



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, September 1, 2019: The Flip Book

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked by someone during her lifetime why she felt compelled to reach out to the poor and the dying in the streets of India and she's reported to have said, "Because I never know when one of them might be Christ returned in a distressing disguise." And I have a feeling that her response was informed by this passage from the Letter to the Hebrews this morning—a passage that she probably chose to embody and live into.

When I heard Mother Teresa's quote in a religion class in the tenth grade at the Marist high school that I went to, it really struck me, even though I never went to church and I wasn't even a Christian.

But it struck me.

When I was here in the mid-2000s your Canon Pastor, I'd often come back to the office after working out at the gym on Bishop Street and most nights I'd find a young couple sleeping on goza mats outside the choir room. This was, of course, twelve years ago and you'll remember that back in those days we didn't have dedicated security patrolling the premises like we do today, and people would often spend the night on the church grounds. And I'd nervously walk by this couple on the way to my car until one night I remembered Mother Teresa's quote and I worked up the courage to ask this couple their names, and then listen to their story about how they had jobs and got laid off after the crash of 2008, and how they could no longer afford to pay rent and so they had to live on the streets until they could figure out a way to get back on their feet.

And in the morning when I'd come to work, Ward would've gently guided them to leave, telling them it was time to move on. But, you know, this couple came to our Sandy services and even had nametags and made for themselves – even though I can't remember what their names were now. But what I really remember was running into the lady on Alakea Street one morning by the courthouse and she was shuffling along, looking very tired and haggard and worn out from life. Her eyes were facedown toward the sidewalk and her hair was all messed up and I looked at her wondering if she would recognize me, which she didn't. But as I was looking at her, what I still remember to this day was how clearly, I heard a voice in my head that said: *You are looking at the face of Jesus Christ.* I remember that to this day and I remember thinking: *Thank God you were nice to her.*

I also remember being told at the time that if we had no savings in the bank, we were only two paychecks away from living out on the streets ourselves. And I remember thinking that that lady could've easily been me because I didn't have any money in the bank. All I had was my job.

When I was in seminary in Evanston, Illinois I would often go down to The Art Institute of Chicago to take in the collection of Impressionist painting that they had there, and I remember going into the gift shop on one of those visits and buying one of those flipbooks that we used to enjoy when we

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were little kids – you know the ones where you flip through real fast and the images become kind of like a movie.

Well, this flipbook had a couple lying on the grass in Central Park and when you flipped one way the perspective went up – the couple, the park, Manhattan, New York City, the East Coast, the United States, the North American continent, the earth, the solar system, finally working its way up to giving a bird's eye view of the Andromeda galaxy. And then it was fun to flip the book back down to the couple, turn it over and flip again; and then the perspective went down – the couple, the man's arm, the man's hand, one little hair on the man's hand, his pore, the tissue of his skin, the blood cells, a molecule, an atom, finally leaving you with the image of some part of the atoms that I think might of been his DNA or something like that.

And I think what struck me about that flipbook was that I realized that we're all the same, really. We're all made up of the same thing – tissue, cells, atoms, molecules, DNA. And then to flip the book over and realize that we're all part of the same cosmos; we share the same space. And I think that's why Jesus said: *Hey, whatever you do to the least of these you do unto me.* We're all the same. We're all one.

Our baptismal covenant charges us to seek and serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being, to strive for justice among all people. And when we do that, we're striving for justice for Christ, and we're striving for justice for ourselves.

And that kind of re-frames and puts a different perspective on how we treat and think about refugees, immigrants, people living in our streets, those in prison, and that list, of course, goes on and on.

But in a way, that's kind of easy, isn't it? For many, many of us who live lives of privilege, privilege meaning that we have some sort of income, a way to get three square meals a day, clothes on her back and roofs over our heads. In the way that creates a comfortable distance between us and those we're called to serve, those were called to pray, those for whom we try to advocate. I know this isn't true for everyone, but I've never been a refugee. I've never been an immigrant. I've never lived in the streets. I've never been in prison. So it's comfortable being different – *until I realize* that our biblical theology tells us that we're one and the same – so I could've easily been that woman sleeping outside the choir room, or walking down Alakea Street with my hair disheveled and my eyes cast down toward the sidewalk, hoping that someone would hear a voice in their head about me saying: *You're looking at the face of Jesus Christ.*

But then I take it up a notch, and what's really challenging is when I think about people like the friends I have on Facebook who have completely opposite political view points from me and who aren't shy about posting them in comments and memes. It's hard for me to interact with all of that and think that I may be entertaining angels. Or when I think of the bosses I've had who bullied, yelled, screamed, belittled, withheld pay raises, or laid me off; it's hard for me to think back on them and wonder if in my interactions with them I was entertaining angels. And what about the kids who tormented me in school when I rode the bus? Was I entertaining angels? Or the people whom I see on TV who went into Parkland and Sandy Hook, or the Pulse Nightclub, or who marched in the streets of Charlottesville: it's way harder for me to say that I am one with them than it is for me to acknowledge that I'm one with the prisoner, or the homeless or the sick or the friendless or the needy.

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It's hard enough to see my oneness with them let alone to think that I might be entertaining an angel, but then we remember the words of Rowan Williams who said "We cannot know the mind of God." Maybe God is up to something that I don't understand. Maybe I have a lesson to learn about myself. And maybe that's why I find people that I disagree with or whom I find challenging, or even offensive, and maybe that's why I find them planted on my pathways and in my midst.

And maybe that's why I remember that flipbook – the one from the Art Institute in Chicago that shows me that we're all more alike than we are different. And maybe that's an invitation into humility – not only a right understanding of my weaknesses and strengths, but also a great understanding of my place in the world, the cosmos, the Kingdom of God.

And maybe how we treat people is how we treat God. Maybe, how we feel about people is how we feel about God—the God from whom we constantly receive unmerited grace and unconditional love.

Think about what we're going to do in this service of Holy Communion. You'll notice that I'm going to hold up the host and break it in two – it's called 'The Fraction' where we take something whole and we fragment it, the way we took something whole and fragmented it when we nailed that bread to the cross. Humanity tends to take the body of Christ and fragment it into divisions based on fear of differences in race, color, class, creed, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and the list goes on. But we don't leave it all fragmented, do we? You all come together for that one body and you are all called to make it whole again by putting it all back together when you walk out that door and live into the words from scripture this morning through your thoughts, through your words, and through your deeds. So take those words to heart when you go back into the world so that you can take those fragmented pieces of bread, that crucified body, and make them whole once again—whole for you, whole for me, whole for the church, and whole for God:

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

*Amen.*