



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – Second Sunday in Easter, April 23, 2017

The Reverend Canon R. K. “Moki” Hino,

I have a beautiful opihi pendant. My grandmother’s brother, my Uncle Toki, sat in front of the TV for hours in the 1970s and polished and polished it until its rough barnacles wore away and its rich colors emerged from the depth of the shell’s being. I got it when he died in 1985. I often wondered where and how Uncle Toki got such a large shell. I was used to seeing smaller ones that my grandmother and grandfather would shuck at our dining room table when they’d buy them from kids who’d gone down to Haina to pick them off the rocks. Opihi have a hard, ridged, circular shell that live on rocks that they clamp down on, remaining safely attached in the rough surf where they thrive on the algae for which they forage, moving slowly across the treacherous rocks, clamping down on one spot, feeding, and then moving on and clamping down on another spot. My polished shell from Uncle Toki is big and so it must’ve had a good and long life.

Many people in Hawai‘i lose their lives picking opihi. It’s a dangerous job. You need sure footing, a strong grip, watchful eyes, and a really good knife, being ever mindful of the water that can sweep you off the rocks without warning and take you out to sea. And it’s impossible to pick opihi with your bare hands. They clamp down extra hard on the rocks when threatened and will let themselves be killed rather than let go. If you want to pick opihi, you’ll have to take them where they’re at.

The opihi reminds me of Thomas in today’s gospel reading. For like the teenaged boys from Haina who take the opihi where they’re at, Jesus takes Thomas where’s he at – clamped down on the rock of doubt to which he tenaciously clings.

Jesus is patient and Jesus is persistent as he leads Thomas to believe in that closed up house in Jerusalem – in that closed up house in Jerusalem where Jesus enters the room and says, “Peace be with you,” and then he shows the disciples his hands and his side. The disciples see Jesus and they believe.

They believe and they are thrust into a realm that transcends their Good Friday grief, their Good Friday despair, and their Good Friday hopelessness. They are thrust into a realm where they find an unexpected Easter joy. The impossibility of the Christ hanging before them on Good Friday becomes the Holy Possible – alive and in their midst. They see. They believe. It’s where they’re at.

Thomas, on the other hand, needs a little more guidance, a little more coaxing. He says, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” And Jesus says, “Okay, go ahead.”

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He doesn't condemn Thomas. He doesn't deride him. He doesn't scold him. He doesn't get frustrated. He gently guides him along the way, saying, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." And Thomas does believe. Jesus takes him where he's at.

And I think that's true for all of us as. I know, because I listen to your stories. Some of us, like our bishop, are baptized as adults. Some of us are here because we come with our parents and grandparents. Some of us are here because we're invited by friends. Some of us are baptized into the fold as infants. Some of us come from other denominations because we feel more at home here. Some of us enter the doors because we're grieving the loss of a loved one. Some of us come because we want to get married. Some of us come because we're hungry. We come. And then we come to believe. God takes us where we're at.

That's certainly true for me. Even though I was baptized into the Episcopal Church as an infant, I didn't become an active church member until I was 30 years old – when I was an opihī looking for a rock – no sense of groundedness, no sense of community, no sense of who I was. I just wanted to belong. It's where I was at – and God took me right there where I was at during a Eucharist with the kids in the Episcopal school where I was a third grade teacher. My little third graders walked with me to the altar rail and showed me what to do so that I could take communion for the first time. And I'll never forget that moment.

I followed my third graders up to the rail – and I was one person. Then I took in the body and blood of Christ, and I walked back to my pew – and I was a completely different person. Something happened. It was instant. It's what they call an ontological change. I became a different person, down to my core, down to my DNA, down to my na`au, as the Hawaiians say.

All of a sudden, in that small chapel with those little kids, I was grounded. I had a community. I was part of the fold. I belonged. And it set something in motion – and today I stand before you as a priest. Things that are impossible suddenly become the Holy Possible – groundedness, community, belonging, being part of the fold, the priesthood. The opihī finds his rock. God takes me where I'm at.

Where are you at? Are you baptized as an adult? Are you baptized as an infant? Are you at the Eucharist because you come with your parents and grandparents? Are you here because your friends invite you? Are you from another denomination? Are you grieving? Are you wanting to get married? Are you hungry? Where are you at? Are you a disciple in that closed up house that first Easter? Are you Thomas who doubts, and Jesus guides along? Where are you at? Are you flawed? Do you make mistakes? Do you ever fall short? Do you have doubts?

Whatever your answer may be, I ask you to remember one important thing. You and I are good enough in the eyes of God, right here and right now, right where we're at, whatever kind of opihī we are, with whatever kind of shell and on whatever kind of rock – with our flaws, with our faults, with our imperfections, and with our yearning and our longing and our desire simply to believe and see the truth we know in the Risen Christ this Eastertide. God takes us where we're at.