



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Third Sunday in Advent – December 16, 2018 *The Missile*

It's been very peaceful in the Cathedral office this past week. You'd think it'd be a bit crazy, especially since the Xerox machine isn't working properly and it doesn't automatically fold and staple bulletins like we're used to. This time of year, churches tend to be a little bit frenetic and anxious – but not us. We're cool. We're calm. We're collected.

Just like last year, this year I told the office that we were gonna frontload our work and begin getting the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day bulletins ready in late November. And that's what we did. And so, when challenges like malfunctioning Xerox machines take place, we're ready. And we were ready. We printed the bulletins and asked people to come in and help fold and staple them manually and 9 days before Christmas, we're ready.

Advent is not a time to go crazy, and there's no need. This is the time of year where we wait. This is the time we anticipate. This is the time we expect. And you can't really do that if you're in the midst crazy-making.

We talk about the first Advent, which is waiting the first coming of Jesus at the Nativity, the Holy Nativity. We also talk about the second Advent, the second coming of Jesus at the end times.

But on this third Sunday of Advent, I'd like to think about a third Advent. There is after all another arrival of Christ for which we need to prepare, but it's not one we like to talk about—and that's the arrival of Christ at our death—the third Advent. The thing is: How do we prepare for that?

Years ago, my cousin Donald's wife Shirley died of a heart attack at 67, just 14 years older than I am now. When I called cousin Donald to express my condolences, he said to me, "Right before she went, Shirley told me that she could see Jesus and that he was coming toward her and she looked so happy that I just had to let her go." It was Shirley's third Advent, and she was ready. She was prepared.

You know, a lot of us had occasion not long ago to really think about something just like that. The rubber hit the road.

The rubber hit the road for us on January 13th of this year. That morning I was getting ready for Nat Potter's funeral when the newly wedded Annalise and JaR Pasalo were at my knocking at my door and asking if they could go into the basement of the Cathedral, because they got a text alert on their phones saying that a nuclear bomb from North Korea was headed our way and that impact was imminent.

I, of course, gave them permission, but something didn't seem right to me. I didn't hear any sirens. There was nothing but a football game on TV. But you never know, right? It might've been the end.

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And I remember walking over to the Cathedral to begin setting up for Nat's funeral and pausing on the lawn between my apartment at The Cluett and the back of the Cathedral to stop for a moment. I stood there and looked up at the sky and wondered if there was any last-minute thing I needed to do if that bomb was really headed our way. And I remember thinking, I don't have time. This is as good as it gets.

And that's when I realized that the only thing I could do was to take the totality of my life – the good and the bad, the triumphs and the mistakes, the achievements and the unfulfilled dreams. The only thing I could do was to take the totality of it all and offer it up to God as truth. I didn't have any time to get anything else right. And was that going to be good enough? I hoped to so. Because that was it. It was all I had.

Well then I walked over to the front of the Cathedral and ran into Karen and Theone and we were talking about the whole thing, very calmly, when this beautiful white tern came and hovered in front of us and it was then that I knew we were going to be OK. The alarm subsequently turned out to be false. And we all had a reprieve.

But it did give me pause to think about how I want to live the rest of my life. I always say with that we can never get to the Pearly Gates with no regrets, but we can try to get there with as few regrets as possible. And it makes me wonder:

- Are there things in my life that I need to clean up and fix?
- Are there relationships that I need to mend?
- Are there friendships that I don't have right now but that I need to have?
- Are there still things that I would like to do?
- Are there still things that I would like to be?
- Is there more that I need to do to become a good priest?
- Is there more that I need to do to become a good disciple?

And what are those things? And do I have the courage to change my ways and actually do them? Do I have the courage to believe that I am only limited by my inability to dream? And do I have the courage to live into those dreams? Or am I going to get to the end of this life with dissatisfaction and regret?

What is the story of my life that I want to offer up at the third Advent of Jesus at my end? And what is that for you? Do you have unfinished business? Do you know what that unfinished business is? And are you going to take care of that unfinished business? And are you going to take care of it now? I hope so, because who knows? The next time we get a text message like that, it may be for real. And we need to be ready.

And that's why we're still and calm in the office right now. We need to be ready. And in this case, we are. And now the staff and I can prepare for the arrival of the Christ child in our midst, in whatever form that may take and in whatever form that may be.

And as difficult and challenging as it might seem, I want stillness and calm for you right now. I want you, I want me, I want all of us to be ready and to have hope in the possibility of good things to come. To me, that's worth more than any Christmas gift, any material gift, that you could ever give – because the real gift will be the gift of yourself and that's what I love, that's what God treasures, and

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that's what the Christ child longs for—the gift of our true, honest, vulnerable, and open selves. It's the best Christmas gift of all.

Are we ready?

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Are we ready?

Amen.