



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 31, 2019: The Japanese Soldier in Guam

I listen to this morning's gospel and the words of that old spiritual come to mind:

*Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me*

*Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!*

Just like the father in this morning's gospel, Jesus is waiting for us to return to him, to come home, to repent, to forgive, to let go of resentments, to strive for peace within ourselves and with one another, to come back to the God who waits for us because God loves us and wants us to be one with God.

Most of you know that I was born and raised in Guam. And as I reflect on that I realize that I was born twenty years after the end of World War Two on an island that had been occupied by the Imperial Army of Japan. Twenty years after the fact, the memories were still raw, just like twenty years after 9/11 (in two years) the memories of that event will still be raw.

When I was a kid, my grandmother taught with Lou, short for Lourdes, an indigenous Chamorro woman, who was a teenager in Guam during the Second World War and I remember Lou's telling me stories about how they all had to bow to the Japanese sentries, even if no one was in the guardhouses because they never knew who might and might not be watching.

When I was in junior high school my grandmother came home and told my grandfather and me about how a Japanese soldier had taken an empathy to Lou's family, taking them under his wing and keeping an eye out for their welfare, protecting them from the abuses from other soldiers who could be very cruel. And when the American forces came in and began to liberate the island, the Imperial Army went on a rampage, killing people, burning houses, abusing women. This one soldier warned Lou and her family about what might happen to them, and so they hid out in the jungle and their lives were spared.

Years later in the 1970s when tourism from Japan was on the rise, this soldier came back to Guam for a visit and sought Lou out at the school where she and my grandmother taught together (my grandmother did the translating). Lou's husband, who had family members executed with swords during the war, refused to meet the man, but Lou agreed to see him and they kept up a correspondence until she died in the late 1970s, an event which left the Japanese soldier crestfallen.

"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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Peace, it turns out, was more important than memories of the war.

Peace or bitterness. Lou made a choice. And she chose peace. Our gospel story this morning is full of choices. The father made choices. He chose to give his son his inheritance and let him go. He chose to let him come home. He chose to welcome him with open arms, much like the gospel a couple of weeks ago described—the mother hen gathering her brood under her wings, even those who’ve gone astray.

The prodigal son made choices. He chose to leave. He chose to carouse. He chose to repent. He chose to come home.

But to me, the most interesting choice in this story is the one that, for us, is unresolved. Does the brother, the one who was loyal to the father, does the brother join the party as well, or does he stay out in the field and cut himself off from the crowd that rejoices along with his father?

We don’t know.

And if scripture is a living thing, maybe the story is left unresolved so that we can resolve it in how we live our lives the way Lou resolved it in how she lived hers. She also had a choice. She could have sided with her husband and kept the former Imperial soldier at bay. But she made a different choice. She chose the path of reconciliation and peace.

And now, today, what about you and me?

Churches can be a vortex of emotions, including anger. And it’s not just the Cathedral. It’s every church I’ve ever been in. They are a vortex of emotions. And I think that happens because God and the church are important to us and we care about them deeply. And when we’ve got different viewpoints swirling around together in a mix of humanity, sometimes conflicts arise and our emotions can get the best of us.

It happens everywhere – in our families, with our friends, in our workplaces, and in the church. Think of what’s probably going on in the Vatican right now. Do you think everyone’s getting along? Think of the fights we’ve had in the Episcopal Church over the past ten years about gay clergy and bishops and having a female primate, the head of the entire corporate and ecclesial entity.

As a clergy friend of mine in New Jersey says, “It’s just what happens when humanity gets together and starts doing their thing.”

Things become very important to us, conflicts arise, people get angry, we get resentful, we dig in our heels, and we start dying in trenches. We have discord and disunion and we find ourselves in a state of sin, carrying on with sinful behavior.

But we’re not doomed. We’re not doomed, because at some point the time comes when we’re called by God to come home to God—to let that all go, to strive for peace, come home to the presence of God who like the father in the gospel this morning, begs his son to come to the party to welcome his brother home, whether his brother was right or wrong, good or bad.

We’re called to show up. We’re called to put our resentments and grudges aside, we’re called to exchange the peace (especially with our “enemies”), we’re called to come to the table, we’re called to drink the wine and eat the bread. We’re called to repentance. We’re called to reconciliation. We’re

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called to come home.

And as we head toward home, we recall the words of Jesus in the parable, and we make them come alive in our lives here and now:

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

Welcome home.

Amen.