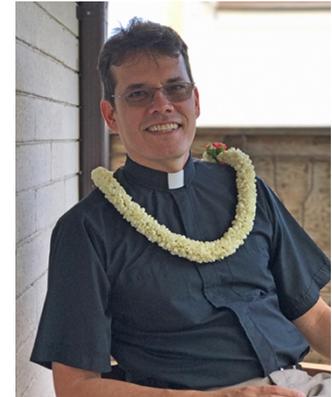




The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A – Proper 14 – August 13, 2017

People often come into the Cathedral to look at our stain glass windows, especially the one above our front doors. And whenever I happen to be passing through the front of the building, I stop and talk to people from all over the world who have stopped in and want to learn about our Cathedral, its founders, and our magnificent window. And I love to tell them to look up to the top panel and go four from the left and take a good look at Jesus walking on the water, because in our window Jesus appears to be on a surfboard, enculturating our cathedral with life in the Hawaiian Islands. And I actually don't know if Jesus is really meant to be on a surfboard or not; but that's what I like to tell people. And I like to tell them that, because for me, getting on a surfboard takes a lot more guts than stepping out onto the water. I've gone into the water and jumped off boats and over cliffs many times. But I've only really been on a surfboard twice.



The first time was when I was in college and I went out with my kid brother in the beach off Kona (where my mother lived at the time) and I got caught in a current and was dragged a mile down the coast and had to walk through someone's beachfront yard and then carry the surfboard back home down Alii Drive. It was pretty embarrassing.

And after that I vowed I'd never get on a surfboard again and I kept that promise until about four years ago, when Father David from St. James in Waimea invited me to go paddle boarding down at Mauna Kea Beach on the Kohala Coast. I was too embarrassed to say that I didn't want to go, and so I accepted his invitation and I gave it a try. For me it was scary and risky. So I know how Peter feels in this morning's Gospel. Like Peter, I was totally in my fear and I didn't have faith and I didn't trust in the reward to come.

That's one of things that strikes me about this story. We get hung up on the fact that Jesus walked on the water, but of course Jesus walked on the water. He's the Son of God. For him that's no big deal. This story, to me, is about Peter's lack of faith and trust in the power of God to save him and keep him afloat when he steps out, and so he sinks.

And, yes, Jesus scolds him, but he doesn't condemn him. Jesus takes Peter where he's at, tells him to have more faith, puts him back on the boat, and we all know that eventually Peter goes on to build the church through his confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Thank God we have a God of second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh chances and even more than that. We have a God who takes us where we're at. And we have a God who forgives.

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So I think the real question for us this morning is, "Do we believe? Do we have faith? Are we willing to step out into the unknown water and trust that God will be there for us?" If I'm honest with all of you, I have to say that, for me, the answer to that question is sometimes yes and sometimes no. And that's why I need God. That's why I need the Gospel. That's why I need the church. And that's why I need you as my community of faith--and the support and prayers that come along with that.

And I think another important question to ask is, "Can you and I take the thrill that comes along with stepping out in faith?"

At Mauna Kea Beach the day I went paddle boarding with Father David, it was ridiculous. I kept falling off and falling off and falling off, but David was by my side and he was patient with me and he kept encouraging me to get back on. And when I get back on he'd guide me, instruct me, and encourage me.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would be able to get on a surfboard, stand, and paddle on the ocean. But after a while, that's exactly what I did. I stood on that board, I trusted that I would be OK, I paddled ferociously (life in faith is about action, after all), and I glided across the ocean. It was a thrill that I will never forget. And, yes, after a few seconds I fell off the board again, but that's life. I fell off the board, but I had my 10 or 15 seconds where I was in the groove and in the pulse of God, trusting that the water in the wind would carry me and that I would be able to do something I never thought I would be able to do.

And as I extrapolate all of it into where I am today, I find myself asking, "Who are we as a Cathedral community?" If you think back to a year ago and remember things that were on social media and listened to the chatter in the diocese, you might've thought that we were about to sink. But look at where we are today. Our doors are open. People walk through them. Our finances are looking up. And when I'm here with all of you I feel a sense of vibrancy and vitality and I believe that we are worthy, valued, loved and saved.

And maybe we had to go through trials and tribulations so that we could get to that place. And we'll probably have to go through more trials and tribulations as we move forward in mission and ministry, because that's the Christian life and the path of the Gospel. No one ever said the Gospel was easy and the Christian path smooth, but they have their rewards.

When someone walks through our church for the first time and says that they love this service, that's a reward. When someone feels the ministration of Jesus Christ because they get a paper bag full of hygiene items and nonperishable foods, that's a reward. When we walk into this church feeling one way and then leave it in an hour or an hour and a half later feeling better than when we walked in, that's a reward. When we open those doors at 6 o'clock in the morning on Sunday so that people can walk in, say prayers, take the sacraments, and feel the presence of God in their hearts and in their lives, that's a reward.

So as much as I say it to you, I say it to myself. Step off the boat and out onto the water, reach out for the hand of Jesus, trust that he will be there to support us so that we can live lives not of fear, but of fervent faith, empowered by the sacraments, emboldened by the prayers, knowing that Jesus is there for you, that Jesus is there for me, and that Jesus is there for all God's people.

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And when it's all said and done, and we're back in the boat, and the wind ceases, may we join those in the boat, those disciples on the Sea of Galilee, and may we join them in saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” Because in the end, that's really all that matters.

Amen.