



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Christmas Day – December 25, 2018 Venus from Kahoolawe

Years ago I had the privilege of traveling to the island of Kahoolawe where I escorted 12 students from Seabury Hall where I was a chaplain at the time. We spent four days on Kahoolawe planting over a thousand a‘ali‘i bushes on one of the island’s slopes in an effort to help hold the soil and prevent further erosion after the island was used for target practice after World War II.

It was an amazing trip, and the hardest I have ever worked in my life. But the reward was great, because we had the island almost all to ourselves and at night and after dinner I could walk from the cabins where we stayed and over to Honokanaia Beach. The last night we were there I walked over to Honokanaia and I had it all to myself – just me, the water, the sea breeze, the sand, and the stars – that amazing canopy of light twinkling above me.

And then I noticed one of those amazing phenomenon that we get to experience here in the Hawaiian Islands – the reflection of the full moon shimmering on Pacific Ocean waters. It was glorious and I felt blessed, but after taking it in for a while, I remember thinking that I had just seen the full moon about a week before and I wondered how it could be out again—and so I looked up in the night sky and I was amazed. I was amazed because what I saw shimmering on the water was not the reflection of the moon, but it was the planet Venus casting its light out of the darkness—a darkness where there was no ambient urban light. It was an amazing thing. And it makes me think of this morning’s gospel where the light shines out of the darkness and casts its light on to the world and where darkness cannot overcome it.

That was true on Kahoolawe, and I pray that it’s true in our lives as well.

The gospel reading for this morning says that the Word became flesh and lived among us. And that that word was the light of the world. What is the Word? It’s not a thing, is it? It’s an idea about a thing, not the thing itself.

The Greek translation for word is logos, which means in Greek philosophy and theology, the divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning.

The idea of the light and love in the light took on meaning for us by becoming flesh — coming to us in the form of a babe in a Manger in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

When I ponder that, especially at night time in the season where I see lights all over the place, I often wonder why God did that, why God came to us in human form. I don’t think it was, as people often say, to save us from our sins. God didn’t need to come to us in human form to do that.

I think back to that other famous verse from John, John 3:16, which says, “for God so loved the world that he gave His only son.”

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God loved us so much that he wanted to experience us as fully as possible and the only way for God to do that was to come to us in human form, and in great humility – so that God could see the goodness that we would bring about to a child born to a young mother and a working class earthly father. He wanted to see our grace and truth. And maybe God knew that God wouldn't see that if God came as a stately king, someone to whom we would be required to give homage, or feel obliged to give homage. Instead he came as a humble child and saw us full of grace and truth, the grace and truth of not being required to, but to want to give homage. It was genuine. And it was true.

And I think that's the gift that the Christ child looks for as we honor him on Christmas day, to see us full of grace and truth, mirroring the grace and truth that we have received from God – the unmerited rewards that we receive so that we can grow closer to God, and the authenticity and genuineness that we offer it all up to God with.

And when we do that, we offer up the gift of ourselves and that's what God loves – not the worldly, material goods that we could offer as gifts – but rather the gift of ourselves. And the gift that we get back is knowing that that is good enough, even with our faults and flaws, our shortcomings and misgivings, that we are good enough – and we know that we are good enough because God loved us so much that the Word became flesh and lived among us. And with that, we can indeed say that this is indeed a very merry Christmas, full of grace and truth.

Amen.