

"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
September 23,
2020

The Right Reverend
Robert L. Fitzpatrick
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,
Priest Associate

The Reverend Deacon
Viliani Langi, Deacon

Hsiao Ying "Ajaon" Chen
Choir Director

Marie Wang
Organist

Bill Slocumb
Parish Administrator

Cathy Lowenberg
Senior Warden

Charles Steffey
Junior Warden

Leyna Higuchi
Secretary

www.stelizabeth720.org
stelizabethhawaii@gmail.com

The Kingdom Is Like...

Perhaps the most common spin we put on today's parable is "it's never too late to get saved."

Whether you show up at the beginning of the day or the end, in your childhood or old age, God is always waiting for you, always ready for you.

We've all seen those movie scenes where the really bad guy is taking his last breaths and the priest hears his confession just at the last minute, ensuring that Mr Nogoodnick is now on the right side of God.

Which is all fine and dandy, as far as it goes. But, truth be told, it doesn't go very far at all. Because this take on the parable is all about a very private "me and you Jesus" sense of our relationship with the Creator of all things.

But Jesus wasn't fixated on this whole "personal relationship" idea. That's a pretty modern invention. Instead, Jesus seems intent on asking us to take a hard look at how we as a community treat each other, here and now.

Because the way we treat each other here apparently has a huge impact on how we'll feel about God's kingdom, in the age to come.

So this parable can really be seen from two points of view. First, through the eyes of Jesus the itinerant Galilean prophet. Second, through the eyes of the Cosmic Christ; the Word of God, in whom all things hold together.

It's a parable that's very down to earth, and it's a parable with cosmic implications. Let's begin "down to earth."

Which begins with a warning. A warning not to take these parables at face value. Because, as Clarence Jordan says: "A parable is a stick of dynamite, wrapped in a story." Paraphrased. So what might this latest stick of dynamite be saying about how we run our economy today?

To be sure, we are a society that worships "me!" Do you know how many people fall off cliffs each year — taking selfies?!

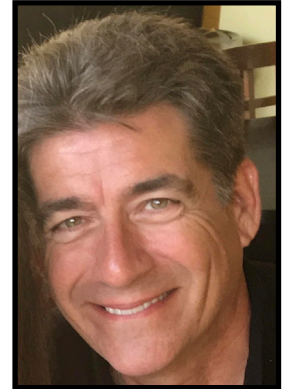
But we also worship "more" — as in, I can never have "enough!" Just look at the pay rates for big bosses and the pay rates for the ordinary Joe and Jane.

For example, "chief executives at large companies make roughly \$278 for every \$1 a typical worker earns — that's up from a ratio of \$20-to-1 back in 1965 and a ratio of \$58-to-1 in 1989." CBS News, 8/14/19.

The consequences of this monstrous disparity sees a vast swath of the country now underemployed and underpaid, leading to envy and resentment, creating the breeding ground for the politics of fear and hate.

As the economic impact of this pandemic spreads, facing up to these gross inequities may have finally reached a flashpoint. Yet sadly, those most impacted by this disparity usually focus not on the wealthy few who pad their own nest with unimaginable wealth, but on their fellow victims, who may be of a different ethnicity or religion or race.

Which is fine and dandy for the guys at the top (and they are almost always "guys"), since as long as we're fighting with each other, the bigwigs have nothing to fear.



So the first stick of dynamite Jesus lights today seems to be aimed directly at the rich and privileged folks of his day, and ours.

Rather than thinking of the landowner as a stand-in for God, what if he is simply a landowner, who has more than enough?

And he sees to it that everyone who works for him also has enough, whether they work all day or just for an hour.

What might our society look like if we insisted that everyone be provided with enough?

What might things look like if everyone is guaranteed a minimum livable income?

These, I think, may be questions Jesus asks us to wrestle with in this society of ours, that tends to see wealth as something the individual owns, and is entitled to, forgetting that God owns this world.

We so easily forget that we are merely trustees of the wealth that comes our way.

We're expected to use it for the benefit of others. Because at the end of the day, it all belongs to God. Jesus isn't asking us to wrestle with this because it's an interesting intellectual exercise or a lovely question of philosophy.

Listen to how the parable begins: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a householder who went out early to hire laborers..."

He's telling us what God's kingdom is like. And it's got nothing to do with fancy celestial condos or endless rounds of heavenly golf.

God's kingdom is like this fellow! This generous fellow, going out to hire workers.

Meaning, if you want to live happily in God's kingdom, you gotta start thinking how they think in God's kingdom!

Just like last week's parable where the fellow forgiven a bazillion dollars ends up in the clink.

NOT because God put him there, but because he put himself there!

By rejecting generosity and insisting on bean counting, our poor fellow last week made a real mess of things.

If you can't learn to love this upside down way of God's hilarious grace, if you insist that beans must be counted and scores settled, that everyone gets their just desserts, well, where are you going to end up?

You'll end up like the first hired hands in today's parable, who stomp away from the generous master — steaming mad. Why?

Because they refuse to see the world and their fellow human beings through the eyes of the compassionate landowner.

If we hope to one day live within the kingdom of God, we need to practice kingdom thinking! And kingdom living! Here and now!

Or when the time comes and the invitation is made, those who haven't made the shift will most likely take a peek inside heaven's gates — and see only hell.

For me, that's the "Jesus" take on today's parable. But what about this parable from the "Cosmic Christ" point of view?

Every time I sit here and preach, I'm facing our gorgeous stained glass at the back of the church.

By serendipity, it's reflected in this plexiglas, so you can see it too!

It bears the symbols of all the world's major religions. For some of us, it means we welcome people of all religious traditions to worship here.

For others, it means we're all invited to dive deeply into the mystery of Christ.

This Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being. This Christ, who is the second person of the Trinity.

This Christ, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. And when we go there, this beautiful stained glass reminds me that all faiths, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Taoist and so on, all theists and all atheists, all animists and Shamans and Wiccans; that all of creation is on the road to Christ, who came that the world might have life.

Who, when he is lifted up on the cross, drags the whole world to himself!

Seen cosmically, the parable today is about the folly of religious wars

and fights and claims of superiority, as God, like the landowner, calls all humanity home.

If we are the beloved of God, it's not because of what we have done, it is because of what God does for us — in Christ.

Look into the night sky with its' trillions of stars, its' billions of galaxies, and wonder.

If this stunning magnificence is the Creator's gift — then what might the Creator be like?

Like nothing we can imagine. Like nothing we can imagine.

Perhaps today, the good news is we can forget about deserving the good things God has in store for us.

We can forget about deciding who's early and who's late.

And smile at the pure graciousness of this loving God.

Who frees us.

Not because we are good.

But because God is good.

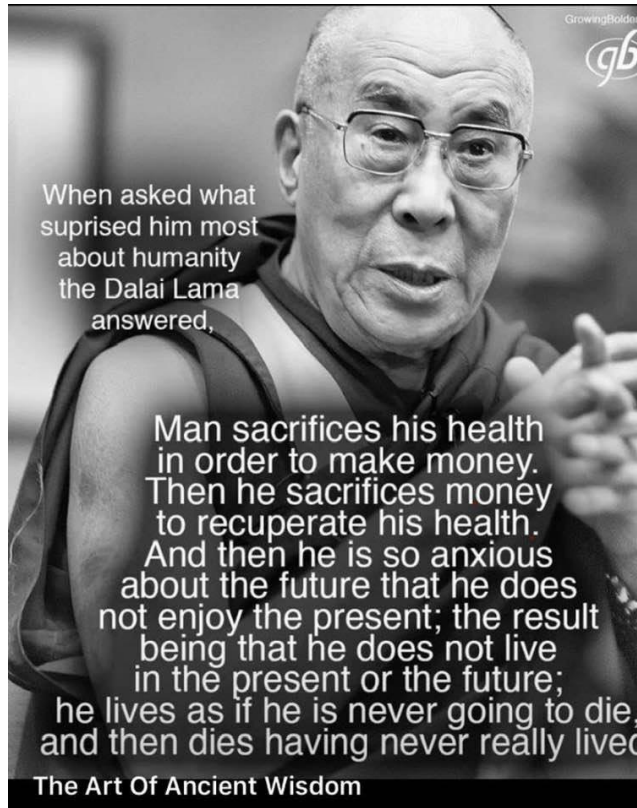
+amen



The mahvalous **grandsons of Anna Langi** gave heart and soul Saturday morning packing groceries for the many many (many!) needy families on our island. As the only food pantry open daily between Waipahu and Diamond Head, we see long lines alllll day long. **Thanks guys so very much!!**



And because the food pantry is so busy, supervisors **Miss Angelica** and her new pal **Bobo** are just wiped out!!!!!!



On St. Francis and a way to Live



We are currently in **Francistide**, or the feast days that focus on the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Francistide runs from September 17, the feast date that celebrates the impression of the 5 wounds of Christ onto the body of St. Francis, until October 4, the feast of St. Francis, commonly known to many as the date when we bless our pets. But St. Francis has far more to teach us than to be lovers of animals—as good as that is. Indeed, he shows us **a powerful way to live** during this time of pandemic and isolation.

Francis spent little time in community or in church buildings. He was a mendicant, someone who traveled outside of religious activities to follow Jesus as closely as anyone ever has. Francis took delight in the small and the ordinary, such as a flower, a donated crumb of bread, or even a slimy worm, because **that is where he found God**. All of creation was Francis's cathedral. All the world and what happens in it, is a potential revealer of God and God's love if we but choose to deliberately see God at work always and everywhere.

Every Sunday, during our virtual morning worship, in the absence of taking holy communion, we pray:

We thank you, Blessed Jesus, for the **Bread of Heaven**, and the **Cup of Salvation**; and for your Body made flesh in us.

The Carmelite nun, St. Teresa of Avila (d. 1582), who happened to die on October 4, the feast of St. Francis, understood what Your Body made flesh in us means: "Christ has no body now **but yours**. No hands, no feet on earth **but yours**. **Yours** are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. **Yours** are the hands through which he blesses all the world. **Yours** are the hands, **yours** are the feet, **yours** are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but **yours**."

The Body of Jesus is us! Francis got this. And we can too. Franciscan friar Richard Rohr observes that Jesus never said, "worship me." He said, "**Follow me**." Every time we choose to respond with kindness to our loved one whose ongoing presence is yanking at our irritation nerve, we follow Jesus. Every time we happily choose to wear our mask to protect others from our germie-ness, we follow Jesus. Every time we are content to stay home instead of going to that enticing gathering, we follow Jesus. Every time we patiently sit with a child and struggle to help teach the current school assignment, we follow Jesus. It is so simple it is hard: instead of climbing ladders of success, recognition, having, we choose not to get on the ladder. We find contentment and adoration in the mundane, ordinary things of daily life.

This is a time of being, as St. Paul said, hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3). And yet, in our simple ways of following and of finding God in the ordinary, in our choosing to be where we are, because that is how we care for our selves, our families and others, we reveal **the Body made flesh in us**. And when we do come back together for communal worship, our Body will be stronger, more vigorous. We will indeed have cause to worship the One who showed us **the Way to be in the world**.

