



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 12th Sunday in Pentecost – August 12, 2018, Anger and Desmond Tutu

I've had three careers in my adulthood. There's my current career as a priest. And many of you know of my first career as a schoolteacher. But what you probably don't know is that in between these two careers I also worked for The Tokio Marine & Life Insurance Company as a carrier representative for Micronesia in Guam, Saipan, and Palau.

It was interesting work, and my main role was to monitor defense litigation and regulations and then explain them in Japanese to my boss, and also to the legal office in Tokyo. It was interesting and it was challenging.

I remember when we had one matter where there was an issue between the way we were doing business and how we were reporting our income to the insurance commissioner. The commissioner's office required documentation from us that the people in Tokyo didn't think they should have to do.

This, of course, caused a lot of consternation and I said to my boss one day, "I just don't think Tokyo can understand what the Government of Guam needs from us." And then my boss replied, "No, it's not that they don't understand. It's that they don't want to understand."

They didn't want to understand. That was a new concept for me. Having been an elementary school teacher and working with young minds that were eager to learn, I couldn't fathom anybody not wanting to understand something. But then when I pondered it, it made a lot of sense. And now I realize that sometimes it doesn't suit certain agendas to understand certain things.

If the Tokyo office admitted that they understood what the Government of Guam wanted, they would've had to take new and different action and that would've been cumbersome and difficult, so it was easier for them simply not to understand.

And looking at today's Bible passage from the Gospel of John, I realize that it wasn't any different 2000 years ago.

The people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee don't want to understand who Jesus is. They have the capacity to get it, but they just don't want to. It would mean a complete and total upheaval of their lives. They're waiting for the Messiah, and maybe it's easier to wait than it is to deal with his actually being there.

And Jesus says, "What are you waiting for? The Messiah is right here. I'm standing right before you. I'm the Bread of Life. God sent me for your sake and I will raise you up on the last day – if you would just get your act together and believe."

Sadly, it's human nature to stay stuck in things that don't work rather than embrace an unknown thing that faith tells us will work. And I wonder: 2000 years later, do we actually believe that we're saved? And do we embody that belief in the way we act, think, and feel?

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I've been involved in Episcopal Church politics now for over 20 years—debating same-sex marriage, who gets celebrated in Lesser Feasts & Fasts, socially responsible investment, vestry elections, deciding on worship times, figuring out money, and the list goes on and on. It's interesting stuff and very engaging, but I ask you—if we're saved, how much of it really matters and why are we spending all this time debating it? Are we moving toward the light, or are we avoiding it?

Several years ago, I was in Honolulu for the weekend and I snuck into the 10:30 service here at the Cathedral. The preacher that morning was Alison Dingley, a retired priest here in the Diocese. And I still remember her sermon, her sermon where she said that part of what we need to do is to create space in our churches and in our lives—space for the presence of God to enter in and inspire us.

I heard that, and it really hit the nail on the head for me.

And now as I reflect on this gospel I think: But how do I do that? Maybe this morning's epistle has the answer, the epistle where the writer says:

Don't let the sun go down on your anger, and don't make room for the devil . . . Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what's useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear . . . Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Now that'd be a great way to create space for the presence of God in my life and in my heart. What about you?

One really good thing that I've done since I've moved back here is that I've made a conscious effort to dejunk my life. I keep getting rid of more and more stuff and all my possessions fit in my one-bedroom apartment and in my office here at the church. And the more I get rid of, the freer I feel.

And I think the same can be said for emotional baggage in addition to material baggage. The hardest thing for me to let go of these days is anger, but when I work to let it go, I feel freer and my life is better; because without it, there's more room in me for the presence of God—and I endeavor to get there by letting go of my anger through forgiveness—remembering *without* anger.

Several years ago, when I was still in Hilo, I was invited by you to attend the Peggy Kai Lecture Series here at Cathedral. The speaker that day was none other than Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa.

In his talk, Archbishop Tutu pointed out that not only are we agents of God, but in many ways, we are stand-ins for God. He went on to say that we blaspheme all the time in the way we treat others because we're treating God the same way—all at once, if we're all stand-ins for God. And, for me, it brings to mind today's letter to the Christians in Ephesus.

If we act out of bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander toward others together with malice; then according to Archbishop Tutu, we act out of bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander together with malice toward God, because we're all stand-ins for God—including those we're angry with.

And if that all seems a bit depressing, then we remember that we can also honor God, praise God, and love God in the way we treat others. We can put away falsehood and tell each other the truth. We can confront and resolve our anger; not let the sun go down on it so that the anger consumes us. We can choose our words so that they may give grace to those who hear and build people up as children of God. We can be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven us.

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So, I ask you to join me in a real, concerted effort to let go of our anger and forgive, considering what each of us can do to create sacred space in our lives; not only sacred worship space, but sacred interior space.

And in the stillness of that sacred space, I believe that we will feel the presence of God we seek. I believe that we will hear the gentle and humble words of Jesus saying to us: I am the bread of life and I will raise you up on the last day. I believe in that sacred space we will understand that it's okay to let go of our anger and forgive; because we are worthy, because we are valued, because we are loved, and because we are saved. That's what matters; not our anger and resentment, but that we have Christ, the bread of life, in our lives. So, please do whatever it is you have to do to create that sacred interior space, enter into it, and then listen to how God begs our hearts to let go of our anger and forgive and truly take the words into our hearts:

I am the bread of life. I will raise you up on the last day.

Amen.