



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 11, 2019: Count the stars

The words in the Book of Genesis this morning are timely for us, given all that is going on back home on Hawaii Island on the access road to the Mauna Kea summit where people are taking a stand on the Thirty Meter Telescope. In the midst of controversies over land, over telescopes and over stars, we hear the words:

Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be.

Whether we're astronomers looking through telescopes, or Polynesian navigators on open seas, or just regular folk who stand wherever they are and look up, the vastness of the stars at night give us a small sense of the immensity of God's presence. And whenever I'm home on the Big Island and I look up at the Milky Way, I think to myself: Here I am, just one human being out of 7 billion, on one planet out of 9 in one solar system in one galaxy. I'm so small. And then at that realization I'm amazed that in the midst of all of it, God loves me fully. I am completely loved by God—God of the land, God of the telescopes, God of the seas, God of the stars.

And for me personally, the words in the Book of Genesis this morning are timely not only because of what's going on up on Mauna Kea, but also because twelve years ago I stood in this very pulpit for the very first time and preached my very first Cathedral sermon on this very passage.

Here are some excerpts from what I said to you that morning twelve years ago:

I stand before you this morning and I'm grateful that you're here for my first sermon in this very special place. I stand before you this morning and I'm grateful that I'm in Saint Andrew's Cathedral, because Saint Andrew's Cathedral is a gathering place that joyfully reflects God's Love.

A gathering place that joyfully reflects God's Love. This is a vision – your vision, my vision, our vision. This is a vision that is part of a journey, a journey based on a leap of faith, a leap of faith where we believe that if we look toward heaven and count the stars, if we are able to count them, so shall our descendants be. We are off on a journey. We take a leap of faith – a leap of faith in a gathering place that joyfully reflects God's love.

And twelve years ago I also said:

I sign on for a journey in a place with a rich history that is willing to change, to move, to grow while it continues to honor its heritage and to honor its past. I sign on for a journey in a place that chooses to value mana, malama, pono – divine energy, caring stewardship, right behavior.

And then twelve years ago I ended by saying this:

As we set out in our proverbial double-bulled Baptismal Covenant and Eucharistic canoes, may we be like those who came before us, those who came before us and set forth, set forth into an unknown ocean and toward an unknown land, set forth on a journey of faith and with God's vision for Abraham in their hearts, headed for a gathering place that joyfully reflects God's Love. "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be."

Fr. Moki, August 11, 2019, cont'd.

It's been 4375 days since I said those words from this pulpit. It's been twelve years.

So, let's check in. How are we doing? Where are we at? How many of those words from that sermon twelve years ago have we actually embraced? What words have we set aside? And what words should we still embrace as we look to the next twelve years—when I hope to be looking to retirement.

4375 days. Twelve years. A lot has happened in that span of time. I came and went—off to the Priory and then off to Hilo and then I came back. Tim left. Walter came and left. Sue Sowers came and left. Not to mention those who have passed: Aunty Rags, Aunty Pat, Aunty Thelma, Aunty Paulie, Joe Oba, Kilani, Ann McElligot, Uncle Hartwell, Malcolm Chun, Bishop Chang; just to name a few.

We are not the same place that we were twelve years ago. And I seriously doubt we will be the same place twelve years from now that we are today. And my question in the midst of all of that is what will our legacy be, our legacy to the God of Abraham? What will our legacy be? And will that legacy be as abundant as the stars in the sky?

Whatever that legacy may be, I have faith that it will be abundant, it will be fruitful; because I have faith in all of you. I have faith in us as a community. I have that we are committed to working for the building up of the kingdom. And I have faith that our works will be beautiful in God's sight if we continue to strive to do it all not through the lens status and prestige, but through the lens of humble service to the One who died on the cross for us and who rose from the dead for us on Easter Sunday.

In the midst of doing what we do to be as a cathedral community and congregation, and as we sit under the enormity of God's presence in the stars at night, we also have to ask why we do what we do, what God is calling us to do, and who is God calling us to be as a community that joyfully reflects God's Love. It is, after all, still our vision. It's still our mission. At least that's what much of our literature still says. What is God calling us to do? Who is God calling us to be?

To answer those questions faithfully means that we will have to step out in faith without a lot of clarity or certainty about what lies on the horizon. But then again, look at Abraham.

He thought he was pretty much done and that he would have no heir. But then God spoke to him and told him to look to the stars. And look what happened. He became the father of Israel. So as we face the un-guaranteed uncertainty of the future, may we be like Abraham and reach out to God in the stars of the night sky above Mauna Kea. May we be like Abraham and reach out to God and hear the words and embrace them as our own:

Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be.

May we embrace those words with hope. May we embrace those words with love. May we embrace those words with faith.

Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be.

Amen.