

When Nanette and I picked up two of her sisters and their husbands Thursday night late in Honolulu, one of them said I should get inspiration for my homily from them. Unbeknownst to them, I already was planning to quote from one of them. So stay tuned for later.

Do you remember a few weeks ago when I arbitrarily and uncharacteristically changed the texts for the day. Well one of the first things I noticed in a commentary this week was the commentator focusing on today's text addressing community and conflict and **then** mentioning that next week's text follows with forgiveness. But guess what, we already had that text. But trust me, I will figure something out.

Change is inevitable because all of creation, just like all of mankind – you know, us – **is** evolving. This evolutionary process is in all of creation, and churches, and humans, and work, and worship. James Baldwin speaking on change said this: "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." For us, the **real** issue is – how do **we** handle or react to change? Do we want to know who moved our cheese because we are not happy, or are we able to adjust to the new and just trust God? Now, remember, both are okay but one is typically **more** productive in the long run.

I think the most important thought in our reading from Ezekiel is found in verse 11a: "**Say to them, As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.**" Yes, there is doom and gloom in our Ezekiel reading and if your penchant is to think of God as a judge or taskmaster then you will find judgement here. On the other hand, if your penchant is for a loving, parental type God then you will find that here in verse 11a. For the most part, except for a few bad apples who are really warped, most parents only desire what is **best** for their children. And that is how I see God, a very good parent. How do **you** see God? Your **vision** of God can have tremendous impact on how you see the world as well. Do you want to be a Debbie downer or a positive Paul?

Does this idea of a loving, parental God remind you of a recurring theme in the psalms of God's steadfast faithfulness and love. Or, how about the story we call the "Prodigal Son" but might be more correctly called the "Prodigal Parent"? Do you **truly** believe in the eternal and steadfast love and promises of God? Can that, does that give you a measure of confidence that you and God, mostly God, have this cheese moving thing covered? If so, did you happen to notice that this idea is also echoed, in a way, in the last verse of our gospel reading that says: "**For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.**" Notice that Jesus does not say "I **might** be there" or it is a **possibility** that "I **could** be there." No, Jesus simply says, "I **am there.**" Also, we should notice Jesus' now classic use of that "I **am**" statement – you know – God's description for God's self. This, my friends, is a powerful statement by Jesus in many different ways.

I believe there is another thought in our gospel reading that we should look at as well. In verse 18 it says, "**Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**" I find this verse to be absolutely downright scary, especially in view of other verses that say things like – judge not lest you be judged – or how you judge is how you will be judged or even do not worry about the splinter in another's eye until you deal with the beam in your own eye, or maybe most importantly – let the one who is without sin throw the first stone. This last one is particularly poignant when we remember, the **only one** qualified to throw a stone – did not.

So, just what are we to make of this gospel reading for churches in general, for KLC specifically, and for ourselves. First, I believe that it is important to note that this interaction at offense comes out of long-standing Hebrew laws and rules, you know - the Old Testament. Second, this is one of the few times that the word "church" is specifically mentioned in the Bible. Third, I also do not believe this type of interaction is solely for use inside the "church". It is, after all, contrary to the interactions between people that Jesus encourages over and over in the gospels. Judging, condemning, and binding the sins of our opponents is **not** the church Jesus calls us to be. Where is humility? Where is concern for the weaker?

And then suddenly, we are at the scary verse about loosing and binding. I often like to quote others who say the things I am thinking better than I am thinking them. Chuck Lindquist did just that in his two God Pause devotionals on this text. His Thursday comments made the following points. First, disagreements should be treated with both understanding and discretion — **never** as opportunities to "score points." Second, reconciliation should **always** be the goal. Third, we should **learn** to forgive one another. A whole bunch, as a matter of fact. Fourth, he says that some translations give the impression that heaven ratifies **whatever** we choose to "loose" or "bind." These translations tend to give **us** power. Other translations like The Message make the connection different. We "loose" what "shall have been loosed" already in heaven — not the other way around. In other words, heaven, God have the power. And heaven has "loosed" a great deal. Heaven, by the way, is under no obligation to observe our earthly prejudices. This is a call for the "little ones", the disciples and us, to treat one another with grace.

Then on Friday, Chuck Lindquist pointed out that our gospel reading is part of a longer discourse, which is at a turning point in Jesus' earthly ministry and also for the disciples lives. Jesus' ministry of healing at home in Galilee is coming to an end. And Jesus is currently in the midst of another long discourse intended to prepare the disciples for what is to come as Jesus heads to Jerusalem and the awful **yet** wonderful events that await Jesus there. Jesus wants the disciples to remember something important, however, before the journey begins. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst." (v.20) Our lives are also filled with turning points like these — from the comfortable and familiar, to something less clear and potentially dangerous. From a past we remember with nostalgia to a present filled with turmoil to an unknown future. Jesus' promise is available to us in situations like these also. Jesus invites us to pray with confidence and to remember Jesus will always be found at our side.

Yes, the unknown future can be scary. But Jesus asks us to face it bravely just trusting in Jesus' promises. Jesus also calls us to love unconditionally. Martin Luther called us to be bold. Do you trust? Are you bold?

Hear then the good news:

We need to remember that what makes a church a church is precisely the presence of many troublesome people.

After all, where else should they be more welcome?

There is a famous quote that says something like: To those with great authority or power comes also great responsibility. Variations of this quote are attributed to many famous people like Winston Churchill but the earliest rendition appears to date back to 1793 in France.

There is also a thematic precursor in the Bible verse in Luke 12:48 which says: **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."**

Patty, the youngest of the sisters, raise your hand, shared the following quote from Nicole Williams book "Lost and Found". *"Every morning we get a chance to be different. A chance to change. A chance to be better. Your past is your past. Leave it there. Get on with the future part, honey."*

Sooo – change – be different – evolve.

Grace and peace to you, my friends. Believe, trust, and when in doubt, err on the side of justice and love.

Amen