



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year B – 2nd Sunday in Pentecost – June 3, 2018, Kintsugi and the Igorot Figurine

Much of the life and work of my maternal grandfather centered in the Philippines. In his heyday, he ran the Guam-based operation of a stevedoring company that was headquartered in Manila and our ties to the Philippines were strong.

And in our living room, my grandmother had a beautiful clay figurine that my grandmother got on one of her many trips to the Philippines and that represented an Igorot rice god, kind of a ruddy and crouched figure that was placed in rice terraces with prayers for fertility and a ripe harvest by the Igorots who formed that figurine out of clay, out of the earth.

When I moved to Hilo to be Rector at Holy Apostles Church, my grandmother let me have that figurine and it sat on the shelf in my cottage in Piihonua and whenever I looked at it, I thought of my grandfather and his years working for that company based in the Philippines. And then one day when I was cleaning and dusting (which was a rare event), I accidentally hit that figurine and it fell to the floor and broke and shattered into pieces.

I was crushed, crushed until I called my grandmother to confess what had happened and then she told me, “It’s just a thing. It may have broken, but the memories of our connections to the Philippines that it represented will always be there.”

And when I recall that clay figurine, I hear the words in this morning’s letter, where Paul says this:

We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

That treasure, the treasure that Paul talks about, that treasure is the gospel message, the gospel message received through the grace of our baptism and made manifest for others in our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds — where we show others through our example of the Christian life what compassion, what kindness, and what love can be, love like the words of comfort that my grandmother gave to me when I broke her precious clay figurine.

That gospel message and that story are pure and complete, reminding us that there are no shortcuts from the birth of Jesus to his death on the cross and his resurrection from the tomb. His journey has to be full. It has to be complete. There are no shortcuts.

And there are no shortcuts for us as we make our way to God—whether that journey be short or whether that journey be long, there are no shortcuts and we have to go through whatever we have to go through in order to get to where we’re called to go.

And we make that journey in clay jars and as clay jars, clay jars that our earthly, clay jars that are fragile, and clay jars that eventually crumble and go back to the earth from which they came, just like my family heirloom, that Igorot figurine.

I think Paul’s point in all of this is that ministry, carrying that gospel message, ministry can be tough and it’s possible that we can become targets as we try to be containers for that gospel message of kindness, compassion, and love. Look at what happens to Jesus today after he heals the man with the crippled hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees don’t marvel or stand in awe of what God does

“Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God.” . - Queen Emma.

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through Jesus. Instead, they plot against him, probably because Jesus embodies something that is greater than they can know, something that they can't quantify, that they can't contain, that they can't control.

As a little boy, I saw a lot of clay – clay jars, clay figurines, clay pots, clay bowls. Not only was my grandmother a collector of those kinds of things, but in addition my mother was a raku artist and she had a kiln in our garage and she crafted many things out of clay, clay from the ground, clay from the earth.

And as an artist, those clay vessels held her artistic essence, a gift from God that was greater than herself, the gift to be able to craft things of beauty out of earth, out of soil, out of dirt, reminding us of that line in Genesis where God made humankind out of the earth, blowing the breath of life into us, reminding us that we are also formed of the earth—and that we are clay jars that hold God's essence.

The thing with the ceramic creations that my mother would make was that they would often crack and crumble in the kiln, as if the fire of the Holy Spirit were too much for them the way it can be too much for many of us.

But then there were those creations that would survive the kiln and that would get glazed and get fired again and they became things of beauty, things that were highly prized by the people who admired and acquired my mother's work.

And sometimes those things would also break, whether by human fault and clumsiness or whether by larger forces and acts of God like typhoons and earthquakes.

And it's the same for us as clay jars – we're fragile. And the things we have to endure as we endeavor to carry the gospel message—I can't begin to tell you the things I've had to endure as a priest in the church—physical assault, being called a liar, and the best one being that I was once accused in an anonymous letter to the bishop of having an affair with a woman on the vestry in my parish in Hilo.

We all become susceptible to that kind of thing as clay jars that contain God's essence and the gospel message.

What have you had to endure for the sake of the gospel message and your faith? Have you been made fun of? Have you had false accusations hurled against you? Have you been told that you're off kilter because you believe in something in which you have faith, but can't scientifically prove? How have you been persecuted or broken as a clay jar for the sake of the gospel message?

And yet in the midst of it all we seem to have a resilience given to us through the grace of our baptism, our Eucharist, and our community. And God can do things for us that we can't do for ourselves, especially giving us the grace to persevere.

When I lived and worked in Japan in the 1990s, I saw a lot of ceramic pieces, ceramic pieces for which the Japanese were very noted. And I remember seeing some tea bowls that were cracked and broken but then that were fused back together with molten gold, a technique called *kinsugi*. If a treasured piece of pottery was broken, it wasn't discarded and thrown away. Instead, artisans could put it back together and fill the cracks with beautiful, brilliant molten gold and the cracks became things of beauty in and of themselves.

And that's the way it is with us — our trials and tribulations. We're all broken somehow, whether we want to admit it or not. We all have some kind of suffering in the stories of our pathways to God,

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our pathways to God where we take no shortcuts and do what we have to do in order to get there, the way Jesus had to do what he had to do in order to get there.

We can't escape suffering. It's part of the human condition. But what we can do is rely on the grace of God made manifest in the sacraments, in the community, and in the prayers in order to persevere and endure. And then we become like those clay jars melted back together with molten gold, the molten gold of the sacraments, the community and the prayers. And while broken, we and the cracks of our lives become things of beauty that can hold the treasure of the gospel message of faith as we continue with fortitude on our pathway to God; not with shortcuts, but with the grace of God who sees us as beautiful, no matter who and what we are and who and what our stories of suffering might be.

And thanks be to God for that. We are grateful, grateful that in the words of Paul, we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

*Amen.*