



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 4th Sunday in Pentecost – June 17, 2018, The Immigrants and Their Children

I want to call attention to the Gospel message this morning, and I also want to call attention to our Collect, the Collect that says, “That through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness and minister your justice with compassion.” Compassion. *Compassio*. To suffer with. That’s what the word “compassion” means. To enter into the suffering of another.

It has been a very, very intense week for me, personally. I moved house. On Monday the movers came and carted off all my stuff. On Tuesday I had to have the cleaners come and clean my old place. On Wednesday I had a walk through with my landlord while I prayed to God that I’ll get my deposit back. Then I get things all settled and arranged in my new place. And then finally on Thursday, I was able to turn on the news. And, boy, there’s a lot of interesting stuff going on right now.

I turned on the news and there was the press secretary getting into a heated exchange with a reporter about the stuff that’s going on at our borders right now. And then, the exchange continued debating using the words of Scripture to justify the decisions and things that people are doing at the border. And then I turned on the news just yesterday afternoon and watched a very heated debate between two Christian clergy. One was a Roman Catholic, and I don’t remember the denomination of the other; but boy, it was a very heated debate where there was going to be absolutely no consensus whatsoever. My thing would be, in that case, to simply walk away. There’s no sense in that kind of argument.

I do want to say to you all, however, that I think that Scripture, the Bible, has been used to justify a lot of behavior that History now looks back on and says, “How could they have used the Bible to condone and justify that kind of behavior?” Things like slavery and the objectification of women?” And it will be interesting to see 25, 50, 100 years from now how this will play out in History and what they will say about the use of Scripture to justify what’s going on at the border. I don’t have a crystal ball to forecast what that might be. I do want to say now, though, that I think that the purpose of Scripture and the words of Jesus were meant to open hearts; not harden hearts.

I don’t have children. But yesterday morning I wore a lei given to me by a mother whose daughter we buried out of the Cathedral. I don’t know what it’s like to lose a child, I don’t know what it’s like to be separated from my child. But I can see somebody in great grief and pain, and I can enter into that pain and feel that pain with her because the Church taught me how to have compassion.

The thing is, that family yesterday had five years to prepare for their separation with their daughter (who had Parkinson’s disease). These poor families in the news—how much time do they have? Two minutes; five minutes?” Like I say, I don’t know how it feels on that side of the equation. I do, however, have a glimmer of how it feels on the other side. My mother and father divorced when I was one year of age. My father went off to the mainland and I never saw him. When I was five, my mother and I were living in Michigan and my mother said to me one day, “You are going to spend the summer with your father.” I didn’t even know what the guy looked like.

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So, she took me to the Detroit airport. I still remember, it was a Northwest Orient 707 (back when they flew 707s) and my mother said goodbye to me. She had prepared me, though, and when she said goodbye, I walked down that jetway with an agent from Northwest and I thought, “Oh, you know, this is nice. I’m leaving my mother but I have this really nice new friend who’s going to take me to Portland, Oregon.” And then that agent sat me down in my seat, and she said, “Have a nice flight,” and off she went, right off that plane and went away... and I remember thinking, “Oh, who’s going to take care of me?” I had no concept of who was going to be waiting for me on the other end.

So, I know what that feels like to be the child in the story of what’s going on at the border right now. And it’s terrifying.

So, when we take a look at what’s going on, and how do we minister justice with compassion? I’m not going to say that policy is right; I’m not going to say that policy is wrong, because I’m not going to get into that political debate from the pulpit. But I do find myself asking, “Are we ministering justice with compassion?” And what I see going on right now that’s really disturbing to me is someone says, “Well okay, I have my Bible, and I know what this means, and I am certain that I am right. And I have God on my side.” Certainty.

Well, you know what, I’m sorry, the opposite of doubt is not certainty, the opposite of doubt is faith. And what is the definition of faith? Well, if you want to know, it’s written in the letter to the Hebrews: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” So, I ask the question, who has faith in this paradigm? The person who’s throwing the Bible at people to separate them from their children? Or the people who leave what they know to go into the unknown because they are seeking political asylum and trying to enter our borders? I think it’s a good question to ask ourselves right now.

Yesterday my friend Andrew and I were talking about all this, and he pointed out that you plant a mustard seed and then it grows into this very gnarly unorganized system of leaves and branches and all that. But in that disorganization or mayhem or whatever, there is space for the birds of the air to land and to make their nest and to find their home.

God’s children are mustard seeds. What are you and I doing to nurture God’s creation in good soil?” I think that it is very incumbent upon us to ask this question. Do I have the right answer versus somebody else? I don’t know. Time will tell.

Remember people used to have those bracelets that said WWJD? What would Jesus do? It’s a good question. What would Jesus do in this situation? What would Jesus say in this situation? Bearing in mind that the Holy Family sought political asylum from King Herod by going into the land of Egypt. Now can you imagine what would have happened if, at the River Nile, if the Egyptians officials took the Christ Child away from his mother and his earthly father? What would have become of that mustard seed?

And while Andrew and I were talking the other night, we asked each other, “What’s your call to action?” And now I ask you the same thing. What’s your call to action?” I don’t know. Because I’m not you. I’m me. My call to action led me to scrap the sermon I had prepared for today and talk about this instead. That was the action I felt called to do. You’re all different and on different paths in life. So, what is your call to action, based on your understanding of the Gospel, what is your call to action based on the spiritual presence that you feel coursing through your veins as you take in the Body and Blood of Jesus? And what is your call to action based on your prayers? I don’t know what

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that can be for you. I do not have the right to judge it. But I will exercise the prerogative to ask the difficult questions, like, “Is this call to action which you are living into grounded in the sacraments, in the Bible, and in the prayers?” If you can tell me yes, go for it. I send you out those doors with my blessing and with my prayers. What is your compassion? What is your response to events like this as they unfold in our world?

And what would Jesus do? What *did* Jesus do in the stories of the Gospel? I invite you to ponder that on your heart as you come forward today for the precious body and blood of our Lord. And then I send you off from this place with prayers. Prayers for you, prayers for this church, prayers for this country, and prayers for the Kingdom of God.

And I send you forth with the line in the Collect, and it bears repeating again, “Keep, O Lord, your household the Church”— that’s everybody, by the way. “Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace”— because we can’t do this of our own volition — “we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with *compassion*; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

I beg you. I implore you, brothers and sisters, as followers of Jesus Christ, to place that prayer on your heart.

Amen.