



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

**Sermon: Year A – 5 Epiphany – February 5, 2017**

**The Reverend Canon R. K. “Moki” Hino**

*You are the salt of the earth.*

Whenever I hear this line from the Gospel, my mind immediately goes back to the Island of Kaua’i and my first trip there in the early 1990s with my grandmother and my grandfather.

I think back fondly to that first trip. And what I remember most about being on Kaua’i for the first time was going out to Port Allen to see the streetlights; and then going for a picnic dinner with the Taniguchis (Uncle Baker and Auntie Kazue) at a beach near Hanapepe. They gave us directions and my grandfather drove off the main highway and toward the water where I saw a large dirt field with white powder on the ground. I asked my grandfather, “What’s that?”

“Salt ponds,” was the curt reply I got from him – like I should have known better than to ask a question with such an obvious answer. So we continued on toward the beach, got out of the car, watched the sunset, and ate kim chee, musubi, and huli huli chicken with the Taniguchis. And that was it.

I’d pretty much forgotten about the salt ponds until many years later when I walked into a shop in Maui where the owner knew I was a priest. “Kahu,” she said, “I have something for you. All the kahus on Maui ask me for this. Let me give you some.” And she reached behind the cash register and pulled out a big one-gallon plastic bin with red crystals inside. “This is special stuff, you know – all the way from Hanapepe on Kauai [sic]. All the kahus ask me for this.” And she handed me a Ziploc bag full of pa‘a kai, Hawaiian salt, from the salt ponds at Hanapepe.

What fascinates me about that salt – I still have some at home and I use it to bless houses, mixing in with water from the baptismal font – what fascinates me about that salt is the color. It’s not white. It’s red. The dirt fields that I saw on my first trip out here are actually clay beds where seawater is left to dry so that the crystals that are left behind can be scraped off the beds. The first layer of the harvest is white and the bottom layers are red, the clay mixing in with the salt crystals. And the really good stuff, I’m told, is mixed with alae, soil from the mountains above – full of minerals and highly prized, because the salt makers don’t sell it. They give it away.

And what really strikes me about that is that anytime I get salt from Hanapepe, I feel the heart and soul of the salt makers. They’re not just going through the motions, but they’re putting themselves into the work as a way of connecting to their ancestors as they strive to continue the tradition and on honor ways of the past. The salt from Hanapepe has the taste of their heart and soul, and it gives flavor to a way of life that they go all-out to honor and continue.

## Year A – 5 Epiphany – February 5, 2017, cont'd

The Gospel also says:

*Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

And that what the salt makers in Hanapepe do.

The thing is, with that kind of passion also comes a challenge, because sometimes we have to figure out when it might all be too much and whether or not we have to rein ourselves in.

*You are the salt of the earth.*

In Hilo there's this place downtown where I love to go for corn beef and cabbage. But for a while I had to stop ordering it, because they were putting way too much salt in it. It was too strong, and that salt was salt of the earth that I couldn't take in.

*Let your light shine before others.*

Many years ago, my Auntie Sono (my grandpa's sister) was walking across the street in Wahiawa to take flowers to the Hongwanji. The sun was so intense that afternoon that it hit the windshield of a driver who didn't see my auntie in the crosswalk – and so he hit her and she died. The light was too strong. Sometimes we have to keep things in check.

And so how do we know? How do we know whether or not to go full force, or whether or not to pull back and rein it all in? The answer to that is that we have to discern. We have to go before the God of our understanding and take it to God in prayer and listen for answers, and that, my friends, makes the difference between responding and reacting.

When I was at Virginia Theological Seminary, I had a conversation with one of the members of my cohort and we were talking about the onslaught of the emails that we often get, many of them with criticisms and complaints about what we've done wrong or haven't done right. And we came to the conclusion that not every email deserves a response. Sometimes the best thing to do is to hit the delete button, or sometimes it's better to sit and wait a few hours, or even overnight before writing back, if that's what we decide God wants us to do. And I know that's a hard sell in the day and age of immediate responses and quick fixes. But as Christians maybe that's the cross we have to bear – to wait patiently for God's guidance.

You and I live in very anxious times. Just turn on the news tonight if you want proof. But the question for me isn't what we're called to do so much as it's who we're called to be in the midst of these anxious times. How do we give flavor to the world? How do we let our light shine forth?

We all have different answers to those questions. Some of us feel called to march and protest. Some of us feel called to write letters to our elected officials. Some of us feel called to sit and watch the news. Others feel compelled to turn to prayer. We're called to do different things. And it's my hope that the church will be here to help us discern, and process, and empower the choices we make so that we can live into those choices with our heart and with our soul. And

## **Year A – 5 Epiphany – February 5, 2017, cont'd**

when others make choices that we don't agree with, or when they do things that we wouldn't do ourselves, I hope that we stay in our heart and in our soul and have the courage to stay in a relationship with one another in respectful and life-giving ways, respectful and life-giving ways that build each other up, rather than tear each other down.

For the people of Hanapepe, working with the salt and the clay is a labor of love. all the materials I've read and all the videos I've seen, when the salt makers in Hanapepe talk about what they do, they almost always well up with tears, because they're moved by their labor and the link it gives them to their past. And it brings them joy. They are the salt of the earth. They let their light shine forth. May their witness to the Gospel empower us to be the same, and may we always give flavor to the world as our light shines forth.