



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year B – Lent 1 – February 18, 2018: Rainbows

Where I live there are rainbows  
And life with the laughter of morning  
And starry nights

Where I live there are rainbows  
And flowers full of colors  
And birds filled with song

I can smile when it's raining  
And touch the warmth of the sun  
I hear children laughing in this place that I love

These are the words of a famous song of Hawai'i. A song about rainbows. Several years ago I was in Kukuihaele, my grandfather's hometown, the town that sits atop the Hamakua side of Waipio Valley.

My mother and I were in a gallery right next door to my grandfather's birthplace and as I looked around the gallery at the different things, I noticed a small painting of Rainbow Falls, a simple five by seven done in acrylics with a small rainbow in the lower right-hand corner.

It was tucked way behind a bunch of other stuff, but I found it—or more likely it found me, and it begged me to buy it and take it home. And for many years the small painting sat by my bedside, a visual reminder of the actual waterfall just down the road from the cottage where I lived in Hilo on Waianuenue Avenue, the street whose name means “water of the rainbow.”

As I sat at home in my cottage, I loved to look at my small painting and today's reading from Genesis reminds me of it. The reading and my painting tie in well together:

*I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*

Several years ago I was out on the Arizona Memorial for the induction of a military chaplain who was a classmate at seminary. It was late in the afternoon and there was a light mist in the sky. We all stood over one of the most devastating, horrific sites in world history and looked toward the mountains and a rainbow appeared in the sky—a sign of peace.

And not long after that I conducted my cousin's beach wedding in Ka'anapali, Maui. It looked like it was going to rain, but the weather held, and when Ben and Lara turned to walk toward the mountains, a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky—a sign of hope for their future.

## Lent 1 – February 18, 2018, cont'd

And then several years later, I went up to the Veterans' Cemetery in Hilo with Carole, a parishioner from Holy Apostles, to say prayers at her mother and father's grave and to commend the spirit of their beloved pet dog after she died the week before. Carole and I said our prayers, and when we were done, we looked in the sky and took in a glorious double rainbow over Hilo Bay—a sign of love and comfort for someone who missed both parents and pet.

*I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*

In the gospel this morning we hear of Jesus' baptism in the waters of the Jordan River, remembering that the water in the sky where rainbows shine, that the water in the sky fell to the earth and made the waters of the Jordan River. And as he emerges from those waters, we are witnesses to Jesus' promise of hope as he prevails in resisting temptation at the hands of Satan after the Spirit sends him out into his forty-day wilderness.

And when we think about it, we realize that in order for rainbows to appear to us, we need water—water from the sky that becomes the water of baptism in the font at the front of the church, water that leads to promise, water that gives us a life of hope, water that reminds us of the grace of God's love.

In the wilderness Jesus resists Satan's temptation and passes God's test. And what's the difference between a temptation and a test? I submit to you that a temptation is when a lower power attempts to entice us into making a poor choice, while a test is when a more benevolent force hopes we will make the right choice. Choosing God versus giving in to Satan.

And that's made all the more clear in the promises in our Baptismal Covenant where we affirm our promises saying, "I will, with God's help," because we know we cannot do it without God's help. We cannot do it alone. And so we have scripture to guide us, the community to support us, and God's Holy Spirit to inspire us to make right choices to follow the will of God.

Think of the tests we've witnessed over the courses of our lives, our parents' lives, and our grandparents' lives.

Rosa Parks could have given into temptation and fear and moved to the back of the bus. Instead, she stood her ground, refused to give up her seat, and chose to follow the will of God.

After her overthrow, Queen Lili'uokalani could have given into temptation and fear and gone for vengeance toward her captors. Instead, she stayed the course of justice, sought spiritual guidance, wrote beautiful songs about forgiveness like the Queen's Prayer that we sing every Sunday, and chose to follow the will of God.

Mahatma Gandhi could have given into temptation and fear and gone the route of violence and terrorism to gain independence in India. Instead, he went the way of prayer, pacifism and peace, and chose to follow the will of God.

Dennis and Judy Shepard, after the death of their son Matthew at the hands of two gay-bashers in Laramie, Wyoming, could have given into temptation and fear, gone for vengeance, and fought for the death penalty for the murderers of their son. Instead, they strove to forgive and asked the court for mercy for their son's murderers, and chose to follow the will of God.

Gene Robinson and Katharine Jefferts-Schori, two of the Episcopal Church's most controversial bishops, could have given into temptation and fear and played it safe rather than become the first

## Lent 1 – February 18, 2018, cont'd

openly gay bishop and the first female presiding bishop in the Anglican Communion. Instead, they discerned a call, courageously said yes in the midst of great adversity including death threats, and chose to follow the will of God.

We can do the same thing. We can resist temptation and ask God to deliver us from evil. We can choose to follow the will of God. We can use our free will to live lives of compassion, humility, benevolence, and love—with God's help.

And then the rainbow in the sky isn't just found in a painting in a cottage on Waianuenue Avenue, or over the sunken USS Arizona at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, or at a wedding in Maui, or at a veterans' cemetery in Hilo where we say prayers for a deceased pet. But it's there for everyone, for all of God's people, all who are willing to resist temptation and choose to follow the will of God.

And then that famous song we sing for Hawai'i becomes not only a song of Hawai'i but a song for the entire world:

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*Amen.*