



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 14th Sunday in Pentecost – August 26, 2018, The warm pond and Mrs. Chang

This morning's letter to the Christians in Ephesus says this:

As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

The gospel of peace. What does peace mean? Some folks think it means the absence of conflict. But I don't think so. Conflict is part of the human condition, part of what we have to sort out and work through during our time on Earth. So instead of the absence of conflict, maybe peace is that sense of calm and groundedness in the midst of conflict. And maybe it's in that contrast that our sense of peace becomes palatable and amplified. We need the contrast in order to grasp the concept.

I think times of peace and the longing for peace also come at times of extreme and intense growth. And those times can be lonely and they can be scary, but they're also times when, whether we realize it or not, we're standing on holy ground.

I think back to my time nine years ago as Canon Pastor here at St. Andrew's Cathedral and working with Flora Chang who found out that she was terminally ill. I went to her house to see her every week and we'd sit and talk. And then right before I'd leave, we'd hold one another's hands and pray.

Well after a year of doing that, you get kind of attached. Then the inevitable time comes and the person dies. And that's exactly what happened. Mrs. Chang died. And she died on the same day I found out that I'd lost my job as Canon Pastor and that I've have to move on and find another call. It was a double-whammy, if you will.

This was definitely an extreme and intense growth spurt for me. I had to say good-bye to someone I'd grown to love and let go of a ministry I'd grown to love as well—all in the same day—and I didn't know where I was gonna go or what I was gonna do.

And I'll never forget what happened the next morning. I had to go to the restroom (of all things) and I walked from my office by the Parke Chapel and over to the restroom near Davies Hall.

In order to get there, I had to walk right by the front door of the cathedral sanctuary. And when I looked inside at the font, the font where they baptized Queen Lili'uokalani after her overthrow, I felt this almost magnetic pull toward the ground, like my feet were firmly planted, and all my anxiety and worry went out of my body until there was nothing left but empty space where the Holy Spirit entered in and gave me blessed assurance in the presence of God.

And all of a sudden, I got the sense that it was correct that Mrs. Chang had died after a long and full life, and it was correct for me to move on. All was right in that one moment and I felt a sense of overwhelming peace in the midst of the chaos and conflict in my life. It was fleeting, but I still remember it almost ten years later.

And how did that all come about? It had to have been God's grace. That and the fact that, like now, I made a real effort during that time at the Cathedral to carve out moments in the day to sit and pray—sometimes in my office, sometimes basking in the stain glass light of the Parke Chapel,

“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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other times sitting beneath the kahili in the main sanctuary, the kahili that embody the spiritual essence of Queen Emma and King Kamehameha the Fourth, our diocesan founders.

I endeavored to pray and to pay attention to God as part of my life. That's what prayer is: paying attention to God as a part of our lives.

And we can pray by kneeling and saying words; we can pray by sitting in silence and listening for that still, small voice; we can pray by driving down the road and taking in the ocean, the sky, and the mountains; we can pray by doing whatever it takes to pay attention to God as part of our lives.

And that kind of prayer and paying attention to God gives us the strength we need to work through and deal with the conflict in our lives, to confront it and come up with solutions where before we had nothing but confusion and dilemmas. And then, after awhile, we begin to transcend the conflict and intuitively know what to do about it and how to handle it. The conflicts no longer confuse and consume us. We can go with the flow. And finally, we find peace.

And that's why I love the line in today's epistle, the line that says:

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.

That line makes me think of the famous words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.

If you'll indulge me in another story. A few years ago when I was living and working in Hilo, I had a friend visiting from Canada and I wanted to take him down to the Warm Pond in Kapoho, the same pond that Fissure Eight took from us last month. It'd been a long time since I'd been there and I wasn't sure if I'd be able to find it, but it turns out that it was easy—almost as if it drew us into its presence.

Now many of you know that I rarely go in the water, but this time I felt compelled, bearing in mind the way the Hawaiians go through purification rites by immersing themselves in salt water. Now that wasn't my intent, but it sure was the effect.

I found myself surrounded by warm water, like being wrapped in a geothermal blanket of God. Talk about paying attention to God as a part of my life! And I couldn't have been the only one feeling it. I noticed that there were a lot of grandmothers and grandfathers there with their grandchildren that day. And they were holding each other and stuff like that; not isolated and doing their own things, but bonding through laughter and touch.

And it wasn't frenetic or anything like that. It was nice. It was calm. It was peaceful. It was holy ground—or holy water, if you will.

And I couldn't figure it out—until I looked at the edge of the pond and a *kaamane* tree there and I saw an elderly Hawaiian lady with wisps of gray hair blowing in the wind. She was sitting under the tree with her eyes closed and her hands open and facing upward on her lap.

She was praying. And it wasn't like she was praying for herself. She was praying for all of us. It was remarkable and I could feel it. I've never seen anything like it. She was definitely paying attention to God as a part of her life and a part of our lives and we all felt warmth, laughter, joy, and peace.

And that pretty much sums it up, doesn't it? Sums up our lives as they should be as Christians—warmth, laughter, joy, community, prayer, and peace.

And it's not hard to do. It just takes a few moments. It can be morning, noon, or night. I can be in church, at home, in the car, or on the beach.

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And I love those God moments. Those God moments of peace. And when I have them, I'd trade an entire lifetime of drama for those 30 seconds of peace. And I invite you to do the same. To find time in your busy days. Time to spend with God, to feel the presence of God, to pay attention to God as a part of our lives. It will change you, it will change me, and it will change the world.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.

As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace

Amen.