



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year B – Lent 3 – March 4, 2018: In the jungles of the Philippines

This Sunday morning, we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of Lent, the dead center of the season.

For the past three weeks, the decor in the Cathedral has been stark. The music has been somber. There're no Alleluias. And we're continually reminded that we're bound to the Law, the Ten Commandments; which on Week Three not only do we recite at the beginning of the service, but we also hear them again in the First Reading from the Book of Exodus.

And this morning, I invite us to hear the Ten Commandments not as a burden, but as a gift – a gift, because they're tool and a guideline for being in relationship with God, which is why we're here in church.

Today we hear the Ten Commandments just one week after we hear of God's covenant with Abraham where God says: *I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you,* giving an old man hope in a situation that seems where there is no hope – it's Abraham's holy possible.

And as we hear the Ten Commandments again in the middle of Lent, we bear in mind that excluding Sundays, Lent is 40 days long; the number of days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, where Jesus was tempted by Satan, where Jesus chose God.

But what if Lent was longer than 40 days? Imagine more than 40 days in the desert wilderness. For some people, that's a reality and a fact of life.

You know, I'm blessed by a life that has many interesting stories; especially stories of my family. As I mentioned to you last week, my mother's grandparents came to Hawai'i from Yamaguchi in Western Japan and so my mother, a *sansei*, was born on the Hamakua Coast on the Island of Hawai'i.

My father was also born in Hawai'i, in Mokualeia, on Oahu's North Shore. His mother, my grandmother, came to Hawai'i with her sister in the 1930s to teach at St. Andrew's Priory. Her father, an Anglican priest from Cornwall, England, promised his three girls that he would educate them and put them through college if they in turn promised to give three years of their life to the church when they got their degrees. My grandmother and her sister Ernestine honored their commitment by coming to Hawai'i to teach at The Priory –right here behind Cathedral.

My grandmother met my grandfather and stayed in Hawai'i and taught at Roosevelt High School as well as Waialua High School. Her sister, my Aunt Ernestine, married an Episcopal priest who was doing mission work in the Philippines and she left Hawai'i to join him in the

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mountains of Northern Luzon in the late 1930s. It was a precursor to a wilderness time for her, a wilderness time that would last much more than 40 days – it last, in fact, for three and a half years.

After our services this morning, I will board United Airlines jet to fly to the Philippines to lead a retreat for 60 Episcopal clergy. And on Tuesday morning, I will take the ten-hour drive from Manila to the mountains near Sagada and Tadian, the mountains where my auntie and my uncle hid in the jungles with their young daughter to evade capture by the Imperial Army of Japan during World War Two and where they relied on the help of villagers and made their temporary homes out of bamboo and thatched roofs, or hid out in caves.

After two years in the jungle, my aunt and uncle, along with their young daughter, were captured. And because he was a chaplain for guerilla forces, they sentenced my uncle to death after a court martial hearing in the town of Bontoc. My uncle's sentence was later commuted by a colonel who is purported to have been a Christian and who compassionately spared the life of the Episcopal priest that his soldiers captured. Perhaps he followed the Ten Commandments as well, taking heart in the Law: *Thou shall not kill.*

My cousin Steve recently wrote a book about the experience of my aunt and uncle during the War called *Guerilla Priest* and in that book the thing that was most significant to me was when my aunt and uncle came out from hiding in the jungle and went down into the village of Babalasang to celebrate Christmas Mass amongst the people whom they felt God called them to serve and who were desperate for a priest.

They risked everything to celebrate Christmas, and I think that they got the wherewithal to do that because as they were hiding out in the jungle they felt the overwhelming presence of God and they had faith and they believed that God would provide for them and in turn they felt compelled to honor God and so they followed all Ten Commandments, especially keeping the Sabbath day holy, setting aside time to pray and to worship the God they loved and the God who provided for them through the kindness of others.

Nothing, not even the threat of capture and their eventual capture, could keep them from the presence of God. Nothing could get in the way of their faith, because they believed that they were in a relationship with God that was covenantal and that if they were faithful, that was all that mattered – whether they spent the entire war in the jungle, whether they were captured, whether they survived, or whether they died. All that mattered to them was that, through the Ten Commandments, they were in relationship with the God they worshipped and the God they loved.

My aunt and uncle survived the war, even after being POWs who were interned in Bilibid Prison. And after the War, they continued their mission work in the Philippines until the late 1960s when they retired to the Oregon Coast. They were faithful, they loved God, they honored the Ten Commandments, and they survived the War.

World War II was a 3½ year Lenten desert wilderness for my aunt and uncle. And every year it inspires me to have a steadfast 40 days of Lent, to do everything I can to make it deep and meaningful, to be in the wilderness, to pray, to feel the presence of God, to be in relationship with God through the Ten Commandments and ultimately, through the Great Commandment of Jesus that sums up the Ten Commandments, to love God and to love my fellow human being with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind.

### **Lent 3 – March 4, 2018, cont'd**

As Craig Kocher says in *Feasting in the Word*:

As the Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a gift to shape their love of God and one another, the journey of the Lent comes as a gift to mold the witness of the church. It is an opportunity to confess the ways we have squandered God's gifts, to renew the vibrancy and faithfulness of our worship, and to increase our love of neighbors near and far. Like the Commandments, Lent is not about religious moralism. Rather, Lent is the journey of deepening holiness shaping lives in the image of Christ to praise God and live in friendship with one another.

Thus writes Craig Kocher.

And in the middle of our forty days, therefore, I continue to wish you all a blessed Lent; faithful and true to the holy possibilities we know will come, the holy possibilities we know will come at Easter, after the 40 blessed days of a profound and spiritual Lent.

*Amen.*