



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Epiphany 1 – January 7, 2018: Epiphany

There is a lot going on this weekend at the Cathedral. We have a gospel which is commemorating the baptism of our Lord, then we have the Queen Emma birthday celebration, and her big feast here at the Cathedral always happens on the baptism of our Lord because of the way the Sundays work out. And it is the first anniversary of the death of Eddie Kamae, so we have/had a special musical tribute to him at the 8:00 service with Jay Larrin singing.

I think that in the midst of all that, and with this gospel reading, I've lost sight of something really important, and that is that yesterday was January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, where by the leading of a star God manifested God's only Son to the peoples of the earth. So I was pondering a little bit, and I was thinking about how the most important decisions for me personally in my life have been the most impulsive.

I remember being in college and having to decide if I was going to stay the extra year and get the professional diploma I needed to go along with my teaching degree or was I going to go back to the Big Island, get a job, and teach without the extra degree, and I decided, without really thinking about it, to go back to the Big Island and teach. Best decision I ever made because I had to stand on my own two feet.

And shortly after that, somebody came up to me and said, "Would you consider, even though you don't have tenure yet, would you consider leaving the DOE and going off and teaching preschool in Hiroshima?" And I said, "Sure," and off I went.

Another really good decision that changed my life by showing me the world.

Then, I was very, very comfortable in Guam, living in a nice townhouse, driving a Nissan Altima with leather seats, flying business class all over the Pacific Rim, working for an insurance company as a Japanese translator. And I was standing on the reef one day and looking out at the ocean, and I thought, "I can go anywhere I want in the world and do anything I want. I'm going to leave this island." And in six months I did, and a year later I was in seminary in Chicago. And you know the rest of the story.

And more recently, one October morning in 2016, I was sitting in my office in Hilo and I got a phone call. I looked down at my cell phone and it said, "Robert Fitzpatrick." You guys know Robert Fitzpatrick, right, he's the Bishop. I thought, "What did I do now?" I picked up the phone and he said, "Moki, I know things are going really well in Hilo, but in ten weeks I need you back in Honolulu at the Cathedral. Will you come?" And I said, "Sure."

I think about those kinds of decisions, and I think about the Wise Men following the star. They saw a star, said we better follow it, they got up and they went.

I think we live so much in the head these days that it undermines our ability to live in the heart, and to trust our gut, and to follow our instincts, and go with it. I mean, that's what they did. They saw a star and said, "We better follow it." Off they went.

Epiphany 1 – January 7, 2018, cont'd

Nowadays we have too much access to information. We would say, “Well, what star is it? How big is it? Where is the star going? Can we calculate the trajectory of the star and figure out where it’s going to land? Let’s Google Earth where that is and see what’s there.” And in the midst of all that gathering of information, maybe we lose opportunities.

It just strikes me because in seminary, they filled our brains with all this information. With me, unfortunately, it didn’t take, it was like my mind was a sieve with all this New Testament, Old Testament, church history, canon law, and all this. And some professor said you do have to be careful in seminary because you will lose your faith. And that’s exactly what happened for a lot of us. We got very jaded about the academics, what kind of positions we were going to get, the compensation packages we were going to receive, what kind of housing allowance.... And we stopped thinking about or remembering what it was like to be called by God into ordained ministry.

I took a trip to Israel about four years ago, and all those miracles Jesus was doing.... It was like, Immaculate Conception, okay, I can take that one, because from a quantum physics point of view I can see how that could happen. Resurrection from the tomb, perhaps Israel is on some kind of energetic lay line, and stuff was bubbling up from the earth. I’m trying to figure this all out in my head, all this stuff that’s scientifically possible, right. But that one about the feeding of the five thousand—good Lord, I was just feeling no way, how do five loaves and two fish, how through quantum physics is it possible to turn that into enough to feed five thousand people?

And then I realized that over the 2,000 years, I think we’ve lost our ability to have faith because we want proof. I wanted my faith back. Then I remembered how people would tell me that Israel, like Hawai’i, was in what they call a “thin space.” A spot on the planet that is a portal to another realm. I was sitting in I think Bethsaida, or somewhere on the Sea of Galilee where this story was purported to have happened, and I was just sitting there thinking, “I don’t get this, I don’t get this feeding of the 5,000, I don’t get it. Maybe Jesus sent out some kind of psychic signal to everybody and they all went in their houses and got food and brought it out....” And I literally heard this message sitting there watching the sunset over the Sea of Galilee that said, “Stop thinking, you are in a thin space between this world and the dream world.” And all of a sudden it made sense, because I was willing to get out of my head and to just trust and to follow the star. Which is really how I try to live my life.

And I think, thank goodness for that, because I would have missed so many wonderful opportunities if I had made the choice to sit there and analyze it and analyze it and analyze it. I’d still be sitting there, probably in my auntie’s kitchen in Mānoa Valley figuring out whether I should go teach in Kona or stay in Honolulu. That’s 30 years ago but I’d probably still be thinking about that. Doing that opened up doors, going to Japan changed my life, trusting that message in Guam and going off to seminary, that was huge, because not only did it change my life, but it changed a lot of other people’s lives.

I guess what I’m saying is, on this day after Epiphany that seems to have gotten lost in the midst of all the cacophony of events around us, let’s take a moment to remember the star, to feel its beauty and to trust that it is okay to enter in and simply go with it and say prayers all along that Thy will be done, Thy will be done. So we can get back in alignment with the will of the God of our understanding. And at the end of that journey, we’ll find the Christ child waiting for us in whatever form that’s going to take. Who knows? But it must be a beautiful and wonderful thing. Follow the star. Follow the star.

Amen.