



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 16th Sunday in Pentecost – September 9, 2018, Off to Manila Because Jesus Said *Ephphatha*

Introduction by Fr. Keleawe Hee, Associate for Pastoral Care:

Father Moki was originally scheduled to preach and preside at our 10:30 service this morning. As you know, he was due to fly to Manila on a flight via Guam, but due to typhoon conditions on that island he had to go through Tokyo and take an earlier flight; therefore, I am going to preside at this service and will read to you the sermon that Fr. Moki prepared.

In this morning's Gospel Jesus uses the word *Ephphatha*, which means "be opened".

On hearing those words, I realize that there's a lot we're invited to be open to, especially the presence of God, which can be an umbrella for many things we should be open to – forgiveness, redemption, guidance, inspiration, creativity, and the list goes on.

A couple of weeks back we, my colleagues and I, were on retreat in Maui where we had presentations by Rosa Say, author of *Managing With Aloha*, a book that unpacks Hawaiian values that businesses can and do use here in Hawai'i.

And while we were on retreat, we spent a lot of time talking about sense of place, feeling connected and belonging wherever we happen to be living and working. And we were asked to share examples of times when we felt in our hearts a sense place, where we were open to it.

I immediately thought of two incidents and two places. The first was in 2010 when I was chaplain at the Priory and teaching fourth grade to sixteen girls, and was doing a lot of supply work on the weekends, especially on the neighbor islands. I remember going to Holy Apostles in Hilo for the very first time in August that year and walking through the front door of the church on Sunday morning and feeling magnetically drawn into the sanctuary. I don't know how or why, but it was then that I knew that was where I was going to be, even though I'd just taken a new job. It took a year for us to discern and figure it out, but one year later, there I was at that church in Hilo, Hawai'i. I felt a sense of place.

Then several years after that, Paul and Kilani asked me to fly over from Hilo to take part in their wedding here at the Cathedral, an event that many of us remember. Bear in mind, now, that I was completely ensconced in my life and ministry on the Big Island and that I was a full-fledged rector of a neighbor island parish. But during the Eucharist at Paul and Kilani's wedding, I went behind the high altar and lifted up my hands to say, "The Lord be with you," and I had this overwhelming sense (right then and there) that I would be back at Cathedral. Two years later, I was back here in downtown Honolulu as your new priest. Again, I felt a sense of place.

The thing is that both times, I had no agenda. I wasn't trying to force something to happen and so I wasn't distracted by my desires and self-will, and I was open enough to get messages from a place that I'm not normally in tune with.

"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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And it's been a long time since that kind of thing has happened to me, and I think it's because my mind is full of chatter and demands pull me in so many different directions. And I don't give myself the gift of taking time to sit with the God of my understanding and so lately I've been feeling a bit off kilter, which is probably God's way of saying to me, *Ephphatha*, open up, because right now there are things that I can't see and that I can't hear, but that I need to see and that I need to hear. I'm like the man in the Gospel story this morning.

The Letter of James this morning says, "Faith without works is dead." This of course, means that we have to work to help others as a result of our faith, but I think it also means we have to work on ourselves as well; never taking anything for granted, including God's grace. In order to help others, we've got to help ourselves

So while I indeed have faith, I can't just sit around and wait for stuff to happen, wait for inspiration to happen, wait for messages from God to work their way through my distractions. I have to do the footwork and I have to be intentional about opening up – and so this afternoon I'm going to do some serious footwork. At 2:10 PM I'm going to get on a United Airlines 777 and fly across The Pacific Ocean to the Philippines; far away from home, far away from the familiar, far away from the distractions of my current life – work, family, study, yoga, friends, the gym, and all the other things that've become routine.

And the day after tomorrow, I'm going to check myself into a convent for eight days and except for one hour of spiritual direction every day, I am going to be completely silent, because I long to open up to the still, small voice of God with a prayer that that voice will lead me and guide me as I try to open up. What will the outcome be? I don't know. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing, because I need to be open to all kinds of possibilities and insights – things I may not even be thinking of or imagining right now. I long to be surprised.

Did the man in today's Gospel ever imagine that he'd be able to speak, to see, to hear? The unfathomable became manifest through God's grace.

For me, in order to open up, I have to get rid of the distractions. What about you? What do you do to open yourself up to the still, small voice of God to lead you and guide you? Do you meditate? Do you take walks along the beach? Do you spend time in your garden? Do you read the Bible? Do you take in the sacrament every Sunday? Do you sit in stillness and silence? Do you pray? Is it a combination of one or more of these things? Is it something else? What is it that you do to open up, to open up to the presence of God?

And when it happens for you, what do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel?

And then what do you do? Do you listen? Do you follow? My prayer is that after you discern faithfully, that you do listen and that you do follow.

I was opened up by the presence of God and I went to Holy Apostles in Hilo. Then I was opened up by the presence of God and I came back to be with all of you here at the Cathedral in downtown Honolulu. And I have not a single regret. Yes, they were trials and tribulations, challenges and conflicts. They were there in Hilo, and they're here at the Cathedral. That's life. But I also listened, and I followed. And that in and of itself is a very great reward, because it means I'm in the flow, that I'm in the pulse of the God I worship and the God I love.

And now I feel God stirring me to spend eight days of silence with Him in a convent in Manila. What's in store? I don't know. But I know that it's something I must do, because I sense Jesus saying that word *Ephphatha* to me; inviting me, begging me to open up, to feel God's presence, to

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discern God's will, and then have the courage to follow whatever I hear and whatever I manage to discern.

So off I go. And I ask for your understanding. I ask for your blessing. And I ask for your prayers while I'm gone, and rest assured that I will pray for all of you – with visions of peace for each and every one of you. With visions of arms outstretched by each and every one of you, seeing you as open, seeing you answering the words of Jesus when he says *Ephphatha* to you, and seeing us taking it all in, doing God's will, giving God glory, and basking in the grace of his mission and ministry with hope and a prayer that we can and will find peace – peace for ourselves, peace for our brothers and sisters in Christ, peace for the world, and peace with God.

In the stillness of whatever sacred place is there for you, I pray that you hear Jesus saying *Ephphatha*, and then that we all embrace the gifts to come.

Amen.