



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year B – 23rd Sunday in Pentecost – October 28, 2018 Show up

Mark 10:46-52 Jesus and the blind beggar

This past Wednesday afternoon I flew to Kona because we had our Diocesan convention there this year. I was looking forward to going to Kona because Kilauea has stopped erupting, and for the first time in my adult life, I had heard there was no vog. The volcano started erupting the year I graduated high school, 1983, the year I turned 18, and it's been going pretty much ever since. Every time I would go to Kona, it had that awful haze that'd come down the saddle between Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa. I was excited to now experience what it'd be like to drive down that road to my grandmother's house and not see any vog, that haze.

Which made me wonder what other kinds of things I was going to get to see. And not only what other kinds of things I was going to get to see, but also what kinds of things I was supposed to see. As I was getting ready to head out to Kona, I was with the blind man, Bartimaeus, when he says, "Have mercy on me." And at the same time we recite the line, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy." I heard those lines in the Psalm, but as I was getting ready to go all I had to say was, "Have mercy on me."

You know, it hasn't been the best week here at the Cathedral. Pipe bombs being sent to politicians. Synagogues in Pennsylvania getting shot up. And then on to of that, our Cathedral community is in great distress because of the fire in Kahala and the loss of two of our members, a 32-year-old mother and a nine-month-old baby, both baptized here in our Cathedral sanctuary and at our Cathedral font.

And since then, I've been fielding a lot of questions about the tragedy. The biggest one being, "Why did God allow this to happen?" Well, you know, God didn't allow this to happen. We don't worship a mean-hearted micro-managing God like that, do we? And the other thing that people say that drives me nuts is, "Oh, well, you know, God must have wanted that baby so badly, so He took her." And I'm like, no, *no*, *NO*, none of this is an act of God, or the will of God.

I think that the God of our understanding is up there weeping with us, and as I cry out "Have mercy on me," I hope and pray that the community, the family, and I are able to clearly see and understand that. That's what I'm hoping for in this situation, that God is weeping with us.

And in the midst of that, what I'm seeing is a tremendous, tremendous outpouring of good will and love for this family. I sent out a letter to the congregation the Thursday after the fire and it said: "When you receive this message, do me a favor and stop and spend time in prayer for the family and for the repose of the souls of the baby and her mother." You know how many responses I got to that email saying, "I did what you asked."? I think because of that outpouring, I saw the presence of God in a way that I hadn't seen before this tragedy.

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The other point that strikes me in the gospel is that at first the people tell the guy, “Be quiet, don’t bother Jesus.” But God stirs him and says, “No, go ahead, bother Jesus, please.” Jesus had that figured out already, so it bugged him and he spoke up. And then the disciples amend themselves and tell Bartimaeus, “Get up.”

“Get up.”

We don’t get to sit here and passively be a recipient of God’s grace. We’ve got to get up, walk, and go to Jesus. I think a lot of us are consumer Christians. We say, well, I’m going to go shop for the right church and figure out what I’m gonna get out of it.” And I don’t know that we ever think about actually getting off our duffs and going to God as we’re crying out, “Have mercy on me!” We expect God to come to us, but how often do we get up and go to God? This is really, I think, the key to all of it. Because when you think about it, Jesus doesn’t go and do some kind of magic witchcraft over Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus gets up and goes, goes to Jesus, and Jesus says, “Your faith.” Because of your faith. Your faith has made you well. And you’ll see that Bartimaeus does have faith.

But he doesn’t just say, “I have faith.” He had faith and it moved him into action. I think that’s what is so remarkable, and that’s what I’m seeing in all of this—that the community is moving to action in this tragedy. There are people taking food over to the family. There are people who are putting together a benefit to help with funeral expenses. And even more remarkably, members of the family contacted me, contacted me first and said—they didn’t wait for me to call and say, “I’m coming out there.” They called and said, “We need you, will you please come?” And then, of course, I got in the car and went.

The other thing is, they died so young. 32 years old and nine months old. Sophia, the baby, she came to church here on Saturday evenings, so I knew her well. I met Connie, her mother, only once, at Sophia’s baptism, but everything that I’m hearing about her is that she was beloved by her family, friends, and neighbors. They talked about how she’d walk the dog in the evenings, and how she’d stop to chat with people and talk story and all that. And when Sophia came to church with the grandparents, everybody would be *ooh-ing* and *abh-ing* over her because she was such a sweet baby. The last time she was here, I went—you know how you do with babies, “Oh hi, Sophia,” and all that, and she put out her arms like this (gesture) because she wanted me to pick her up—she wanted to connect.

How that ties in to “Get up!” is that these two showed up for life. They showed up for life. I really think that teaches us something about how we can go ahead and live our lives. Show up. And kudos to everybody here on Sunday morning who showed up.

But it doesn’t mean just showing up to church. I mean, that’s very important. But to show up and to be present for other people so they can feel the love of God the way people felt the love of God from these two people who are no longer with us in bodily form but who will always be with us in spirit. To show up to life that way. That’s a magnificent thing, because that helps me feel and see love more clearly, and it helps me see life in a different way.

Life on this planet, after all, is about discovering love, much of the time through connection. And it’s about having courage also, having courage to show up and to take risks—like running for office and maybe being the recipient of a pipe bomb—like showing up to worship at synagogue and maybe being the victim of gun violence. To know there are no guarantees on this earthly plane, but to show up anyway. To be present, and having faith that the reward is going to be greater than the cost, it’s just a remarkable thing to me to think about it all. In some metaphorical way, it ties in to going to

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Kona and seeing that vista more clearly than I have in the 35 years since I graduated from Honoka'a High.

What a gift that is, and I think that it's a spiritual sign to me that these two people, Connie and Sophia, passed through our lives, and because of that I can see things more clearly. And I no longer have to say, "Have mercy on me." But I can say, "Thank God for having mercy on me." And then, you know, I can say those lines in the Psalm in good faith, having embraced them in my heart, and this morning we say them for Connie, for Sophia, for the 11 people that died going to synagogue yesterday, for them we say, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed." And we can say that because these two people, Connie and Sophia, were willing to show up for life. So now *we* have to show up for life. So show up for life. Show up for the sake of Connie and Sophia. Show up for the sake of the 11 people who lost their lives in a Pennsylvania synagogue yesterday, Show up for the church. Show up for yourself. Show up for God. Show up for life.

Amen.