



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Feb. 10, 2019: The *Atulai*

I've been doing a lot of reading for my doctoral work lately; and as I read, I like to take a yellow highlighter and highlight sentences and phrases that jump out at me.

One of the things that I highlighted was so good that I wrote it out and stuck it on my refrigerator so that I would see it every time I go to get an ice cube or drink of water. I wish I could remember which book it came from, but I don't know. At any rate, the saying says this:

We cannot force God to stumble us over where we sit.

There's a lot of language in that statement. But what it says to me is that things happen on God's timetable, versus our timetables. And it also says that maybe we're called not to just sit, but to get up and actually move into action in order to meet God on the path that God would have us travel on.

Think about what it says in this morning's Gospel:

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

He asked Simon to get in the boat and row it out to shore. That required action. And even though he didn't really understand why he was being asked to do what he was being asked, Simon complied. Again, action.

I think what that says to us is we can't always be passive and wait for God to do things for us. And that's because many times what God is calling us to do is to engage in some sort of action—things like making phone calls we don't want to make, going to places we don't want to go, answering emails that we would rather delete, meeting with people we may not want to meet with, doing things we may not want to do.

And then there's that other rub where we do all these things and then nothing happens. And maybe that's why we hear this:

He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

Perhaps Simon was trying to do things on his timetable rather than God's timetable.

It reminds me of when I was a little kid in Guam and people used to stand beside the road in their pickup trucks with coolers full of ice. Someone would stand by the road and shake a bag full of freshly caught fish called *atulai*, which is known as *akule* here in Hawai'i.

"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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If you stop by the roadside and these peddlers would open their ice chests, they were packed with *atulai*. The thing is, I wouldn't see them every day; only at certain times of the year. The fish ran when they were going to run, not when the fisherman told them they were going to run. And when they did run, people would bring in loads and loads of them—just like in today's Gospel. So sometimes we have to wait until the timing is right.

And I think that's the point of this gospel. We have to move into action, but when the time is right—and the problem with that is that it doesn't always jibe with our desires and our timetables and when we want things done or when we want to do them.

At the end of the Gospel lesson it says this:

When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

I think we tend to think that this means that they left all their material things and while that may be true, I think it means more. I think it means leaving behind self-will and the compulsion to be in control.

And that can be difficult for us, because it leaves us vulnerable. But if we're not vulnerable, it's hard for God to come into our spirits and into our lives.

And I think the point of all of this is that, again, as I always say, we are called to be in the pulse of God, in the rhythm of God, in the vibe of God—and then to listen and to be guided and then to put down and leave behind doubt, fear, and uncertainty; and then follow.

And I'll admit, I'm often scared to do that, because I don't have the assurances that I want to have in order to live into that call, but perhaps that's something I also have to leave behind. And that's why I need this Eucharist every week. Because it's there that I get the strength and confidence to be vulnerable and then step into unknown and uncharted territory.

This Eucharist is that blessed assurance and I invite you to partake of it and be open and vulnerable to the presence of God so that you'll be in tune with God, in the pulse of God, in the vibe of God, so that you can leave things behind and be 100% with God.

We cannot force God to stumble us over where we sit.

Through this Holy Communion, we take action and go to God instead.

Amen.