



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year B – Trinity Sunday – May 27, 2018, The volcano in Puna

This morning's Gospel says:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son *and* God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Whenever I hear or read that line I think to myself: if God wanted us to stay the same, if God didn't want us to change at all, ever, God probably wouldn't have sent Jesus into the world to save us. And we bear in mind that God sent Jesus to change the world, not to keep things the same. Not to change is not to be Christian.

And then 2000 years later we get all worked up about making changes like moving pews, adjusting to new realities in worship and music, and the list of things like that goes on and on and on.

The church doesn't always like change, but change is part of our call if God sent Jesus into the world to change things and shake them up. At least that's what I think. To be Christian is to change. Not to change is not to be Christian.

But I understand that can be a hard pill to swallow. And, really, the things we get all worked up about, thing like moving pews and what have you, those things really seem kind of petty when we think of the people in Puna who are faced with the changes that are happening to the land where they live and where they have homes and lives. I have several former parishioners who can't go home and don't know their fate—and one former parishioner who does know his fate, only because he's already lost his home to the lava.

The people of Puna have no control over the changes that are happening to them.

And that can be really hard. Way harder than some of the things we might worry about and that we actually have a lot of control over—pews, music, worship.

Puna.

When I was a little boy my grandparents took me down to Kalapana Black Sands Beach in Puna because I'd seen it in a picture book put out by National Geographic and so I begged them to take me. And I saw the beautiful black sand with the gentle white foam of the waves lapping upon it and those iconic palm trees that swayed in the sea breeze right along the shore. That beach is no more. It got covered up by lava in the 1990s. Things change, including the 'aina, the land.

And then there were the many stories of the anchialine pond in Puna, 50 acres of brackish water, that my Uncle Sai had in Kapoho. My mother and auntie and all my *sansai*, my third-generation cousins to learned how to swim in that pond and it was known as the Higashi Pond until it got covered up with lava in the 1950s. That pond is no more. Things change.

Yes, things change and you and I are called to adjust and change as well so that we don't stay where we are and so that we move closer to the light, the light in the Paschal candle, the light of Christ.

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And that not only requires change in the form of action, but it also requires a change in attitude. Jesus, after all, calls us out of self-righteousness and into compassion.

Two weeks ago, I was in Hilo and I actually heard a couple of people say, “Well, why did those people buy land and build houses on top of an active volcano? They knew what could happen.”

But I don't think questions and judgements like that are germane to the Christian path of compassion, do you? Haven't you ever done something that you regretted? Haven't you ever made a mistake? And are you called to stay in your regret and stay in your mistake, or are you called to change and live a life in the redemptive love of a forgiving God?

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor.” You know, the people in Puna are some of the poorest people in the State of Hawai'i. And what have they done in response to this eruption? They dashed the regulations of the government and set up tarpaulins on a street corner and set out tables and gathered clothing and toiletries and food items and invited people who needed them to come and get them. They can take whatever they want, giving people who seem to have a lot of choices taken away from them the ability to continue choosing, even in a small way.

So as that volcano erupts in Puna, new land is being created and new attitudes are also being created – and that's a change, a change in a largely secular society where the words of Jesus seem to be embodied, the words of Jesus where he says:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son *and* God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

And the lives of the people of Puna are saved through the Christ that swells up in the hearts of those who reach out to help, regardless of whether it was right or wrong to buy the land and build a house.

The people of Puna are there, after all, because it's the cheapest place in the state to live and they were encouraged by developers to buy land in places like Nanawale, Lanipuna, and Leilani Estates. For most, especially Native Hawaiians, it was the only place they could live into their dream of being able to buy home and then as it all goes south, the outside world points fingers and condemns; not at the developers, but at those who dared to dream of owning land and building homes. And in response, the community who has fingers of judgement and contempt pointed at them gathers together to help people that need—and the church, the Christian church, a church that often self-righteously condemns others, could learn a heckuva lot from the people of Puna. Indeed, blessed are the poor.

Puna.

The Kalapana Black Beach of my childhood is no more. The anchialine pond in Kapoho of my mother's childhood is no more. There are a lot of things in our lives that are no more. But what is still alive and well is the spirit of *aloha* of the people of Puna that I believe is pleasing in the sight of God, the God who loved the world so much that he gave his only son. And the spirit of the son lives in the hearts of those who reach out because not only is it the Christian thing to do, it's the human thing to do.

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And the heart and soul of the people of Puna brings to mind the song Hōlei written in honor of Kalapana, a song that refers to the booming and swelling seas of Kalapana that was ultimately destroyed by lava in 1990.

*'O Kalapana, kai leo nui,*

It is Kalapana, the great-voiced sea,

The song goes on:

The uplands of Hōlei listened,  
Roaring is Kalapana,

And then it says:

*Kuli wale, kuli wale i ka leo,  
He leo no ke kai, ē.*

Deafened, deafened indeed by the voice,  
It is the voice of the sea

May the voice of that sea carry our prayers to the people of Puna, and may the voice of that sea bring the presence of the Holy Spirit to us to inspire our hearts to learn their lessons to us about coming together as a community in times of need and reaching out and compassion and love.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son and God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

*Kuli wale, kuli wale i ka leo,  
He leo no ke kai, ē.*

*Amen.*