

Makaukau? E huli, e huli makou; e huli, e huli makou; kou maka, kou lima, a me kou kino e; e aloha mai.

You heard that? The page turned. Same book; new chapter. You have turned that page, awaiting what is to come in the adventure called “church.” And you’ve extended aloha to me to encourage and facilitate, to challenge and analyze, to reassure and engage. The advantage of being an “outsider” is that I get to ask all kinds of questions, of everyone—everyone who will spend time with me—in order to understand both how this congregation functions and how it might live out its mission even better. There are many gifts here, empowered by the one Spirit. Some of those gifts are yet to be discovered.

Take a moment to think about your gifts... Now ask yourself if your gifts are being offered in mutual ministry. If not, the obvious question is “How come then?” Not to worry. In coming months we’ll be in conversation together and begin to develop an inventory of skills/gifts/passions as well as discerning ways through which the ministry of this congregation might benefit from them. As Rachel Maddow says, “Watch this space.”

We just listened to the passage from Luke in which Jesus challenges his visitor to look beyond the socially-acceptable and see the role of the maligned and ostracized. Jesus was good at that, challenging our presuppositions about decency, respectability, honor, righteousness—those who live lives considered “kosher.” It is really about mobile hospitality, isn’t it? It continues to be about who we treat others, especially those of a different group. Bigotry thrives when anyone acts out a sense of chosenness, specialness, superiority. This parable catches us watching, holding our breath, fearful, when what we are called to do is show up with kindness being our agenda. We cannot always “fix” the problem; but we show up. William Sloane Coffin reflects, in The Heart Is a Little to the Left, “No longer is it an individual wholies bleeding in the ditch but whole communities in city after city across the land.” (mention shootings, BLM, etc)

You’ll learn that I appreciate the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Prophets, and often include that reading from the lectionary. Amos and Hosea are called to mind this month. Today we consider Amos 7: 7-17. I’ll read it, from the NRSV.

Though I never had a class in physics, like you I know a little bit about “practical physics. Anyone who has ever lifted or transported an object knows about leverage; anyone who has ever built anything over a foot high understands what it means to be “plumb.” The plumb line is an ancient tool—more basic than the square and level possibly. I know, somebody is looking it up right now. Just think about defensive walls and fortresses—right here in Hawai’i. Somebody needed to ensure some stability—they didn’t have rebar.

So, this plumb bob, with a long cord, would assist us in our construction still yet today. (Invariably, when this reading comes around every three years I’m trying to find this tool. It

helps to organize things as I've been doing lately) Of course the 8th century BCE prophet, who just loves to challenge the privileged, is inspired by God to use the plumb line as an indicator of social instability. Clearly, Amos makes the case against the status quo in the Northern Kingdom's theocracy: it is indeed crooked, corrupt, unable to withstand the gravitational forces of divine judgment on behalf of the poor, the vulnerable, the voiceless, the alien.

And Amos says, essentially, "I'm one of those whom you oppress; I'm simply a dresser of sycamore trees; I have no power—only a Word from Yahweh."

What is the word from Yahweh to those of us at Waiola United church of Christ at this particular time? What challenge from Jesus moves us into new ministry? Coffin notes, "I think the love of Jesus is the plumb line by which everything is to be measured. (elaborate) What is next for those who listen, for those who hear, for those who will not turn away, for those who use all the tools necessary for constructing the Peaceable Realm in this world? As Henri Nouwen wrote, "The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it."

Finally, our work will not be the ultimate statement of faith; our endeavors are always temporary and partial. We work, we worship, and we wait. For we know, as did Archbishop Oscar Romero, that all is transitional. Here are his words:

In our time together it is highly doubtful that society will be recreated; that is not the goal. The goal is about responding to changes in society with truth, hospitality, courage, hope, peace, and justice—and a healthy dose of forgiveness and humor.