at taking the very strange, radical, even revolutionary challenges of Jesus and turning them into something more to our liking.

And so our Roman Catholic friends create a church that looks like the Roman empire, with the pope taking the place of the emperor, and various ranks of clergy taking the place of the elite power brokers.

Meanwhile, the Protestant reformation became a golden opportunity to infect the church with the newly growing system of capitalism -- tying salvation to financial success.

The phrase "Protestant work ethic" grew precisely out of that situation, as we began to see material enrichment as evidence of God's blessings, and the inevitable poverty that capitalism creates, as evidence of God's curse.

And each of these systems spend a great deal of time creating rules and laws. They are consumed with setting out what behavior is acceptable and what is not; ignoring the fact that Jesus gives us only one law: "love one another"; that Jesus gives us only one command: "do not judge!"

In the last hundred years or so, in the midst of a society that worships the individual, Christianity, among many Catholics and Protestants, has come to be defined as an entirely "personal relationship with Jesus" rather than a call to remake the earth, so that earth more nearly resembles heaven, by forming communities that seek love and forgiveness and non-violence.

Every generation of Christians therefore needs to rediscover who and what Jesus is all about, and who and what he calls us to become.

Like caterpillars whose destiny is to be changed into butterflies, if we have the courage

to practice a life of letting go, we can change from a faith that is merely a sop to the status quo into a faith that really can move mountains.

And the parables Jesus tells are our roadmap to that place of transformation.

In every generation the parables take a sledgehammer to our watering down of the strange invitation of Jesus, helping us move yet again a step closer to the actual kingdom of God.

So it is with today's parable, which is a direct assault on our way of living, because our way of living is all about development and growth and making money whenever and wherever we can.

In a sense, we are lucky these days because the wisdom of what Jesus has to say stares at us from just about every headline every morning.

Climate change caused by our addiction to fossil fuels is already melting glaciers and causing decades of ever increasing average temperatures around the world, leading to inevitable sea level rises which are even now making some south Pacific islands uninhabitable - not to mention the routine ocean flooding in major cities like Miami, and Waikiki.

This year's fruit production, from mango to avocado, is way down, probably because pollinating bees are dying at alarming rates, most likely due to our love affair with pesticides, while the new president of Brazil has just announced an assault on the the lungs of our planet, the Amazon rain forest.

Indeed, as my dear friend reflected last week, the struggle at Mauna Kea is about far more than the sacredness of the mountain or



even the rightful claims of the Hawaiian people - what's at stake at Mauna Kea may very well be the fate of humankind.

The struggle for the piko of the Hawaiian people underscores the truth that unless we learn to live sustainably, in harmony with creation, we will surely die - having destroyed what sustains us.

And it's not only on this vast scale that the words of Jesus, perhaps now more than ever, are urgently needed.

What happens to us, as individuals, families and communities, in a system that transforms citizens into consumers, and these days, transforming consumers into data points?

What happens to us as we live and breathe a culture that measures human worth not by one's kindness, generosity or compassion, but by the size of one's bank account?

What happens to us when the President of the United States constantly seeks to cut the ties that bind us to one another?

Here in Hawaii we still have, thanks particularly to our Hawaiian and Asian traditions, strong family and community ties.

Yet this great gift of community is constantly bombarded by the broader culture that champions the rich, the handsome, the strong.

We see it in multimillion dollar condos going up like weeds in Kakaako while thousands of our local people are barely holding on, or are in the street already.

We see it in the obscenity of corporate bigwigs gorging on, not 20 times but 400 times, what the average worker earns. All of which brings us to the feet of today's parable. Here is the rich man, speaking only to himself, planning only with himself, seeking to benefit only himself.

He is like so many of us: independent, self-reliant, needing no one.

It is a fool's errand as God, heartbroken, says to the man: "look what you have done to yourself! You plan alone, build alone, indulge alone, and now..... you will die alone!" Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 67.

Many preachers try hard to take the bite out of this parable. We say: "The problem isn't wealth, it's how we use it." That's what we say, but it's not what Jesus says. St. Paul gets where Jesus is coming from.

Paul, sitting with the Risen Christ, comes to see that God intends for people to work for just two reasons:

First, so we aren't a burden to others, and second, to have resources to give to those in need. How different from our culture, which teaches us to work in order to accumulate wealth, so that I can retire to the good life, to eat, drink and be

It is this disconnect between the original purpose of work, and our distortion of that purpose, that today's parable comes at us, like a punch in the eye! (Which is why we have the old saying, the truth will set you free, but first it will make you miserable!)

And yet, none of this is intended as a scold or as judgment. Rather, look at what Jesus does in today's gospel. He tells that young man who wants "justice" from his brother that when you chase after that kind of justice, you only get hurt, you only get a war.

How much money is worth a ruined relationship between brothers?

As St. Augustine says "God gives us people to love and things to use; sin happens when we confuse the two."

Today's gospel is a stark wake up call, especially to we rich of this world, that all we have is gift, that our lives and all material blessings are on loan to us, we don't own any of it, we're only borrowers, caretakers.

As Paul urges us this morning, "Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: ... passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient." It's not that these things make God mad.

The "wrath of God" is simply shorthand for the foreseeable consequences of living in a way doomed for destruction, like driving a car over a cliff: God doesn't cause the calamity, the driver does!

The root of our faith is to draw us out of ourselves, and into the lives of one another, for only then can we in fact become who we are always meant to be. In this drawing out, we come to see that "love demands a complete inner transformation - for without this, we cannot possibly identify with our fellow human beings.

We have to become, in some sense, the people we love. And this involves a kind of death of our own self. No matter how hard we try, we resist this death: we fight back with anger, with recriminations, with demands, with ultimatums.

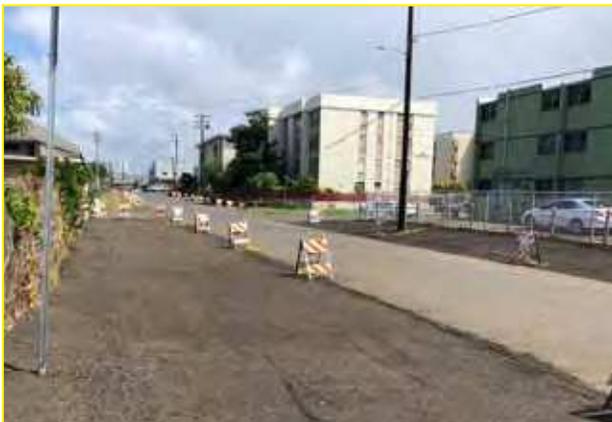
We seek any convenient excuse to break off and give up on this difficult task.

And yet, if we do not break all spiritual chains, cast off the domination of all misguided compulsion, and find our true selves, if we don't discover and develop our spiritual liberty and use it to build up God's kingdom here and now, what will become of us?" Merton, *The Desert Fathers*, 18-20, paraphrased.

## Cutefying the Container!!!



The ever active **Junior Warden Charles Steffey** (above) is hard at work cleaning out and cleaning up the container, now baptized as **Elizabeth House**, as we welcome three female guests for short term emergency housing. The City has moved aggressively to remove the encampment from Kanoa Street (below) so the need to find some alternative housing on a short term basis became urgent. **Many thanks to all our volunteers** who tirelessly seek to bring the love of God, in the form of judgment free talk story, daily food, laundry, toilet and shower and so much more to these our brothers and sisters in need.



Construction next door at Kalihi Palama Health Center is going **GANGBUSTERS!** A new clinic building is going up with steel and hollow tile and probably lots of superglue to hold it all together!!!



## Happy Birthday

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

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Renza Farek        | 08/02 |
| Pablo Venenciano   | 08/04 |
| Sue Yap            |       |
| Nicholas Chung     | 08/05 |
| Wayne Pacupac      | 08/06 |
| Maxwell Starkman   | 08/09 |
| Sean Padasdao      | 08/11 |
| Elyjah Badua       | 08/13 |
| David Hirashiki    |       |
| Linda Woo          |       |
| Man Love Sos       | 08/14 |
| Simter Robert      | 08/16 |
| Keith Ho           | 08/17 |
| Harold Ware        |       |
| Jo Ann Young       |       |
| Patsy Ann Ching    | 08/18 |
| Reden Ho           |       |
| Kaitlin Nagamine   | 08/18 |
| Karen Batangan     | 08/19 |
| Caren Jean Esaki   | 08/20 |
| Pedro Timonio      |       |
| Marietta Ware      |       |
| Nancy Au           | 08/21 |
| Joel Jong          |       |
| Joshua Lino        | 08/22 |
| Jaden Morey        |       |
| Jeferrson Noket    |       |
| Madleen Michael    | 08/24 |
| Iluminada Padasdao | 08/25 |
| Inaria Repaky      |       |
| Jarrett Young      |       |
| Mercy Julio        | 08/26 |
| Eden Amoy          | 08/30 |



## A Response to a Bishop Who Says of the Afterlife: "No reasonable person believes that anymore."

Little by little, wean yourself.  
This is the gist of what I have to say.  
From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood,  
move to an infant drinking milk,  
to a child on solid food,  
to a searcher after wisdom,  
to a hunter of more invisible game.

Think how it is to have a conversation with an embryo.

You might say,  
"The world outside is vast and intricate.  
There are wheat fields and mountain passes,  
and orchards in bloom.

At night there are millions of galaxies,  
and in sunlight  
the beauty of friends dancing at a wedding."

You ask the embryo why he, or she,  
stays cooped up  
in the dark  
with eyes closed.

Listen to the answer.

*There is no "other world."*

*I only know what I've experienced.*

*You must be hallucinating.*

-Rumi

### Bells & more bells!!



Our gang of wonderful bell ringers woke up the WHOLE neighborhood with their chimery chimes!!!!

### Kenya Kabitz!

Report from Kenya:

**Sawenge Young Women** have 4 cows and 1 calf, Poultry keeping 300 eggs in the local brooder, 200 chicken, 10 cocks and 50 chicks. 50 plastic chairs hired 10 times for 10 shs each they have saved 5,000shs. Planning to sell 50 chicken @ 500=25,000 +5,000=30,000 so that they buy another cow.

**Siritanyi Self help group** - Currently 7 big cows and 3 calves. 3 cows being milked every day they get 45cups @20. Poultry has improved 50 chicken 3 cocks they build a big chicken coop, improved one that can accomadate 200 chicken. Tree planting doing well up to now they have sold 2,000 seedlings @10 they have saved 20,000shs. Honey harvest 60lts sold at 12,000 saved. More bee hives to 25pcs. The harvest was low because of the climate.

**Royal Women group** - Bead making new arrivals they have saved 50,000shs. 4 cows. Love, Mama Joyce

## What a Gorgeous Gang!!



Many thanks to the great folks who show up all the time to help with the **Saturday Breakfast with the Houseless!!** From the **Oahu Contractors** to doctors and lawyers and just regular good souled folks, it's a blast and a half every week!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## Basketball Bombshells!!



Our All Star St Elizabeth Saints Nite League Basketball Team came OH SO CLOSE to being league champs! A great season for a great bunch of guys, along with **Mo and Mel** and our wonderful coach, **Rhashun!**

# Sunday School News

By Sue Yap



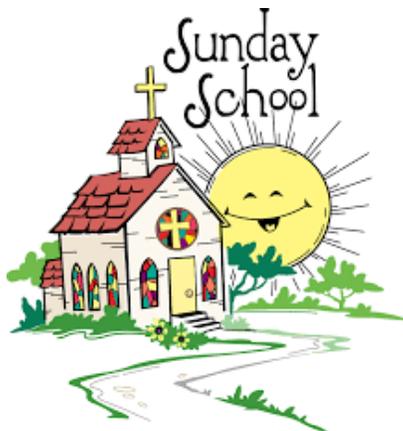
Lazy days of summer will soon be the 'back-to-school' rush time! Thank you for all your most generous donations of school supplies! Miss Jamie was busy shopping and hunting for bargains to add to the backpacks and bags with all your generous donation! The Sunday school teachers were busy as bees checking off each school list for each student!



The list started out with 21 names, grew to 39, on distribution Sunday, one more family needed school supplies! 45 bags total! Some have signed up but were not in church on Sunday, Please sign out and pick up your supplies!

The Summer Music Program with Miss Ajaon will begin on August 4th. This class will be during Sunday School time. All children of all ages are welcomed to attend! Miss Ajaon has a nice set of percussion instruments (thanks to a generous parishioner) and hopefully all the students will beat to the right drum!!!

**Sunday School will begin on August 25th!**



Thanks to Lisa Anne and Gloria with little Catherine, they packed 27 bags for all the elementary and middle school kids!

## ***Religious Leaders Statement of Solidarity with Kanaka Maoli Protecting Sacred Mauna Kea***

WE who live in the Hawaiian Islands and call them home are challenged today and in the future to care for them so that those of Hawaiian ancestry as well as those of us who have affection for this special place continue to serve and care for the land and her people with authenticity and integrity.

The current test that we face for both the preservation and future use of Mauna Kea is but the latest of many that force us to take sides. To many, the choices seem insurmountable which is why we who lead and stand with our communities of faith must stand tall (Ku Kanaka) and provide the light of insight that will bring about peace and resolution to the stalemate of interests that present themselves on today on the Sacred Mountain.

Mauna Kea is a sacred space. It is wao akua -- place of the gods, it is the mountain of God. It is understood as the genesis point of the Hawaiian people, where sky father Wakea met with earth mother Papahanaumoku.

The controversy surrounding the TMT telescope continues to highlight the struggle of native peoples to protect and preserve their sacred sites from desecration.

We the undersigned have a responsibility not to stay silent in the face of injustice.

We are not against science or scientific research. But it should be done in an appropriate location. Building one more gigantic telescope on our sacred mountain might harm the natural environment, and the spiritual integrity. In light of recent arrest of kupuna, in the act of peaceful civil disobedience, the questionable telescope project is certainly harming the deep peace of our Hawaiian community!

Some may disagree, but we believe the mountain belongs to the Kanaka maoli. It is part of their homeland. And they must have a say about what to do and what not to do on their sacred land!

We offer our prayers in solidarity with all our kanaka maoli sisters and brothers who feel oppressed, bullied, and not listened to.

We pray for a deeper understanding of this very important issue.

We pray for the people who insist to build in the midst of the loud outcry & the deep pain of our Kanaka maoli community.

We pray for ourselves and all religious people and organizations to take action and join with others to right the wrongs.

We the undersigned religious leaders express ourselves in these words, speaking truth to power during these difficult days! (signed by over 200 faith leaders)

***ua mau ke ea o ka `aina i ka pono***



## NOTES FROM THE CATHOLIC WORKERS

### Summer Travels: Finding Sanctuary by Niambi Mercado

Did you know San Francisco is named after St. Francis of Assisi? Pretty obvious right, but for my sleep deprived brain this was mind boggling. I have just returned from the Community of St. Francis Companion Program, a ten day immersion into the lives of the only four Episcopal Franciscan nuns in America. We ate, prayed, and worked together. Sister Pamela Clare gave the two of us attending lessons on Franciscan spirituality, Sister Jean taught us how to care for composting worms, Sister Maggie took us to Open Cathedral the street church that serves the houseless in the downtown area, and Sister Ruth told us about the work she does around sheltering families of people who are the hospital.

Sister Pamela Clare showed us around San Francisco where we saw shelters and sanctuaries: places of rest created for those desperate for respite.

We visited 826 Valencia, a writing resource center of under-resourced students ages six to eighteen. Each center has a small themed store that sells oddities including but not limited to: a message in a bottle, USB drives, extra-firm-fairy-mattress erasers, and troll dental floss jump ropes. The stores feel like Consumerism satire, for the first learning center was forced to put in a store front because the property is in a retail zone. So they created a small store and put in a giant learning center in the rest of the space. The other learning centers have followed the same model. I felt nothing but joy exploring the nooks and crannies of 826 Valencia shop.

We visited The Gubbio Project in the Mission district at St. John the Evangelist. The Gubbio project was started by Franciscan friar Louis Vitale and activist Shelly Roder in 2004 at the Roman Catholic St. Boniface church in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. Both churches now provide a safe place for the houseless to sleep during the day. The project is named after the story about St. Francis brokering peace between the frightened townspeople of Gubbio, Italy and an aggressive wolf. Francis negotiated a peace deal that benefitted both parties. I felt humbled to visit the sanctuary that the Gubbio Project has created.



We volunteered at St. Martin de Porre's House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker soup kitchen in San Francisco. We chopped veggies, squeezed lemons, washed dishes, handed out spoons, and interacted with the guests that came for lunch. I felt the love that the volunteers had for all the guests that came to seek sanctuary.

Sanctuaries are places of love, rest, and peace. They come in many shapes and sizes. It was an honor to be able to live with the sisters and experience the different sanctuaries of San Francisco.

Left to Right: Sr. Pamela Clare, Sr. Jean, Sr. Elenor Francis (Community of St. John Baptist), Niambi, Sr. Maggie, Caroline.