



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 17th Sunday in Pentecost – September 16, 2018

By Fr. Keleawe Hee, Associate for Pastoral Care:

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark 8:27-38 (Proper 19)

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The Gospel of the Lord.

In today's gospel, Jesus describes to Peter and his disciples the uncomfortable reality of his ministry. Jesus must die, not a quiet peaceful death, but a death where he is going to suffer and be crucified. His death will not be pretty. His death will be pain, anguish, and despair.

It's not difficult to see and understand that Peter simply can't believe what will happen to Jesus. Peter's idea of the Messiah was not of a suffering servant, but of a conquering king! But now, Peter is scared, overwhelmed, and unprepared for what is to come.

Life does that to us.

Imagine Peter, thinking to himself, I didn't have this in mind! Suffering? Rejection? Death? I didn't think so. This was never in my plan when I signed up to be a disciple.

Life brings interruptions and takes us places we never planned to go.

Peter is struggling with his faith, trying to make sense of what he really believes, wondering if he has what it takes to meet the demands of following Jesus.

We all know what that's like. We've all been Peter.

We have all had moments in our lives when we were scared, overwhelmed, and unprepared. It could have been a loss—loss of love, loss of money, loss of health, or it could have been a change, a new job, or the addition of a new family member. We looked down the road at what was coming towards us and we didn't like what we were seeing. No, this isn't happening!

"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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But we can't stop life.

And we have all had moments in our lives when we didn't want to face what was going on in our life, when we asked ourselves, "why me?" And those were the days when we questioned our faith in God.

Faith in Jesus, as I learned, and as Peter learned, is not about eliminating risk, or being in control. Instead, Jesus tells us to risk it all. Abandon ourselves. Give our control to God. That is what Jesus is doing and he expects nothing less of those who would follow him.

When we try to control our spouse, partner, family members, or friends, we stop listening. We stop seeing the goodness in their hearts. We stop accepting. We become selfish and unlikable.

Following Christ reminds us that our life is not our own. It belongs to God. We are not in control. God is. Our life is not about us, it is about God. We are living fully because we are free in knowing these things.

I am reminded of the day the missile was coming to Hawai'i. It was a beautiful typical Saturday morning. I was watching tv and my wife showed me her cell phone and asked if I got the same message on my phone, something about a missile. There was nothing on tv or on the radio. Was this a joke? And as you all know, we had only 12 minutes. We texted our daughters to see if they heard, I took the dog out for one last walk, and my wife put on her makeup and got dressed to sit on the porch and wait. I had no control over the situation. I thought to myself, I've lived a great life. I felt at peace. I could let go, because I had faith in God.

We can't stop missiles, hurricanes, lava flows, or floods. We are truly helpless.

We can only prepare, clean up, and move on. We must embrace the will of God, however painful, daily, hourly, continually.

It's really only the difficult and challenging things in this life that end up telling us who we are, what we are made of, and what really matters.

So when you hear the voice of God, you need to listen very carefully. In my case, it was the voice of Fr. Moki asking me, "Fr. Keleawe, can you be in charge of the Cathedral for two weeks?" And I got really nervous, and I questioned myself, but then I remembered that this is what God is asking of me and I knew I could do this, with God's help, a lot of prayer, and with the support of all of you.

Jesus chose to give.... in a world that takes.

Jesus chose to love.... in a world that hates.

To heal.... in a world that hurts.

To give life..... in a world that kills.

He offers mercy..... when others seek revenge.

Forgiveness..... when others humiliate.

Compassion.... when others cause pain.

Jesus trusted God's abundance..... when others said there was not enough.

Jesus showed us that the only way to truly live is to give yourself away for the sake of others. Have the courage to follow him, and you will find true joy and peace, and all the life that God wants to give us each and every day.

Amen.