



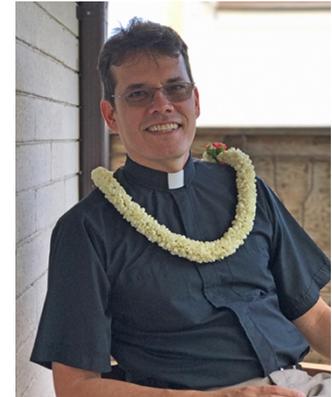
The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – 8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 30, 2017

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Yet again, here's another parable I really understand.

Years ago I had the entire summer off between the time I worked at the Priory and the time I went to Hilo to be rector at Holy Apostles. For a priest, having three months paid summer vacation was a luxury and a gift and I took advantage of it and traveled not only to New York, London, Paris, and Japan; but also to French Polynesia for the voyage of a lifetime on the back of a freighter that started in Papeete, went through the Tuamotus, and then toured the Marquesas Islands.



And because it was so remarkable, I wanted to remember that voyage and I decided that I would scrimp together my savings and buy one of those wondrous and beautiful black Tahitian pearls to wear around my neck so that whenever I saw it, or touched it, I would remember that journey, that journey that was for me the journey of a lifetime.

So I went all over Papeete looking for the right pearl and didn't find it. I looked in Moorea and Huahine and didn't find it. We stopped in Rangiroa and I didn't find it. I went through almost every island in the Marquesas and didn't find it. And then it was time to head home and I was sure that I would return to Hawai'i pearl-less, but something told me not to give up, that the time wasn't right yet, that I had to be patient. And on the last day of the cruise and before we headed back to Papeete, we made a brief stop in Fakarava in the Tuamotus and took a tour of the pearl farm when I finally found the perfect one. It's a beautiful gray pearl and I spent almost a whole paycheck on it – and I have no regrets. I brought it home with me and had it strung on tsuji fishing line and whenever I put it around my neck, I think back to that wonderful time and memories of a trip that I will never forget.

And it always strikes me that pearls come to be when an irritant goes inside an oyster and the oyster tries to dispel the irritant by putting nacre around it. And in the end, that irritant becomes a jewel, a thing of beauty, a pearl of great price.

As we traverse our lives of faith, it's inevitable, isn't it? It's inevitable that at some point we will face trials and tribulations, whatever those trials and tribulations might be – usually in the form of some kind of loss, loss of family, loss of job, loss of money, loss of friendship, loss of loved ones, loss of dignity, loss of pride. But then it strikes me that God embraces us and soothes us by putting God's nacre around us; whether it be in the form of the sacraments, the support of the community, answered prayers, or some sort of combination

Pentecost 8 – July 30, 2017, cont'd

of all of those things, God takes it all and turns it into something beautiful - and we become pearls that God seeks out, because God so longs to be in relationship with us and God desires nothing more than to simply love us for who we are, whether we're wounded or not. Like the merchant in search of fine pearls, God seeks us out.



For some reason, this reminds me of Queen Emma. There are many, many portraits of Her Majesty, but the one I like the most is one that depicts her with a string of black pearls around her neck. Every time I look at that picture, I think of the trials and tribulations that our queen went through – the loss of her child, the loss of her husband, the loss of her bid to seek the Hawaiian throne, and the loss of her people due to various kind of diseases that were introduced to the islands, especially smallpox, smallpox whose epidemics on her people compelled her to do whatever she could to build a hospital, the hospital that we call the Queens Medical Center today.

Every trial and tribulation Queen Emma went through might be represented in one of those pearls on the necklace that she wears. And while I don't know where that necklace is today, I know that you and I can be her symbolic pearl necklace – you and I – as we forge on in our lives of faith, taking our trials and tribulations, and asking God to soothe them in the hope that God will take it all and make it into something beautiful, something beautiful like the Pearl of Great Price, beautiful beyond anything we could do for ourselves, beautiful beyond anything we could ask or imagine.

And then comes the greatest gift of all – the realization that even though we go through trials and tribulations, that even though we are wounded, that no matter what, we are blessed. We are blessed because God soothes our lives and makes us beautiful and we are blessed because God seeks us out and sees us as fine pearls, pearls of great price.

And through it all we remember that God is like the man who sold everything he had to buy the pearl, because God gave God's only son for our sake, because each of us is a pearl of great price to God, and God was willing to give God's son for us.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

That pearl is you, that pearl is me, that pearl is us. *Amen.*