



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – Lent 2 – February 25, 2018: Parkland, Florida

In this morning's Old Testament reading, God tells Abram:

You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

If that were me listening to those words my first thought would be:

That's impossible. There's no way. My wife is barren. I'm too old.

And yet we know the rest of the story. We know that Sarah gives birth to Isaac and that their descendants indeed number the stars.

I recently heard that the definition of neuroses is to have a sense of hope for the past and despair of the future. And I think that's defined as neuroses, because it goes against the human spirit, our optimism, our belief in the promise of things to come, our hope—not our despair, but our hope for the future.

Think of the Polynesian voyagers that set out in canoes from the shores of French Polynesia in search of a new home, because of war, famine, or for whatever reason. They believed that there was land out there, because they saw the *koalea* and they knew that the bird came from the north and never alighted on the water, but only on the shore. Therefore, there had to be land to the north, and so they set out. They had faith.

I think of my great-grandparents who came to Hawai'i from Yamaguchi and set out in the steerage section of a steamship in search of a better life, because it was just too hard to make a go of it in Japan. They believed in opportunities beyond the shores of their homeland and that they could make enough money to return to Japan in three years and buy a piece of land. And even though it didn't turn out the way they planned it, they had faith.

They stayed in Hawai'i, bought a piece of land on the Hamakua Coast, raised vegetables, and raised and educated twelve children.

And we know, of course, that the Polynesian voyagers came upon a land covered with vegetation and flowing with waters from mountain streams and then set up a civilization based on stewardship of and care for the land of promise that they found because they cast off their canoes from southern hemisphere shores, cast them off in faith that there would be something out there for them beyond their imaginations and their wildest dreams.

And God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled. He became the father of many nations. His descendants were numerous as the stars.

Lent 2 – February 25, 2018, cont'd

And what does this say to all of us?

Did my great-grandparents forge into unchartered territory in a leap of faith to build a future for their children...

Did the Polynesian voyagers forge across unchartered waters in a leap of faith to build a future for their children...

Did God say: I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you to build a future for their children...

...to build a future for their children to live in a world where their children go to school, or go to church, or go to concerts, or go to movie theaters, to get shot up by people and AR-15 rifles?!

Is that why they took a leap of faith? I think not.

The Sunday after the church shooting in Sutherland Springs, Texas, I stood in this pulpit and said this:

I've come to believe we can take away every single gun in this country and violence will still happen until we've addressed the basic fact that every single one of us has a dark side and every single one of us has a shadow—because you cannot be a light for Christ without casting a shadow.

And then I said this:

The thing that we've got to begin to confront as a community of Christ is that we all have a shadow. The church has a shadow. The country has a shadow. The world has a shadow. And Jesus is here to help us redeem that shadow through the waters of our baptism.

Redeem us to do what? Redeem us to have a failure to bother?

What do the waters of my baptism tell me? As they stir and continue to create new life, what do the waters of my baptism tell me? I don't care what they say on Facebook, my thoughts and prayers are with the people of Parkland, Florida. But then, what do my prayers spurn me on to do? To sit and watch TV and get mad? To continue delivering diatribes from this pulpit?

No.

The waters of my baptism, stir up in me the desire to work through my fears of constantly being politically correct, something Jesus Christ himself never did. The waters of my baptism tell me to confront my fears, to take a stand, to take a risk, to do something—to bother.

Last weekend after church, my friend Dixie and I sat on my lanai sipping our Starbucks lattes, living our blessed lives in one of the most beautiful places on the planet, when I told her that I told Dee that I walk by Dick Chang's grave every day and I hear him saying, "Stay the course. Don't ever give up." And so, if not for me but for him, I can't settle anymore. I can't become cynical and contribute to the collective malaise and say that there's no hope. Because if I did that, then Dick Chang should've never ordained me.

Lent 2 – February 25, 2018, cont'd

Then Dixie looked at me and told me about a march that's taking place, that's being organized by students on March 24th and that they're going to march on Washington DC and say, "It's our lives that are at stake. We're getting killed – in school. And we want to hold our elected officials accountable as stewards of our future and stewards of our lives." And Dixie and I got *ver kelempt*, and in one of those beautiful, God-filled moments, we looked into each other's eyes and I said, "We're going to Washington DC. Whatever it takes, we're going on that march."

And God provides.

I came into the Cathedral right after that and I took Heather Graham by the hand and looked at her with longing in my eyes and said, "Will you take the 10:30 service on Palm Sunday for me? Please. I've got to go to Washington and march," and Heather's eyes welled up, and she looked at me and said, "Go!" just like Michael Curry said, "Go!" when he got elected as Presiding Bishop. "Go!" And then I texted Keleawe Hee and asked him to take the 7:00 and 8:00 services. And he texted back the same thing. "Go!"

So off I go. Off I go because I can't sit here and do nothing any more. I can't stop at prayer and stifle action. That's not why my great-grandparents came to this country. That's not why the Polynesian voyagers set out on uncharted waters. That's not why God said: I will make you exceedingly fruitful.

We cannot be exceedingly fruitful if we settle for our youth being subject to mass shootings in school, or in church, or at concerts, or in movie theaters.

Jesus says: If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me...Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

When he arrives, we have got to offer Jesus a better world. We must never allow the Son of Man to be ashamed of who we are and what we do or don't do. We have got to offer Jesus a better world.

And it starts right here and right now—with our thoughts, with our prayers, with our Holy Communion, and with our action. We must never allow the Son of Man to be ashamed of who we are and what we do or don't do. And we can do better than settling for sacrificing our youth before marginalized people with AR-15s. Instead, we can join them, we can empower them, and we can help give them a fighting chance.

We are only limited by our inability to dream. And I dream of a world where our children are safe and where marginalized people with AR-15s feel the love of God to soothe the wounded soul and to see themselves as beautiful and to know that they are loved. I dream of that world. And I want to help make it happen.

And so, I ask for your thoughts and I ask for your prayers, because I'm going to Washington DC to march in the streets because my thoughts and prayers tell me to finally, to finally take a stand.

Amen.