"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
March 22, 2023

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

Hsiao Ying "Ajaon" Chen
Choir Director

Bill Slocumb
Parish Administrator

———

Cathy Lowenberg
Senior Warden

Charles Steffey
Junior Warden

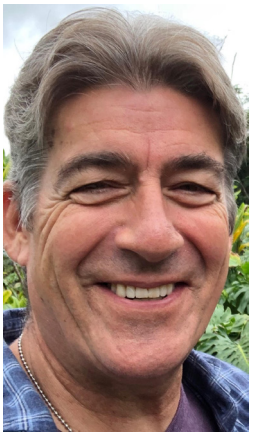
Darsha Lee
Secretary

Tricia Castro
Treasurer

www.stelizabeth720.org

stelizabethhawaii
@gmail.com

Eyes and Ideology



As a news junkie, I've been watching the Tucker Carlson saga unfold these last few weeks.

As you may know, Mr. Carlson was given exclusive access to some 14,000 hours of Capitol Hill video taken around the time of the January 6 insurrection. And lo and behold, there was no insurrection! Just tourists on a day trip!

Even though you and I watched an insurrection unfold in real time. Rather than show footage of the actual assault on the Capitol, he spends his time showing snippets of video that purport to show nothing actually askance.

The message he's giving to his loyal followers is: "Don't believe what your eyes see, believe what your ideology tells you!"

I had a similar encounter this past week with the folks who look after my retirement fund. As you know, some mid-sized banks failed, spooking the financial markets.

They failed because they started to gamble with depositors' funds on risky investments. They failed because the strict regulations put in place after the calamity of 2008/9, which prevented that very kind of gambling, were rolled back on these mid-sized banks a few years ago.

Yet, much to my chagrin, the folks who manage my portfolio, while spooked by the crashing banks, are at the same time adamant that the worst thing that can happen is if those mid-sized banks are again strictly regulated.

Don't believe your eyes, believe your ideology. And I'm quite sure my conservative friends can point to an equal number of cases where folks in my political camp trade in what our eyes plainly see for what we choose to believe.

It's just that my own ideology blinds me to those things. I share these stories with you as a rather long-winded introduction to what today's gospel is getting at.

It is this: our human condition of collective blindness. It's the trap that the Pharisees find themselves in this morning.

A man born blind from birth is miraculously healed, but rather than rejoice, the Pharisees are stuck with their legal blinders on. Since it's the sabbath, no work can be done. Not even God's work.

So that even if God's work heals a man, if it happens on the sabbath, it can't be God's work. "We know what's true and we're not going to let what we see with our own eyes change that!"

Don't believe your eyes, believe your ideology. So let's take a stroll through today's long Gospel story and discover what new sights we may see.

Ironically, one of the biggest criticisms about Christianity by modern, scientific, sophisticated folks has to do with the miracles that Jesus performs.

None more so than restoring the sight of a man born blind. We modern folks tend to pooh-pooh such tales as ancient magic or the superstitions of a gullible people. And yet, as with all things Jesus, we frequently miss the point.

Especially when it comes to the miracle stories. Especially when it comes to the blind being able to see.

Today's gospel, like last week's, is a long story! Some may wish we did some editing and summarizing rather than plow through the whole thing!

But we plow through because, just like last week's beautiful story of the Samaritan woman, today's story is full of priceless jewels, if only we walk slowly enough to spot them. Because while on its surface this is a story of a blind man cured, in fact, it's actually the story of those who think they can see, yet who are in fact truly blind.

So the irony of us pooh-poohing this miracle story is that the real miracle that Jesus pulls off isn't so much restoring the physical ability to see.

It's that he takes blind folks like us:

-blind to the wonder of creation

-blind to the interconnection between the sacred and the ordinary

-blind to the unfolding of God's kingdom on this good earth

-and slowly helps us begin to see.

Like that other blind man cured in a different gospel, we at first see only through eyes still being formed, so that what we see is often fuzzy and out of focus.

But if we hang in there with Jesus, our vision slowly improves, and then the real miracles begin to happen.

We begin to see that salvation is not a reward for following the rules.

Salvation is the consequence of changing our consciousness.

That change comes from Metanoia: entering into the larger mind of God.

And when we begin that journey, things begin to change. Harsh judgments that I used to consume myself with, against others and myself, begin to drop away.

Anxiety and fear that used to run my life slowly becomes nothing more than barely audible background noise.

And as a consequence, how I now come to see others changes as well.

Like that smelly bum hanging out at the street corner. If you see him through the eyes that Jesus opens up, why, lo and behold, that supposed bum turns out to be Our Lord himself, standing in our midst!

Those rascally children running around the church? They are angels in disguise!

And this world, with all of it's frustrations and foibles, with all of its pain and confusion, is the very place where God is even now scattering the seeds of God's own kingdom. So when life throws its slings and arrows our way, like banking catastrophes or insurrections or election denials, in our blindness we often greet such things with anger, resentment, self-pity or fear.

But with Jesus-healed eyes, we begin to see these same challenges as soul-shaping gifts.

Gifts intended to change us into more human beings.

Gifts intended to change us into people who, because we know something about suffering, can extend mercy and compassion and kindness to others.

So that when we feel life is spinning out of control, when in our desperation we seek to hold on tight to life as we think it ought to be, as our ideologies tell us it must be; when we put on Jesushealed eyes, it's possible to let all of that go.

It's possible to then move and dance and sing with the wild wind that is God's Spirit — letting her take us where she will.

This journey from blindness to sight is a journey from unbelief to belief.

Then from belief to faith. Then from faith to a new consciousness about the very nature of reality.

A life of unbelief just sees the obvious: we live in a dog eat dog world — and we better learn how to bite!

But belief comes to see beyond the obvious. Even if it's just a hint that life must be more than "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

Faith begins to put meat on the bones of belief, as we actually try to start living differently.

More generously. More intuitively. In the flow. And that's when we notice the often slow awakening of a new consciousness.

As we explore the borders of the mind of God. One that peeks out from behind the curtain of what my preconceptions and prejudices say is true — into the profound mysteries of what is actually true.

The poet puts it like this: "If the eyes of perception were cleansed, we would see things as they are — infinite." -Blake.

He expands on this thought in another place, where he urges those with eyes: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, And Eternity in an hour." Id.

Perhaps during these days when the uncertainty of daily life screams from every headline, perhaps now is the time to sit for awhile, and ask for the grace to really see.

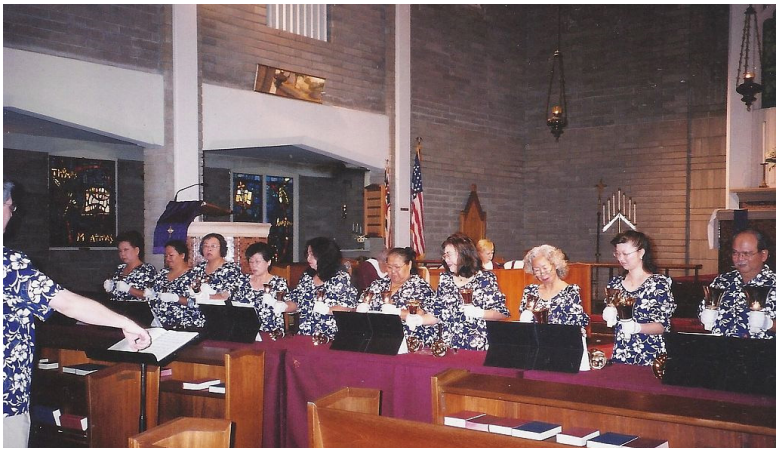
To exchange our ideology for Jesus eyes. Then ask for the humility to be open to this gracious Creator.

Because "once you were darkness, but now in the Lord — you are light."

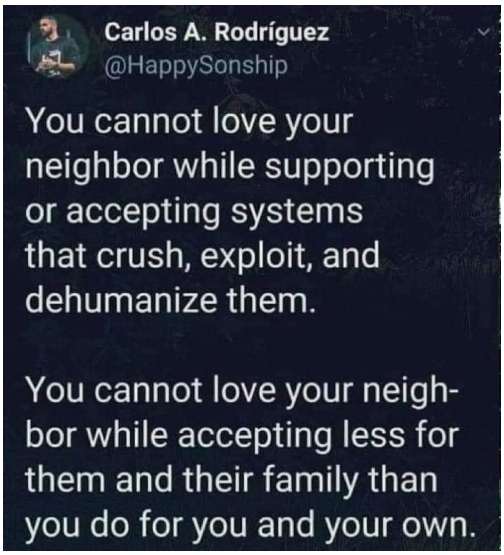
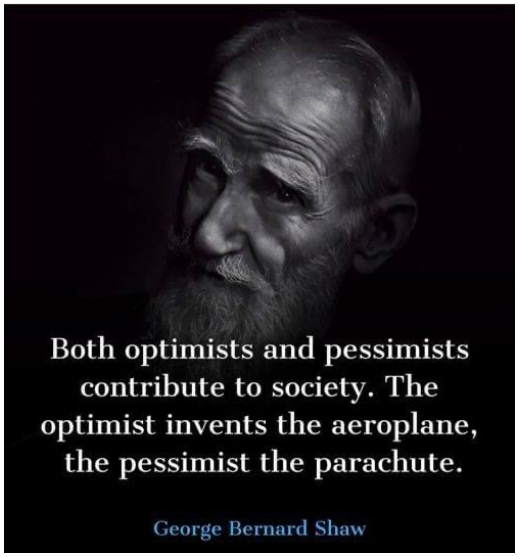
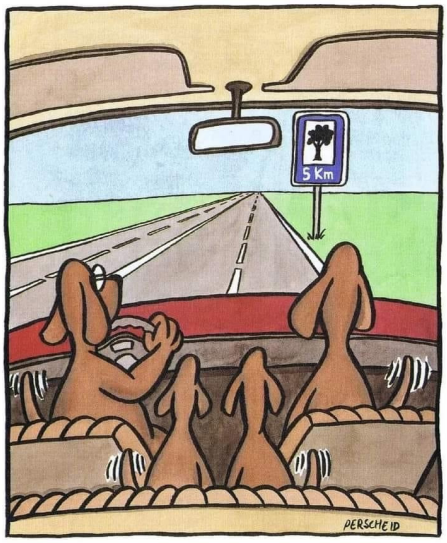
+amen

WHAT'S HAPPENING??????????

As **Miss Sue** and **Lisa-Anne** were cleaning out the Sunday School time capsule, look what they found! Some blasts from the pasts here at St E's!!!!!!



Meanwhile, the **Saturday Saints** arose in the wee hours to feed hungry bellies, to crack a few eggs and even more jokes, and enjoy a rousing good time!!!!!

As our youngsters gather around the Lenten wreath recalling the reasons..... we remember the season.....

QUOTABLE QUOTES FROM NOTABLE FOLKS