

## A Farewell Sermon

Thank you all so very much for coming here this morning to worship and to be part of the beloved community that is St Elizabeth's.

I've been accused of timing my retirement so it fell on this Sunday's gospel lesson, because it's one of my favorites, because for me it sums up where we've been together over these many years.

But in fact I didn't have to time anything!

The Holy Spirit, who is alive and well here — took care of all the details!

So let's explore for a moment the beauty of today's gospel.

The idea of God going out into the alleys and slums and byways to collect all of God's people; the bad and the good, the corrupt and the worthy, the ugly and the beautiful, truly is the story of God's relationship with humanity.

And ever since Mother Jodene and Kit first showed up here with their bolt cutters, cutting the chains from our fences and doors, then taking that little bell out into the back alleys collecting children for a reading class in the rectory garage, the story of God, going out and collecting God's people, has come alive in this parish.

And over these many years we have all tried our best to keep at that beautiful task of "searching out for others."

So we marched from this church to the federal building every month for a year so that our friends from Micronesia could be eligible for Medicaid health insurance.

Hundreds of people marched and at last the law was changed and Medicaid is available to these long suffering friends.

We painted signs and organized and marched and testified at the legislature for affordable housing – before affordable housing was on the government's to-do list.

Scores of St Elizabeth's members showed up in support of the gospel of compassion, mercy and inclusion when that nationalistic anti-Christian movement headed by Franklin Graham came to our islands; and even more showed up to demand that the legislature ensure that the law permits everyone who wishes, to marry the person whom they love, irrespective of gender.

And, of course, there is the marvelous ministry of Wallyhouse.

A ministry that has washed countless loads of laundry, charged a myriad of devices for the houseless, feeds thousands of hungry bellies and whose members strive daily for justice and peace..

And usually, at least on our best days, all of this happens with a sense of compassion, dignity and love.

The Lino family began the Saturday morning breakfast by driving around and picking up the houseless so that they'd know there was a place to have a hot meal.

Those humble beginnings have grown to over 30 regular volunteers, not only members of the church, but friends from the neighborhood and other parts of our island – who not only prepare a meal – but who engage with those who are too often invisible in our community.

Seeing them as friends – and not as threats – or nobodies.

What's this have to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The simple fact is, this IS the gospel of Jesus Christ!

While some think of what we do as "social work", the work of this church — is gospel work.

And why is that?

Because the work of the gospel is to build up the kingdom of God — right here on earth.

That is the great commission that Jesus gives to us — and that is the great commission that we strive to take up every day here in Palama.

We have not always succeeded.

We have sometimes become impatient.

Sometimes angry.

Sometimes depressed.

But when those times have come, the Holy Spirit is quick to bring grace and refreshment and laughter, so that we can stand once again, and continue the journey.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks of this journey as the fulfillment of God's dream.

"I have a dream," God says.

'Please help Me to realize it.

It's a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, ... its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion...'

'I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family.'

And here's the thing.

Unlike our love affair with segregating and dividing and scoring people on their worthiness:

'In God's family, there are no outsiders.

Everyone's an insider.

Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew and Arab, Chuukese and Hawaiian, Roman Catholic and Protestant, ... Buddhist and Hindu, City-folk and farmer — **all belong...**" D. Tutu, *God Has A Dream*, 19, modified.

But how do we get there?

First, we have to take the journey of faith as seriously as we take our love affair with controlling people, places and things.

Today's readings give us a glimpse into that spiritual journey.

In the Older Testament, when the people take their gold rings and necklaces and earrings and teeth and melt them into an object of worship, what that story is really telling us is that the first step in spiritual development is that we worship the things we make ourselves.

In other words, the first god whom we adore is the god who looks just like us.

Which is a problem.

Because when we worship reflections of ourselves, be it the Pentagon or Wall Street or celebrities or anything in creation, we diminish ourselves.

Because we are made for so much more than that.

And the way out of that misdirected “worship of self”— is to reach out to one another.

Particularly to the least, the lost and the left behind.

Getting out of ourselves is the surest way of finding ourselves standing before the face of God.

That’s the point of the gospel lesson.

Go out!

Gather people!

Welcome them!

No matter who they are!

But in the process of that welcoming, **ask for the grace to be transformed.**

That's the point of the fellow who shows up without the wedding garment.

A faith that doesn't change us is a faith that is dead.

The wedding garment is a symbol for the life of a faith that changes us.

Scripture uses clothing as a metaphor for a life wrapped up in faith.

As St Paul encourages the Galatians to "put on the baptismal garment of Christ."

And the Colossians to "be clothed in compassion, kindness, mercy and patience."

It's why Isaiah speaks of God "clothing Israel with righteousness."

While St Peter urges us "to be clothed in humility."

It's a way of reminding us that a faith that doesn't change us — is no faith at all.

That faith, if it's alive, will change us.

And change we must if we wish to wear the wedding garment of the kingdom of God.

It is a garment sewn not with hands, but with hearts.

And there is this about that wedding garment.

It's a single piece of cloth, seamless.

It cannot be divided.

The seamless garment tells us something about who we are to be at the wedding feast of God, and who we are to become as we journey to that place.

We are to be seamless.

With one another.

And with God.

The student asks: "How are we to treat others?"

And the teacher replies:

"There are no others."

We are called to embrace a unity of spirit.

A sense that all people, all creation, and all that is uncreated, is intimately connected.

Interwoven.

Indeed, a seamless garment.

I know some of you worry about what's next for this place.

Please don't worry.

Just keep doing what you are doing: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the sick - and all shall be well!

"Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen ..., and the God of peace will be with you." Phil 4:9.

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