

Discipleship In a Broken World: August 2013

Aloha ke Akua:

In the weeks since the Zimmerman Trial verdict and two Supreme Court rulings impacting same-sex marriages (striking down the federal Defense of Marriage Act and deciding not to review the overturning of California's Proposition 80), I have been again studying the two-part story of the early Church: the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Especially as a preacher, I have had to spend many hours with the Gospel of Luke. My understanding of discipleship and of the Church has long been shaped by Luke's writings. The trial and the rulings coming so close together have left me looking for the Holy in these events. Many – even most – clergy and lay leaders in our Diocese welcomed the Supreme Court rulings. I have heard from several that were equally dismayed or confused by the jury's action in the Florida trial. Where is God?

On Sundays in our congregations, the Gospel lessons these past few weeks have been from Luke's Gospel and have focused our attention on active discipleship. Jesus has warned his followers – then and now – that the cost of discipleship may mean no home (9:58) and even setting aside family duties (9:60). In one of my favorite verses in Scripture, "Jesus said to him [the person who wanted to say good-bye to his family before following Jesus], 'No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom.'" (9:62)

Chapter 10 (vs. 1-24) begins with the sending of "seventy-two" others (in pairs) into the world to "heal the sick" while proclaiming: "God's kingdom has come upon you." These seventy-two others proclaim the peace of God in every house they enter. Again, however, these too are sent with nothing, but the clothes on their backs being dependent upon the hospitality of others – of strangers.

The story of the Good Samaritan is told as an explanation about what it means to be a neighbor. The Great Commandment is understood to be the basis of life: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." (Deut. 6:5; Lev 19:18) Who is my neighbor? In the story told by Jesus, the nature of neighborliness is redefined. The Samaritan, part of a proscribed group, is the true neighbor. Authentic love of neighbor is marked by generosity to the stranger. Further, it is the outcast that shows love. It is the outcast from whom we are to learn. Paul, like other Jewish teachers, would state: "All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: Love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:14) With Jesus, everyone is my neighbor and I am everyone's neighbor. There are no strangers. There are no outcasts. There is, for Jesus, no "other." That is what it means to be a disciple.

As Chapter 10 ends, Jesus calls the disciple back from the active life back to his side. Having taught about the active aspect of discipleship in care of the stranger and being sent into the world, Jesus meets Mary to teach. "While Jesus and his disciples were traveling, Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. She had a sister named

Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his message. By contrast, Martha was preoccupied with getting everything ready for their meal. So Martha came to him and said, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to prepare the table all by myself? Tell her to help me' The Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her.'" (Luke 10:38-42) The Church has often read this story as an affirmation of the contemplative over the active life. It is about radical discipleship in another way. Mary sits as a disciple at the feet of a teacher. In the society of the time, that is not a place for a woman. Martha was fulfilling her expected role. She was not as attentive to what her guest really wanted – disciples. Again, the disciple is not the one expected.

The call of discipleship often turns the world upside down. The stranger (the other or the rejected) is placed in the center of the community of faith. Our fear and our anxiety are to be set-aside for the new community. Those of us who call ourselves the disciples of Jesus Christ are challenged to offer peace and healing to all that we meet. We are commanded not to be anxious. We are to welcome and care for the stranger, and, further, we must allow the stranger to minister to us. The stranger too can provide care and shelter, the stranger can teach and change the disciple.

The rulings of the Supreme Court parallel the slow movement within the Episcopal Church to care for lesbian and gay sisters and brothers. Those who were officially strangers are now welcomed as fellow disciples. We are coming to understand that any Christian couple regardless of sexual orientation that engages in a sexually exclusive, permanent and indissoluble relationship ought to seek the blessing of the Church in our broken world. Disciples need the community to support them through the vicissitudes of life. I think this is a mark of discipleship. The movement within our Church would have continued however the Court had ruled. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are trying to create a community of peace and healing. We pray that we are sitting at the feet of Christ and discerning how the stranger might become our sister or brother.

The Zimmerman verdict reminds us that we still live in a divided and fear-filled world. The unnecessary murder of Trayvon Martin is an example of that division and brokenness. With "Stand Your Ground" laws and the prevalence of guns, we know the world still embraces fear and violence. I do not have the expertise or experience to adjudge Zimmerman's guilt under Florida law. As a Bishop of the Church, I am called to turn my attention to the community of faith and the call of discipleship. Racism and prejudice are alive and well in American society – even in Hawai'i. The fear of the stranger (the other) still festers. Perhaps it is the fear of the loss of power – real or perceived. It may be the primal fear of the stranger -- the tribe on the other side of the hill. The violence of a gun culture and the fear of the stranger combine to create a person ready to kill. The disciples of Jesus Christ are called to bring peace and healing. I cannot think of a reason that a disciple of Jesus Christ would carry a gun – except as an agent of the civil authority. The very concept of a "Stand Your Ground" law is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ to turn the other cheek, to be not anxious and to see in the stranger the face of

God. Our call as the disciples of Jesus Christ is to stand in the midst of the division and the violence crying peace and bringing health.

In the Gospel of Luke when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he is simple and direct. “Jesus told them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, uphold the holiness of your name. Bring in your kingdom. Give us the bread we need for today. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us. And don't lead us into temptation.’” (Luke 11:2-4) The upholding of God’s name is our hope that we too can be brought into that holiness. In Luke, Jesus prays that God’s kingdom – the peace and the healing – will pervade everywhere and at all times for everyone. There are no strangers in God’s kingdom. The disciples of Jesus Christ are urged to ask God’s abundance on today, but not to be anxious about tomorrow. God’s forgiveness depends upon us forgiving all who have wronged us. There is no proportionality in God’s love. We are called to give it back in full measure. The temptation of life is to trust in something other than God – money, power, control, anxiety, fear, or anything or anyone else. The call of discipleship is to proclaim peace, to bring healing, to care for the stranger and to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ. I pray that we each may have the courage to be such a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,

+Bob

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+ Keali’ikoaokeakua