



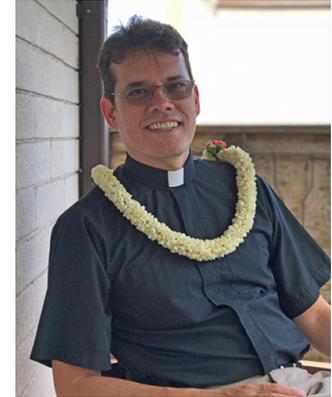
The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 25, 2017

This morning's Gospel says:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

It makes me think of my lanai and how I get to sit on it on late afternoons after the sun has gone behind the skyscrapers of downtown Honolulu. I love to sit and look at the Spanish moss hanging from the trellises, the ti leaf plants and calamansi trees below the banister, and right now, the gorgeous shower tree in full bloom of pink and yellow flowers across the way. I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit as I sit on my lanai and take in the urban landscape on late downtown Honolulu afternoons on the Cathedral Square and I feel grateful and I am blessed.



And then as if to bring it all home, I often see white terns swooping and swirling in on the thermals in the sky above the bell tower like Holy Spirit doves, and honing in on their nests and their young ones, alighting on the branches of the shower tree, returning home to their nests.

We have a lot of white terns on the Cathedral close – some in the shower tree, some in the monkey pods, and even more in the *kukui*. And there's a volunteer organization that comes in monitors the nests, the babies, and how they're all doing. From time to time I chat with them and in one of those chats, I learned that the terns fly out to sea to hunt for fish to bring home to their babies, sometimes going as far out as a thousand miles. And it's amazing to me that they can do that and then find their ways back to the trees on our Cathedral close, to the exact spot where they left their babies and where they return to nurture and feed them. Nothing can keep them from their young – even a thousand miles of ocean.

I watch the birds fly home and I feel the presence of Christ – in my heart, in my home, on our square, and in our lives.

And in the midst of that and in the midst of my humanity, I have to admit to you that sometimes it seems like Christ is far away from me, just like the baby birds feel like their parents are far away from them. But we're connected, just like those baby birds and their parents are connected. Nothing can break that bond. And even though the parents are far away, sometimes as far away as a thousand miles, they are doing everything they can to nurture their young. And so, when Christ feels far away from me, perhaps he's out there nurturing me in a way that I may not perceive, but that I will definitely feel when he decides that the time is right.

As Barbara Brown Taylor sums up this feeling of mine in her iconic book, *Leaving Church*, where she describes a time in her life when she was burning out and felt alone, Barbara Brown Taylor says this:

“Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God.” - Queen Emma

Pentecost 3 – June 25, 2017, cont'd

Above all, I saw that my desire to draw as near to God as I could had backfired on me somehow. Drawn to care for hurt things, I had compassion fatigue. Drawn to a life of servanthood, I had ended up a service provider. Drawn to marry the Divine Presence, I had ended up estranged. Like the bluebird that sat on my windowsills at home, pecking at the reflections they saw in the glass, I could not reach the greenness for which my soul longed.

We all have times in our lives when we feel like this, but as Barbara Brown Taylor also says:

Salvation happens when someone with a key uses it to open a door he could lock instead.

And as the famous theologian Walter Brueggemann says:

The world for which you have been so carefully prepared is being taken away from you...by the grace of God.

So, yes, I may lose my mother. I may lose my father. I may lose my brother. I may lose my sister. I may lose my entire family, my entire household. But the presence of Christ will always be there for me and I wait for it and I long for it the way the baby bird waits for and longs for his parents to come home to feed and nurture him.

And as Paul says in his letter to the Romans:

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Even if the sparrow falls to the ground, it will not be separated from the love of God. Even if the terns have to wait for their mothers and fathers to return from a thousand miles away, they will not be separated from the love of God. And even if we feel far away and are in darkness, we will not be separated from the love of God.

And as the white terns swirl above and swoop down in front of our spiral and bell tower on downtown Honolulu Cathedral afternoons, may we take the beauty of their riding on the thermals and into our hearts, our hearts where the presence that we take into our bodies in the form of bread and wine this morning lives and waits for us to return to Christ and for Christ to return to us.