



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Advent1 – December 3, 2017: Uncle Francis and the Net

Many years ago, I visited my Auntie Dora’s apartment in San Francisco where she’d retired with my Uncle George. Once they left Hawai‘i, Uncle George never came home and Auntie Dora came back only once—to bury in out in Kaneohe at Hawai‘i Memorial. But Uncle George and Auntie Dora always called Hawai‘i “home”.

Their San Francisco apartment had a photograph on the wall, above their worn and tattered sofa. A copy of it is in your bulletin this morning. The photograph was an old black and white, taken by Uncle George, of my Uncle Francis Funai. In the photo, taken probably in the 1940s, judging from the looks of Uncle Francis in the photo with his athletic frame and strong legs. And in the photo, Uncle Francis is poised on a lava rock, looking out toward the ocean, waiting for a school of fish so that he can cast his net.



You’ve gotta have a lot of patience to do that kind of thing, to stand on a jagged rock and wait for a group of fish. I know. I’ve never thrown a fishing net, but I’ve taken a bamboo hand pole down to the breakwater at Kawaihae back home and waited, and waited, and waited—until a papio came and finally took my bait and I pulled it in—after a really good fight.

And when you’re fishing like that, you can’t slough off. You can’t leave your pole or your net and go do something else until you wanna come back and try again. There’s no reward in that. Fishing takes patience; you’ve always got to be ready. You never know when the fish will come. And it brings to mind the words in today’s gospel: Keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come.

The image of Uncle Francis standing on the shore with his net tugs at me as we enter the Season of Advent, the time where, as Paul says, we wait together for the “revealing of Christ.” I tend to think of Advent, the revealing of Christ, as an external event, something that happens outside of us. But what if it’s an internal event as well? Something that happens inside of us? Something that happens in our hearts?

I think of that and oddly enough, I think of Uncle Francis standing at the shore and waiting for the fish to come, looking and waiting in anticipation that they will cluster under the shadow of his net. I think of Uncle Francis in that photograph and I wonder not only what’s going on in his mind, but also what’s going on in his heart, like his heart is warm and ready as he waits in anticipation for the fish to come so that he can throw his net gloriously into the air and watch it twirl and land on his catch so that he can pull it all back in toward him.

Advent 1 – December 3, 2017, cont'd

And in turn, right now I wonder what's going on in our hearts, what's going on in our hearts as we prepare to keep alert and wait for the coming of Christ. If the coming of Christ is something that goes on inside of us, what does that look like? What does it feel like? Maybe we can look at the words in the Scottish blessing that I use sometimes. Maybe the words in that blessing give us a clue. Here's what it says:

May the blessing of light be on you, light without and light within. May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire, so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it. And may light shine out of the two eyes of you, like a candle set in the window of a house, bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm. And may the blessing of the rain be on you, may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean, and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines, and sometimes a star.

If that's what it looks like and if that's what it feels like to have Christ within us, then I long for Him with all my heart.

There is so much going on at the end of the year. And I wonder if we do ourselves a disservice by getting caught up in the frenzy – the frenzy at this time of year that the secular world calls Christmas, but that we know is actually supposed to be called Advent. Do we miss feeling the warmth of the peat fire in our hearts because we're busy running to and fro from this store to that? Do we cover up the light of the candle set in the window of our house by running from this party to that party, worrying about what to cook, what to take, what to wear, and how we're going to pay for it all? Do we dash the twinkling of the star in the shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines in the midst of it all by murking up the waters with ripples of frenzy as we fret about whether or not we have enough? Are we watching? Are we waiting? Are we awake? Are we alert? Or are we numb to the magnificence that's about to unveil itself inside us?

I hate the idea of getting caught up in the frenzy, feeling numb, and missing the miracle. I'd much rather feel the warmth and the love of the Christ within. So this year, I'll continue to stay away from the shopping centers and the stores. And except for my niece and nephew, I won't feel obligated to buy useless stuff for family and friends – junk that they really don't want or need. This year maybe I'll write checks to our benevolence fund and help to serve people in need instead. There are plenty of them out there and, if we really take a good look, we might find that some of them are with us right here and right now this morning, sitting with us in our pews. And on top of that, I'll continue to do say my prayers every morning and I encourage you to do the same.

No frenzy. No anxiety. Just tapping into the Christ within, trying to be the peat fire, the candle set in the window of the house, and the shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines and sometimes a star—all of it for a world in need, a world that longs for the presence of Christ that can be revealed in the good works and loving hands of the Christ that dwells within all of us. And the warmth we feel when we serve the Christ in our midst signals the arrival of the Christ alive in our hearts, the Christ for whom we watch and wait now that Advent is upon us. And we don't have to look beyond our shores or beyond our walls. We need only look out into our community, or maybe even at the person sitting next to us in our pews.

So as we enter the Advent season, let's think about spending some time in silent reflection, like Uncle Francis patiently standing on the shore on the lava rocks and waiting for his prize. Let's sit and wait. Wait for the light, the light without and the light within. Wait in anticipation, wait with excitement, and be alert. Wait – and the inner Christ that longs to emerge from our warm and ready hearts will surely come, and that will be the greatest Christmas gift of all.

Amen.