

"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

Weekly Edition
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V Bishop of Hawaii

The Reverend
David J. Gierlach
Rector

The Reverend
Imelda S. Padasdao,
Priest Associate

The Reverend Peter S. M. Fan,
Cantonese Language Priest

Fr. Mafi Vakameilalo,
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Organist

Bill Slocumb
Parish Administrator

Cathy Lowenberg
Senior Warden

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Junior Warden

Leyna Higuchi
Secretary

Caren Chun-Esaki
Treasurer

www.stelizabeth720.org
stelizabethhawaii@gmail.com

Becoming Jesus

Yes, it's been a momentous week. The results of the election have driven some of us to joy and others to despair.

But no matter your feelings about these results, today's gospel lesson is a flare shot into the night sky, a clarion call to sit up and pay attention to what matters most of all.

How many of us have said, or heard others say, usually in jest, but with always a hint of the serious:

"I'm really glad so and so is in my life! They'll pull me into heaven!" But as we near the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus whips out a parable that ought to give everyone pause.

Because we know that parables are sticks of dynamite, wrapped in a story, we won't get fooled by the surface of things. Today's parable isn't about sharing with others.

It isn't even about the wisdom of proper planning, except in a very particular way. No, this is a parable about what it actually means to be a Christian. And it's NOT about hollering out the name of Jesus.

Nor is it about Jesus bumperstickers or claiming Jesus as one's Lord and Savior. It's not about any of that outside stuff at all.

What Jesus seems to be begging us to see is that the Christian life is a life-long project of seeking to become like Jesus himself.

As we say around here, we aren't called to worship Jesus, we're called to follow him. Today, he takes it one step further. We are called to become him.

Isn't that the meaning of the oil in today's story? It's why those with the extra oil cannot share what they have.

You can't give someone metanoia — that willingness to enter into "the larger mind of God." You can't give someone faith.

You can't give someone the capacity to love. All of these can only occur through the personal transformation that we each of us are called to undertake.

And I'll bet you dollars to donuts that if we don't do the work in this life, we're gonna have to do it in the next life!

So, we might as well get to it today, eh? Now, maybe you think I'm all wet in thinking that this is a parable inviting us to become Jesus.

So let's look closely. Perhaps you might come to agree. It was Issac of Nineveh who observed: "There is a love like a small lamp, fed by oil, which goes out when the oil is ended.

Or like a rain fed stream which goes dry, when rain no longer feeds it. But there is a love, like a spring gushing from the earth, never to be exhausted."

As John Shea says: "The wise virgins are in touch with this, the inexhaustible river. So the oil is always replenished — rather than consumed." Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels*, 315.

And that's the significance of the foolish ones who try to "go out and buy" more oil. That phrase shows up elsewhere, and with a similar meaning. When Jesus is about to feed the multitudes, his disciples at first object, telling Jesus to have the crowd "go out and buy" food for themselves. Mk. 6:36.



The urge to “go out and buy” is to look outside of oneself for what one needs.

That’s why Jesus replies: “you feed them.” Just so, as Jesus has his encounter with the Samaritan woman, the one in which he offers her the Living Water that never runs dry.

He has this conversation while his disciples have “gone out to buy” food in the village.

After they return and see this strange encounter between Jesus and the woman, they implore him to eat, and he brushes them off, saying, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”

Our task in this life is to engage in the journey that takes us out of ourselves, to the food, and into the Living Water, that Jesus provides.

By surrendering our egos. Our hurts. Our obsessions. Our justified angers. As we learn to walk this new path of self-giving love.

A path that trusts utterly in the constant nearer presence of this God who consumes our lives — so that our lives may enter into, and become one with, God’s life.

This is how we become Jesus. That’s what St Paul comes to see when he cries out: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me!” Ga. 2:20.

As Jesus himself says: “The person who trusts me will not only do what I’m doing but even greater things, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I’ve been doing.” Jn 14:12.

And Jesus goes even further when he prays: “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us...” Jn. 17:21.

This transformation from being “creatures made in the image of God” to “creatures whose destiny is unity with God” — is our most fundamental calling in life.

It’s a calling that is recognized by all mystics, and it’s a calling offered to all people. But here’s the rub, it’s a journey we each of us need to make alone.

Gandhi said: “My life is my message.” St Francis said: “Preach the gospel always. When necessary, use words.”

Martin Luther said: “You’re going to die alone, you better believe alone.”

My AA friends say: “Walk the talk.” And Jesus, this time from the Gospel of Thomas, says: “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person...” Logion 108. Shea at 317, modified.

Don’t get me wrong! I remember clearly the day young Aiden walked into the church, took one look at me all dressed up in my robes, and yelled out: “There’s God!” This isn’t about getting a big head and strutting around bragging that “hey look at me, I’m Jesus!”

No! Always there is a tension between we who are created — and Jesus who is the judge of all creation.

And yet, our destiny is unity with God — a fullness that is taken up and grafted onto the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Isn’t that what it means to be “the body of Christ?” This destiny awaits us when we learn to see in the eyes of the least and the lost and the left behind, the face of Jesus.

And when we learn to see, through self-giving love, and humble service, and brutal honesty with our own defects of character, that we too are among the least and the lost and the left behind.

That’s why the five foolish bridesmaids can’t get into the party. They haven’t undergone the transformation that allows them to see that “the door only opens when they can open it for themselves.” Shea, 316, modified.

That’s why the picture hanging in many of our homes of Jesus knocking at the door has a detail most folks overlook.

If you look closely, the door handle isn’t on the side where Jesus is knocking.

It’s where we are! Where we live. Only you, only I, can open the door. “A man knocks on a door.

The voice within says: ‘Who is it?’ The man says: ‘I’m your neighbor.’ “No one’s home,” comes the response. The man wanders for a year, returns to the door, and knocks again. ‘Who is it?’

‘I’m your brother.’ The voice answers, “There’s no one here.’ The man wanders for another year, returns to the door, and knocks again.

‘Who is it?’ The man replies: ‘I am you.’ The door opens.” Shea, modified, 317.

Jesus won’t know us until he sees his own face reflected in ours. Isn’t that the hard, yet joyfully hopeful, lesson of today’s gospel? And if it is, are we ready to change? +amen



COMING UP

PRETTY SURE we are all looking forward to saying goodbye (and good riddance!) to 2020...

Here's what's coming up (and not) in the weeks ahead:

1. **Thanksgiving.** Sadly, due to COVID social distancing and gathering needs, we will **not** be doing our annual Thanksgiving meals on wheels. BUT, Mel and Mosese will do so from their home. If you'd like to support them with turkeys or fixings please give us a call at the church and we'll coordinate.
2. **Advent.** Advent marks the new church year and begins November 29. We **will** have an Advent Wreath (hint hint altar guild...) but no young ones to light it or share readings.
3. **Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.** Both services will happen, live and virtually, 9 PM for the Eve and 9 AM for the day, with most attending virtually. We are working with our splendid choir director to see if pre-taped videos of our choirs is workable. Also trying to figure out how to get incense into everyones homes.

.....This too shall pass.....

Oregano

Back in January of 2020, if any of us can remember that pre-pandemic world, we completed our peace garden. The raised beds were filled with dark, rich composted dirt from Hawaiian Earth Recycling and ready for planting. Our dear friend, Gigi Cocquio, founder and caretaker of the Hoa `Aina O Makaha Farm brought us our first plantings which were cuttings from his farm. He brought lemon grass, Ti, and oregano. I did not recognize the appearance of the oregano because it was a succulent but its scent was distinctive.



What is this? I asked Gigi. And he confirmed that it was indeed oregano. Curious I googled "succulent oregano" and found that it is actually called Cuban oregano or Mexican mint. Not a true herb of the oreganum family but from the mints, it is used just like oregano, which is especially common in Italian style cooking.

Fond of pasta, this was great, I thought, and planted it in our first raised bed just outside our kitchen window.

We tended and watered the oregano until it grew to overabundance. It was definitely time to harvest and share the produce with our guests at the door. We cut the oregano into manageable pieces, put them in a large bowl and set them out on our contact-free serving table that sits just outside our front gate. A few of our guests were pleased to take this unique oregano, others were curious, and then a group of Filipino women arrived who knew exactly what it was.

Oh, this is a wonderful medicinal herb! one exclaimed. It is really good for coughs and congestion. I am so happy to have some. Another explained that they make juice from it and then use it for its medicinal purposes. The succulent property gives it moisture good for juicing. Those ladies took nearly every bit we had to offer and were happy as can be as they proceeded back to their car.

This story speaks to some of the joy we experience as Catholic Workers. We live in voluntary poverty and rely on donations from others to make our work possible. A plant was donated for our garden which gave produce that we in turn could donate, which in turn stimulated the recipients to share their pleasure and knowledge. We as workers, instead of poor, become rich in goods, knowledge and others' joy.

Not too much later, another woman came, saw what little was left of the oregano and asked to have it. This is good medicine, she chimed. Good to keep the flies away.

