

"I am the vine, you are the branches; abide in me and you will bear much fruit." John 15:5

Vine & Branches

from St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, 720 N. King Street, Honolulu, HI 96817 • Phone (808) 845-2112

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The Right Reverend
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V Bishop of Hawaii

The Reverend
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Rector

The Reverend
Imelda S. Padasdao,
Priest Associate

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Cantonese Language Priest

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Letting Go

We human beings are endlessly creative when it comes to trying to figure stuff out in life.

That's often a wonderful thing about us, and accounts for much that is good and useful in our society, from medical cures to engineering designs that are functional and beautiful, to the deep thoughts expressed by our poets and philosophers.

But sometimes we can and do, overthink. And perhaps one of the most over thought moments in our common history is that moment in time in which Jesus enters Jerusalem with hosannas and palm wavers, soon to be followed by that sham of a trial, his torture and grotesque death on the cross.

Why did these things happen? And over the years, we've come up with all kinds of ideas. God, say some great thinkers, is like a king who has been dishonored by our sins, so we owe God a debt, a debt we can never repay, so God sends his son to pay the debt on our behalf.

Other great thinkers say Jesus died as a ransom for all of humanity. That the devil held us all in his grip, kidnapping us, in effect, and Jesus, in giving his life, paid the required ransom.

A more recent thinker says that God, through Jesus, in becoming the innocent scapegoat who dies for us, frees us from our obsession with seeking out and blaming scapegoats.

Something we've done forever: just think of all the despised people who are used to pit "us against them."

And so this great thinker says Jesus frees us from this mentality by shaming us into seeing that every scapegoat — is God. And while all of these ideas perhaps hold some truth, I wonder if something else is actually going on between Palm Sunday and Good Friday?

What if the parade of palms which ends on the cross is in fact the unfolding, the natural consequence, of what happened in the desert at the start of his ministry?

Remember those days, when the devil confronts Jesus with the temptations of power, fame and wealth?

"You're hungry, use your power to turn stone to bread." "One doesn't live only on bread, but on God's word." "Throw yourself off the high place, God will rescue you." "Don't tempt God." "Worship me and rule the world." "Worship only God."

Such were the temptations Jesus rejects in favor of an unwavering and complete surrender to God. But let's be very clear about one thing.

It's not that Jesus is a spiritual Rambo able to say no to the Temptations because of some inner strength..

Instead, just before his trip into the desert, he was baptized, just like you have been, and that voice spoke to him saying, "you are my son whom I love."



Those same words were spoken by God at your baptism, whether you remember hearing them or not. Jesus trusts that love, surrenders to the depths of that love, and that's what saves Jesus from the Temptations.

Because the parade of palms sets the stage for accepting power, fame and wealth as the way of salvation. You can hear the excitement, the anticipation: "At last our political leader, our warrior Messiah, is here!"

Just as we today, when we forget God's boundless love for us, put our faith in weapons of terrible destruction, in the economy, and of course, in Kim Kardashian.

Just like the desert days, here at the parade, Jesus is once again challenged to take the road of control as his last days approach; and that same challenge presents itself to us each and every day.

Power, fame and wealth IS the path to salvation in our world today. It's the air we breathe and the water we drink.

It's how a man like our current president becomes the leader of this nation, because of our enchantment with power, fame and wealth.

Yet, in these sacred days, Jesus rejects once again the false promise of power, fame, and wealth, and once more surrenders completely to the God who loves completely. Which is why he makes no defense at his trial. Which is why he understands the fear and trembling of his friends.

Which is why he forgives all of us for our complicity in his death. And make no mistake, we are complicit — every time we give ourselves over to power, fame or wealth in seeking our salvation.

And yet we are forgiven, because perhaps what Jesus hopes we shall see from our place of forgiveness is that the life of complete surrender to the God who loves us completely is the only life worth living, the only life that lasts.

We are in the midst of a pandemic. Life as we know it is upended. While economists used to tout the 200,000 jobs being created each month, we are now in a time when 6 million lose their job in a week.

In the midst of all of this loss of control, here we are, in Holy Week. And maybe for the first time in a long time, we can actually swallow the great truth that Jesus comes to bring.

That it's not about appeasing an angry God nor is it about paying a ransom to the devil.

The great truth Jesus brings is that surrender, letting go, letting be, is the gateway to true life.

Fr Richard Rohr puts it this way:

"Learning that we are not in control is the truth of our situation. Finding peace in this world means coming to accept that we're not steering the ship. That truth is the bedrock of each and every religion.

Mystics know they are being guided, and their willingness to float on the breeze of that guidance is precisely what allows their spiritual journey to take flight.

We cannot understand the joy, the release, that comes with surrender to this God of all consuming love — unless we try it — and experience first hand the delicious freedom that surrender gives to those willing to trust." Meditations 4/2/20, modified.

We are living in days when the invitation to surrender has never been more obvious, or necessary, yet very frightening indeed.

If we give in to the fear, and retreat to our old habits of insisting upon being in control, then all that awaits us is disappointment, frustration and anger.

But if we accept this invitation to surrender, to let what is be, to trust that all shall be well, then, we shall stand at the entry way to the life that really is life.

A life which we most of us can only catch a glimpse of, because so much in our society tells us to take charge, to be the master of our own fate, to do it "my way!"

Coming to see that these are simply lies and illusions can be, and often is, a painful awakening.

"For many of us, this pandemic may be the first time in our lives that we have felt so little control over our own destiny and the destiny of those we love.

It may feel like a humiliating loss, a stepping backward, an unwanted vulnerability.

Yet, accepting our lack of control is the starting point for any serious spiritual walk toward wisdom and truth." Id.

What Jesus does today is to walk the walk of letting go, under the most horrific circumstances. Yet that walk leads not to obliteration, it leads to resurrection!

Because it is a walk straight into the loving arms of the Lover who makes all things, who brings life out of every death. Including yours. Including mine.

In these difficult days, may you find the desire to follow the way of Jesus.

May you find in your own letting go — the joy and peace that only God can give.

+amen

Holy Week at St. Elizabeth's!

Maundy Thursday 6 p.m.

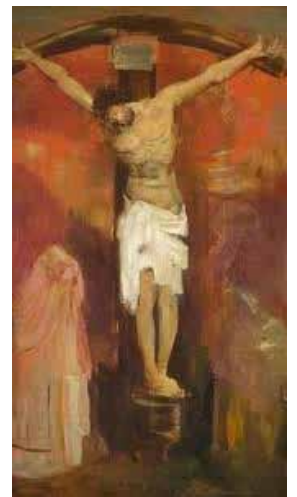
Go to www.stelizabeth720.org and click on

Facebook or Zoom — or call in on your phone: 1-669-900-6833. Then enter this Meeting ID: 236 815 485



Good Friday Noon and 6 p.m.

Go to www.stelizabeth720.org and click on Facebook or Zoom — or call in on your phone: 1-669-900-6833. Then enter this Meeting ID: 236 815 485



Easter Sunday 9 a.m.

Go to www.stelizabeth720.org and click on Facebook or Zoom — or call in on your phone: 1-669-900-6833. Then enter this Meeting ID: 236 815 485



"See" you then!

Notes from the Catholic Workers

During the coronavirus lock-down, we at Wallyhouse have limited our services to those we can offer without having our guests enter our yard or house. This means that we have temporarily discontinued such services as hot showers, the open art studio, clarification of thought dinners, hanging out on the patio and laundry. But we have devised a relatively safe system of serving people at the gate, instead of at the door. Our gate ministry provides daily grocery bags, a weekly take-out hot lunch, device charging, mail pick up, basic first aid, hygiene and feminine products, and emergency clothing.



To accomplish our gate service, Monday thru Saturday, we have one person sit on the porch to remind our guests not to enter through the gate but to remain on the other side of the chain link fence. From this position, one of us interviews the guest to assess needs, complete the requisite government forms for food distribution, including signing, so that the clipboard and pen are not shared. A second member of the community serves as a runner to deliver what is needed. We have set a 36" square table just outside the gate where items are collected or distributed. If a person has devices, they are set on the table for the runner to collect. At the same time, a prepared food bag is brought out and set on the table while the guest stands away from the table. Once the runner has returned into the porch area, the guest steps up to collect the food bag or other needed items. This system allows for consistent safe distancing and the runner can use gloves and hand wash with ease. The yard is large enough for guests to stand six feet apart when there is a line.

We have found some surprise gifts along the way. Our numbers of guests have increased dramatically, some days we see a 100 guests! But, of necessity, we have also lost most of our volunteers. The work of the house now falls mostly into the hands of the three live-in volunteers. Opportune is that while we are practicing physically distancing from our guests, we have found a new social comradery with them. Instead of having people complete the forms for food where there is little verbal exchange, the present interview system has heightened communication. We are learning names before unknown and sharing simple stories to make the data collection more affable. Former and new volunteers are baking, sewing and even shopping to provide fresh food, masks and needed products so that we can serve our local vulnerable population of poor and houseless people. Our recently completed peace garden cannot be used by the community at this moment, but we have an abundance of produce that we can distribute at the gate. The ministry is alive and well, it has us on edge with challenges but also filled with gratitude for the many gifts we are receiving.