



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A - Proper 28 – November 19, 2017

I am a fourth-generation biracial Asian American, born and raised in Micronesia, and whose family is from the Hamakua Coast—Kukuihaele and Ahualoa. My great grandparents come to the Big Island's shores in the 1890s on ships from Hiroshima and Yamaguchi to work in the cane fields on the slopes of Mauna Kea.

Several years ago, my auntie, my mother, and I took my auntie's four-wheel drive truck and drove through dirt roads on what used to be lush sugar fields and make our way down to the shoreline to a place called Haina Landing, the spot where my great grandparents came ashore over a hundred years ago.

It's a beautiful place, Haina Landing. Black lava cliffs drop into sapphire colored waters and the sea breeze blows in and brings a gentle sense of peace to two granddaughters and a great grandson.

But when my grand-auntie, who died when she was 102 years old, told us the story of my great grandparents' arrival, I knew that Haina Landing wasn't always so beautiful and peaceful. When my great grandparents arrived after being processed through immigration in Honolulu, they were rowed to the rocky cliffs in dories (small boats) from a steamship offshore. A crane then lowered nets into the dory and my great grandparents were forced to climb inside so that the crane could scoop them up, lift them from the dory, and plop them on the rocky shore where they began lives of sweat, toil, hard work, frustration, worry, fear, and, finally, triumph.



Cane fields with irrigation flume, Hamakua Coast, early 20th C.
Image courtesy of NHERC

The labor agents in Japan who recruited my great grandparents to come to Hawai'i's shores didn't consider them people. They objectified my great grandparents and like they did with so many others, they turned them into a commodity, a way to make money; they were mere talents, like the talents in today's gospel – a unit, a measure of currency.

And like so many workers who came to Hawai'i's shores to work in the cane fields, my great grandparents did not remain satisfied with their lot. By the grace of God, they persevered and they thrived, like the slaves who receive five talents and who then go off at once and trade with them, and make five more talents, the slaves who create an exponentially positive effect in the world and on the world.

My great grandparents put in their three years, completed their contractual obligation to the plantation, and somehow came up with the means to procure a 32-acre plot of land where they built a ramshackle house with dirt floors, grew vegetables that they carted to town on a beat up

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old horse, and raised a second-generation family of twelve, a family of twelve that worked together to save and invest in their educations and they became taxmen, teachers, accountants, executive secretaries, postmasters, telephone operators, librarians, business owners, carpenters, and they in turn invested in the education of their children, and those third-generation children became bankers, accountants, biologists, hotel managers, engineers, chemists, attorneys, executives, systems analysts – all who contribute to life in Hawai'i and on the U.S. Mainland. And my great grandparents didn't look back with bitterness. They proclaimed that a power greater than themselves helped to make it all happen, and out of gratitude they surrendered their Japanese passports in the 1960s and applied to become citizens of the United States.

And it's the same for countless cane workers who came to the Hawaiian Islands. They took their talents, and with God's grace, they grew their talents and created respectable lives for themselves and for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren – talents, treasures of value in the sight of immigrant matriarchs and patriarchs—talents, treasures of value in the sight of God. The Chinese, the Okinawan, the Portuguese, the Korean, the Puerto Rican, the Filipino, all who left the lands of their birth and became permanent exiles on strange islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, but who kept their eyes on the future, worked hard, and raised children who became teachers, doctors, governors, senators, deacons, priests, and, yes, even bishops; always attributing the grace of their good fortune not to their individual effort, but to family, to community, to cultural values, and to a power greater than themselves.. And through it all, in their own steadfast and constant way, they increased the talents given to them and they built up the kingdom of God.

And as a Cathedral community, we're called to do the same kind of thing, not to maintain the talents we're given, but to use them to increase the gifts of God through the grace of God. And we do it with love and the grace that we receive through our sacraments, shining light on the inner workings of our lives where God's presence stirs us up to go forth and increase our talents as well.

Think of the amazing thing that happens at the table when we pray that we may faithfully receive the holy Sacrament and serve God in unity, constancy, and peace. What does this talent, this sacrament, give us the gumption to do? My prayer is that it gives us the yearning, the desire to transcend the bleak plantation existence of the cane worker immigrant to Hawai'i's shores in the late 1800s and early 1900s and to honor our baptismal covenant promises to seek and serve Christ in others and to respect the dignity of every human being so that we can thrive the way many of the cane worker immigrants to Hawai'i's shores thrived in the islands that became their homes.

What will the world look like when we take the grace we're given in this sacrament and live into nothing else but these two baptismal covenant promises – to seek and serve Christ in others and to respect the dignity of every human being? Would there be racism? Would there be sexism? Ageism? Classism? Clericalism? Would there be gay bashing? Would there be chemical addiction and substance abuse? Would there be domestic violence? Would there be mentally ill homeless people living in the streets of our cities and towns? Would there we gunmen going in and shooting up churches and the people who gather in them to worship God? Or would there be, like our Eucharistic Prayer says, unity, constancy, and peace?

What will the world begin to look like when we leave here after this morning's Eucharist and take our talents out into the world? The exponential effect and the palatable grace of God's love embodied in our actions in a wounded world are sure to be transforming in much the same way the immigrants to Hawai'i's shores found their lives are transformed, proving to you and proving to me

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that we can and do live lives of promise and hope, where talents don't have to be buried in the ground, but where they can bask in the light and be transformed and multiplied by the grace of God.

And we're reminded of that every Sunday, every Sunday when we come here for spiritual nourishment and spiritual food, reminding us of the power of our baptism and the power of the risen Christ that we take into our bodies, into our hearts, and into our souls so that the words of our prayer have substance, flesh, and meat to them – the words of the prayer that say, “Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart through Christ our Lord.”

The remnants of the plantations at Haina Landing where my great grandparents came ashore are long gone. The sugar cane stalks are no more, the mills are no more, the cranes are no more, the nets are no more, the overseers are no more, the sweat, the toil, the backbreaking work, the frustration, the worry, the fear are no more.

Now there are only shady ironwood trees, jagged black cliffs, sapphire ocean waters, gentle sea breezes, an occasional pod of dolphins swimming by, memories of times past, the spirits of those who came ashore from Japan, from Korea, from Okinawa, from Portugal, from China, from Puerto Rico, from the Philippines, and the stories of the triumph of these immigrants as they increased their talents in the loving arms of God's grace that, in turn, give us the courage not to stick our treasures in the ground, but to bring them out and multiply them in a world that longs to know, to see, and to feel the loving hands of God and Christ in its midst.

So come to the table and then go forth into the world – go forth into the world feeling confident in God's grace – and let your talents thrive as well – and be grateful to God for all of it.

Amen.