



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – First Sunday in Advent – December 1, 2018 *Asan Beach*

When I mark the sands of time, I think back to my birthplace and my childhood home, on the island of Guam in Micronesia. When I was a kid there was one main road on the island – Marine Drive. It went from the Navy base to the Air Force base and Marine Drive was the artery of our lives; connecting us to schools, churches, the airport, the pier, the power plant, restaurants, and retail and grocery stores.

And there was one place along Marine Drive that was special to me and I always looked forward to seeing when my grandmother would drive by it. It was a stretch of rocky sand called Asan Beach, and at the time there were numerous two-storey tin barracks that my grandmother told me was a hospital that was built after World War II, Guam having been occupied by the Japanese and then the site of a horrific battle as the American forces liberated the island in 1944.

Asan Beach drew me in to its energy, even though we never took the time to stop there, for whatever reason. In spite of that, there was something about it that drew me in and that longing and that desire put me in touch with something that was larger than myself—spiritual forces that I didn't have words for as a little boy and that I barely have words for now that I am a grown man.

Something was drawing me in to that beach, but the time wasn't right to find out what it was. It was as if the fig tree had leaves sprouting from it, but was nowhere near ready bear fruit—in my case, spiritual fruit.

Maybe the pain of being a little boy who was marginalized by family and by schoolmates just wasn't ready to converge with the pain of what happened on the beach in 1944—combat, death, cruelty, and war. The time wasn't right.

And then when I was 10 years old, Asan Beach took on a different lifeforce when it housed refugees from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the population of the island literally doubled in two weeks, and one of the only places for the refugees to go was into those two-story corrugated tin barracks.

That was when I learned about empathy at the hand of my grandmother who insisted that I go through the house and pack up some of my toys so that we could take them to a distribution center and have the toys delivered to children so that they would have something to play with, because they had nothing after fleeing their homes and leaving everything behind, literally coming to a new country with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The beach at Asan invited me to think of how those children felt, and I was suddenly in community with people I didn't even know, and I was ready to suffer with others for the sake of the common cause of humanity. But I still didn't get to set foot on that beach.

The memories of war that took place before my childhood were on that beach. The effects of war that took place during my childhood were on that beach. And that beach had pain and that beach had compassion, but I think what was ultimately drawing me in to it was a longing for peace—peace around me and peace within me—peace for a little boy who wanted to belong.

“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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The thing is: I had to wait. And that's what Advent all about. Waiting. And not only waiting, but also anticipating good things to come. You remember how as little kids all we wanted to do was tear into the presents under the Christmas tree, but we had to wait until the day and the time was right.

Mary had to wait, full with child, with no guarantees or certainties about what life had in store for her or her child, or how it would all unfold. For that, she had to wait the same way she had to wait in that Upper Room after the Ascension and until the Holy Spirit came to be the disciples' advocate and guide. Mary waited.

You know, years ago they tore down those tin barracks at Asan Beach and they turned it into a public park with a well-manicured grassy field and palm trees dotting the shore. It wasn't until I was almost 50 that I got to go and walk on the actual beach and put my feet in the same water that the soldiers who liberated the island in 1944 crawled through for the sake of others' freedom. And the same water where Vietnamese refugees stood and looked out toward the sea between them and their homeland after fleeing from it in 1975.



I was almost 50 before I actually went down to that beach, and only because I finally could and because I had a sixth sense that told me to slow the car down and pull it into the parking lot as I was driving by. The time was right. And as I stood on that shore and in that warm tropical Micronesian water looking out at the waves beyond the reef, I thought about the soldiers in World War II and the refugees from the Vietnam Conflict, and I felt pain and suffering and sadness in the ether and in my heart.

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But then the sea breeze wafted up off the water, and it was as if the wind was whispering that precious word to me, that precious word being peace. A place of war and turmoil and conflict and abandonment had at last become a place of peace for that little boy who was now a man who knew that he belonged, belonged to God.

And it was worth the 50-year Advent wait for me to have that feeling of being embraced and enfolded in that peaceful presence, knowing that God was as desperate for me as I was for God.

We have to wait for good things to come, and they don't always come on our timetable; but when they do come, those moments are pivotal and those moments are precious.

And nothing is more pivotal and precious than the Christ child coming into our world, and our call right now is to wait, and then to notice, and then to embrace that peaceful presence—when the time is right.

And I hate to tell you this, but that doesn't happen on the human calendar between late November and late December. That's the creation of humankind that we impose on the timetable of God and that doesn't always do us the best of service, because Advent for us is constant and ever-available—and we have to be ready for it at all times; not just during the Church's Advent season, but all the time.

I didn't have a clue that when I pulled my car into that beach when I was 50 years old that I was going to get the feeling of peace that I got, but something told me not to keep driving like my grandmother always did, and to pull that car into the parking lot and to walk toward the water. I'm glad I listened. And I'm glad I waited.

So during this time of Advent I invite you to wait, to be alert, to listen, and to trust—to trust those signals from God that nudge us toward the peace of God whether it be on a childhood beach, tending to the needs of a loved one, spending time in prayer, looking at the mountains, feeling the gentle rain falling from the sky, or whatever it takes for you to be in that glorious presence so that you can feel that peaceful Christlike goodness in your midst – probably in the form of the peaceful Christlike goodness that is in each and every one of you.

The joy of Christmas will come when the time is right; but for now, in Advent, we wait.

Amen.