



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – 4th Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2017

This morning's Gospel reading is about hospitality, welcoming the stranger, enfolding the brother and sister into the community, embracing all humankind with the love of God that is present in our hearts and in our lives; present in our hearts and in our lives because of our prayers, because of our community of faith, and because of our sacraments.

Whenever I hear the word hospitality, I think of the Hawaiian word *ho'okipa*, where guests and strangers alike are welcomed with our spirit of *aloha*, where there is complete generosity, or *loko maika'i*, where we're highly empathetic, and perceptive in anticipating the needs of others. (from *Managing with Aloha*).

As many of you know, I come from a Hawai'i Island family on the Hāmakau Coast. And on my last Hawai'i Island stint, I lived in an area of Hilo called Pi'ihonua, an area made famous in a song by Helen Desha Beamer called "Kimo Hula," a song that Mrs. Beamer wrote after a visit to the estate of James "Kimo" Henderson. She wrote the song because she wanted to thank Mr. Henderson for his hospitality, the *ho'okipa* she received when he welcomed her into his home. In the third verse of the "Kimo Hula" Mrs. Beamer writes this:

*Mahalao iā 'oe, e ka hoa aloha
I ka ho'okipa e nā malihini*

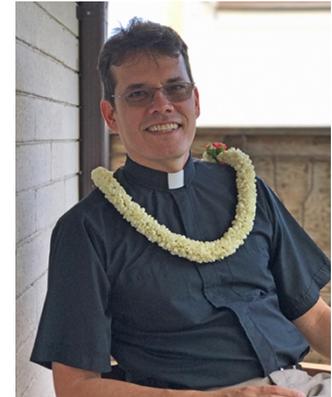
Thank you dear friend
For gracious hospitality to visitors

Mrs. Beamer's *mele* speaks not only about hospitality, but also about the response to hospitality, responding with the gift of song. Helen Desha Beamer was a master of this, writing *Keawaiki* after visiting the home of Francis I'i Brown at what is known as Mauna Lani Bay today, writing *Paniau* after a visit to the home of Al and Annabelle Ruddle in Puakō, and countless other song about visits to the homes of family and friends; giving from her heart, writing *mele* to thank her friends for their hospitality, their *ho'okipa*.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus says:

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

And I can't help but wonder: Did Helen Desha Beamer write her songs of gratitude because her hosts saw Christ in her, and she saw Christ in them?



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And this, of course, reminds me of the greatest *ho 'okipa*, the ultimate hospitality: the unconditional love that God has for us and the way that we can accept that embrace, anytime, anywhere, no matter who we are, no matter what we've done; in spite of our shortcomings, in spite of our faults; nothing, absolutely nothing, will keep God from welcoming us and taking us in.

I know that feeling of that unmerited grace, made manifest in God's welcome, invitation, and hospitality.

Those of you who have gotten to know me over the years know that I come from an unchurched family, and that even though I was baptized in the Episcopal Church at the age of two months, I didn't know the embrace of God was there for me until I walked back into the church when I was 30 years old.

Those of you who have gotten to know me over the years also know that I was a bit of a drifter in my youth, an *opih*i looking for a rock (as they say), flitting from job to job, place to place, wondering who I was, longing to belong and just fit in somewhere.

Then one day my auntie called me from San Francisco to tell me that Duty-Free Shoppers was transferring her to Guam, the place where I was born and raised, where I grew up. She didn't want to go out there alone and she asked me to come along with her and so I got a job teaching third grade in the same school where I went to junior high, in the same classroom where I hit my Japanese teacher in the eye with a piece of chalk!

And because it was an Episcopal school, I had to take my third-grade students to chapel every week for Morning Prayer – and it was nice. I liked it. I liked the music and I liked the feeling. But the real gift, the *ho 'okipa*, came a couple of months later when the chaplain got up in front of all of us and said, "Remember, everybody: next week we are going to have a Eucharist." And I sat in that pew in that church with those eight-year-olds and thought to myself, "What in the world is a Eucharist?!"

And so, like the good teacher that I was, I took my students back to the classroom, sat them on the floor to read them a story, and started out by saying, "Now, boys and girls, you just heard Father Tony talk about the Eucharist. Who can tell Mr. Hino what a Eucharist is?"

And they all responded in unison, "Communion!" "And what's communion?" I asked. And a couple of them said, "Where you eat the bread and drink the wine," responding from what had been drilled into them by their religion teachers. "Very good," I said, feeling very relieved inside that I finally knew what that chaplain was talking about when he mentioned this whole Eucharist thing.

And then I was in a quandary that made no sense to this unchurched me. I was in a quandary and I remember thinking, "How can I be a good example to my students if I sit in the pews while they all go up and take communion? What kind of teacher is that?" And now in retrospect I see that God indeed works in mysterious ways, because I went to the chaplain with my quandary and he looked at me and said, "I remember you! (probably because I hit my Japanese teacher in the eye with a piece of chalk). When you were a kid here you told me that you were baptized. So you can take communion. No problem." I didn't realize that we were now under the 1978 Prayer Book, because when I went to school we were under the 1929 Prayer Book and you had to be to

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confirmed before you took communion. The rules have changed.

And so, the following Wednesday I took my kids to chapel, and when the time came for communion, I followed them up to the altar rail and watched them very carefully so that I would know what to do. And I remember going up to the rail as one person, taking the bread and putting it into my mouth, and turning and walking back to my pew not only feeling, but also *knowing* that I was a completely different person. I was part of the fold. I finally belonged. God works in mysterious ways and God is persistent. God embraced me, and seven years after that first Eucharist, I was in seminary. And today I stand before you in this cathedral as your priest – all because of invitation, all because of welcome, all because of hospitality, all because of *ho 'okipa*.

That's the Christian life, the Jesus Movement. And we're called to do something with that, the way Helena Desha Beamer did something with it, responding with the song of our lives and giving of ourselves with gratitude for the things we receive, the things we receive from others and the things we receive from God.

That's the island way and that's the Christian life.

And Helen Desha Beamer sums it up well, she sums it up well in the third line of the last verse of "Kimo Hula," the third line where she writes:

Hea aku mākou, e ō mai 'oe
We call, you answer

She wrote that line for James Henderson, but I don't think she'd mind, I don't think she'd mind if we take that line for ourselves and give it to God.

Hea aku mākou, e ō mai 'oe
We call, you answer

It's the ultimate in hospitality, the height of *ho 'okipa*. And for that I end by saying one simple thing: Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God for God's hospitality to us, thanks be to God for our sacraments, thanks be to God for our faith community, thanks be to God for Helena Desha Beamer, thanks be to God for the gift of Hawaiian song, thanks be to God for our beautiful island life, and thanks be to God for the gift of God's son. For all of it, for everything, thanks be to God.

Hea aku mākou, e ō mai 'oe
We call, you answer

Thanks be to God.