



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year A - Proper 18 - September 10, 2017

This morning I'm feeling a bit nostalgic. Maybe it's the passing of Bishop Chang. Maybe it's my age. Maybe it's that my grandmother is almost 98. But I'm feeling a bit nostalgic and I'm thinking about when I left Honolulu to go to Hilo in 2011. My last official piece of business before I left was to conduct Morning Prayer for four hundred people in the St. Andrew's Priory community here in the Cathedral. It was the official opening of The Priory school year.

It brought to mind the opening of previous school year, the first time any of my fourth grade students had an Episcopal priest for a teacher. A couple of them wanted to push my buttons. One of them, an eight-year-old, less than four feet tall, came up to me after the previous year's opening chapel service and said:

Excuse me Father Moki. My mom said I had to tell you this, because you're my teacher and you're a priest.

There was this really religious guy who had a horse. He was so religious that he gave the horse church commands. When he wanted it to move he said, "Praise the Lord." When he wanted it to stop, he said, "Amen."

So one day he went riding on his horse and said, "Praise the Lord!" And the horse started moving. Then he started praying and praying. He got lost in his prayers and wasn't paying any attention. He got to the edge of a cliff and just in time he finished his prayer and said, "Amen," and the horse stopped. He saw that he was at the edge of the cliff and realized what he'd done and he was so grateful that he raised his arms and said, "Praise the Lord!"

Many times these days I feel like I'm going over the cliff and taking the church along with me. It seems as if we've hit the wall. Attendance is down. Stewardship campaigns don't seem to work like they did fifty years ago. Our liturgy doesn't speak to the majority of younger folks out there. People keep talking about how we're running out of money.

And yet, we recall that Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my church." Can anything destroy the power of those words? Can anything really destroy the church? I don't think so. So, I think the real question is: How do we work together to change so that we can thrive, so that we can grow?

It brings to mind a quote that I read not long ago:

Finally the time came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

For you and me, that time has come. How do we blossom? How do we change? How do we thrive? How do we grow? Perhaps the key to all of that isn't charts and programs and strategies. The key to all of that is to live with love

## Pentecost 14 – Proper 18 – September 10, 2017, cont'd

In his letter to the Christians in Rome this morning Paul says this:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Put on the armor of light. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week we remembered Queen Lili'uokalani at our 8:00 service. This was a woman who was accused of treason, placed under house arrest in a dark room in the corner of 'Iolani Palace for eight months, and stripped of her throne. Yet she did nothing but strive to love those in her midst, especially her enemies.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Queen Lili'uokalani lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. She chose not to go for vengeance, but to strive for forgiveness, reminding me of a quote of hers—my personal favorite:

Throw the 'opala, the rubbish, out of the garden of your heart.

Queen Lili'uokalani put on the armor of light by cleansing the bitterness in her heart through forgiveness. She sums it up well in the third verse of *Ke Aloha o Ka Haku*, The Queen's Prayer, the song she wrote to console her niece Kai'ulani at the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. Queen Lili'uokalani says this:

Mai nānā 'ino'ino  
Nā hewa o kānaka  
Akā e huikala  
ma'ema'e nō

Behold not with malevolence  
The sins of man  
But forgive  
And cleanse

Those are the words from *Ke Aloha o Ka Haku*, meaning the aloha that we create, doing it not by seeking vengeance, but by making the decision to throw the 'opala out of the garden of our hearts, to forgive, and to cleanse. *Ke Aloha o Ka Haku*.

*Aloha*. We use that word a lot. For years I foisted it off, explaining it as hello, good-bye, and I love you. But several years ago, right before I went to seminary, I was down at Mauna Lani Resort for Danny Akaka's Twilight at Kalahuipua'a for an evening of Hawaiian culture and music at the hands of Mr. Kalani Souza.

I learned that night from Mr. Souza that the etymology of the word "aloha" is much deeper than hello, good-bye, and I love you. It's *alo ha, ha* meaning the breath of life and *alo* meaning to go before or in front of, as if one goes forth extending the breath of life when he or she says, "Aloha," A deep and meaningful word when you break it down like that.

## Pentecost 14 – Proper 18 – September 10, 2017, cont'd

We all have the breath of life inside of us. As Christians, we call that breath of life, that *ha*, if you will, we call that breath of life Christ. That's why our baptismal covenant makes us promise to seek and serve Christ in others and respect the dignity of every human being and, as Kalani Souza says, when we say, "Aloha," we are acknowledging that what exists between you and me is the breath of life. Whether we call it Christ, whether we call it the *ha*, or whether we call it both, it's what we share. It's what exists between us.

This all struck me the other day when I received an email from someone in the diocese who signed off, "Aloha Ke Akua." I'm sure they meant "In God's love", but when you really think about it, what that really means is to go before the breath of God, as if paving the way for God to be revealed to others. *Go before the breath of God*. Now there's a mission statement if I ever heard one. We go before the breath of God.

Think about that and listen to the words of Paul again. It gives them new meaning. It clothes them in new armor. It bathes them in new light.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's how we change. That's how we blossom. That's how we thrive. That's how we grow. We live in love and go before the breath of God and make way for God to be revealed to everyone in the kingdom.

So as a church community we come to the table and we go before the breath of God and make way for God to be revealed to the world. In the parking lot and in the streets, we go before the breath of God. In our homes and with our families, we go before the breath of God. As we gather with our friends, with our co-workers, with our church family, we go before the breath of God.

We go before the breath of God as we look out at the shore and take in the magnificent ocean. We go before the breath of God as we bask in the gentle Hawaiian rains. We go before the breath of God as we stand at the rim of Diamond Crater and witness the power of creation. We go before the breath of God as we take in the majestic Ko'olau Mountains as they rise to the sky from the bottom of the sea.

No matter where we go or what we do with this gift of life—as we come into the world from our mothers' wombs, as we learn to walk and talk, as we go off to school and forward into life, as we find our soul mates and fall in love, at the births of our children, at the deaths of our loved ones, and finally when our own time comes, we lay aside the works of darkness, we put on the armor of light, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and we remember the *ha*.

We remember the *ha* and go forth into the world before the breath of God. And as we do so, we remember Queen Lili'uokani and we remember the words of Paul:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

*Amen.*