

“*Manawanui Po’okela*/Utmost Patience” 1 Timothy 1: 12-17 September 11, 2016

My sister in Ohio called us, fifteen years ago today, waking us up in Portland, to tell us “Turn on your tv.” We did and, along with millions in the US and abroad, experienced the shock of vulnerability. Many alive then could remember the attack on Pearl Harbor and connected the two events as pillars of outrage erected upon the shifting sand of shock-induced numbness. For my generation, the assassinations of the 1960s were our points of reference. In all of these experiences, our assumptions of security and rationality were, and are, assaulted, questioned, and cast adrift in a stormy sea. In all these experiences, we recognize our vulnerability as human beings, a vulnerability felt often elsewhere in the world where bombings, assassinations, oppression in its many forms, and natural calamities have become common. In all these experiences, we are challenged to our ethical cores because, clearly, there must be a response. But ever since that day, thoughtful persons have wondered what that response ought to have been; clearly, the indignation-based response has had unanticipated outcomes—outcomes that remain after all these years with no end in sight.

In 2005, a book was published by our own Pilgrim Press, titled, War or Words; Interreligious Dialogue as an Instrument of Peace. Various ethicists, theologians, and religious leaders contributed to this work, noting that we are now in ongoing conflicts that do not fall within the “Just War Theory” because these conflicts are not between sovereign states. Further, these acts of terrorism have led an entire religious tradition to be suspect, even reviled. I will simply offer this thought by Hans Kung, noted ethicist and Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, University of Tübingen, Germany: *There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions. There will be no dialogue among the religions without global ethical standards. There will be no survival of this globe without a global ethic.* (p. 20)

While we might well point out that violence often uses religious zeal as a cover for outright hatred, I think we’ll agree that we need a better understanding of other faith traditions in the interest of the common good.

Last Sunday, Jeremiah’s illustration of the potter suggested that Master Potter God, in anger, could shatter humanity with great ease. Yet, God does not do so. In a reading from Exodus 32: 7-14, suggested for today, Moses talks God out of destroying the people in response to the Golden Calf Affair—known in our time as Wall Street in the Wilderness. In verses 9 and 10 we read, *The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this*

*people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.*” Notice how God, while angry with the people, has not given up on Moses. It helps to be away from the action in order to avoid guilt by association. Then Moses, risking being *maha’oi*/impertinent, responds; in verses 11 and 12 we read, *But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘it was with evil intent that [God] brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.”* This is called negotiation; it takes courage rooted in an ethical center which takes the long view, a perspective which identifies other tools, other resources more suited to the task.

The long view is illustrated in the passage from Luke 15. With the shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness in order to seek the one which is lost, and the woman searching for a lost coin in her house, Jesus reminds us of including everyone in the community, indicating the joy in heaven and among the angels regarding such finding, such retrieval, such reintegration, such reunion.

Our theme today comes from First Timothy chapter 1. The author, who writes in the name of Paul, and tells Paul’s story convincingly, remains unknown to us. However, the message matters. It is one of confession, *I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence*; it is one of transformation, *I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*. Jesus, then, was willing to *display the utmost patience/manawanui po’okela, making me an example to those who would come to believe*.

If we really believe into Christ—notice I didn’t say “believe in”—we become part of a new perspective and a new belonging. Our lives change because we’ve been “found” and recreated for mission; we’ve been called up to the role of negotiator. What do you think about that thought? Christians are chosen for negotiation, for conversation and advocacy as forms of service. Think of the negotiations in South Africa which led to the Peace and Reconciliation movement. Think of all the negotiations regarding civil rights, women’s right to vote, the end of slavery, environmental awareness, protection of communities endangered by environmental racism, struggle for a living wage, advocacy for health care, restitution regarding stolen lands and alienated populations, and currently taking place in North Dakota, the destruction of First People’s sacred lands in an effort to build a pipeline. Is this not a part of our mandate, if when we say Jesus” we are saying “justice?”

Just possibly that focus on justice will be a hallmark of the church of the future, the emerging church, the church Cameron Trimble, of the Center for Progressive Renewal, calls church 3.0—one which is informed by forms 1.0 and 2.0 but is not limited to those modes. Just like our technology changes, challenging our brains, so do our institutions, including church. Postmodern Christians will not settle for programs which support the status quo and emphasize personal salvation; they think in terms of community and effective actions. Think about your childhood in the church. If you were raised in an orthodox tradition, such as Roman Catholic, you were inducted into church 1.0; if you were a product of a Protestant denomination, you were rooted in church 2.0. The former exists on hierarchy, tradition, and scripture; the latter rejects, somewhat, hierarchy and tradition in favor of scripture. The emerging church looks for other ways of understanding, those not limited to ancient perspectives and ultimate truths. Now, nevermind shaking your heads; this is happening whether or not we approve. And who knows about folks like me—will there be seminary-trained religious practitioners?

Just to be clear, Waiola will not become a postmodern congregation (although there are postmoderns among us); those groups will grow up around us. They might well appreciate what Waiola means to this community, but they will follow their own path. We might give them a blessing, so that their work for justice might produce good fruit. Waiola has its own path to continue. And this raises the questions of what that path looks like now; how we walk that path together assessing strengths and challenges; how leadership is developed; and how trust is shared.

In coming weeks I plan to be more specific about these matters, here, in the newsletter, and in conversation. Next month during the quarterly meeting, we will spend some time in table conversation called Asset Mapping. It is not about financial assets, by the way. This will be a time for you to share the gifts of this congregation. It sounds simple; it is. And it can reveal something overlooked.

Is one of the gifts manawanui po'okela? Is this congregation known for utmost patience? What about in your own life? Are you balancing patience with conviction? Clearly, manawanui po'okela is a God-quality. We are limited in our capacity to watch the mango grow; but we are wise enough to know that our resolve to enjoy it has to be tempered. Patience with our children, our partners, our coworkers, and especially our church community leaders is a priceless trait. Let us, like the writer to Timothy, immerse ourselves in the utmost patience of God, witnessed in Christ, that it might grow within us and this community. In this way, Waiola, church 2.0, will continue to be open to God's invitation in our time. It is only through patient listening that we perceive the Stillspeaking God.

In War or Words, Marvin Cook, Professor of Philosophy at the US Air Force Academy reminds us of order. Terrorism exists to create disorder. Our Creator brings forth order out of chaos and calls it good. If social order is valued, then, Cook envisions *A new world order based on shared values, sustained and defended by power wielded in the name of, and with the support of, a united world defending its common civilization.* (p.35)

Finally, a brief reflection concerning those who die by the evil adventures of zealots brings us to the sense of loss suffered by so many families fifteen years ago and thereafter. We honor their grief; we honor the newfound vulnerability we share. We are honest enough to know that religion is an excuse for violence which seeks to upset social, regional, and global order; therefore we will not retaliate with hatred toward any faith tradition and its adherents. We grieve the pain in God's heart when humans wreak havoc upon others, others who have nothing to do with the alienation and frustration behind it. We repent our own participation in unjust systems and seek God's alternative of caring community. We pray for humility born of tragedy and suffering. We seek the path of dialogue and peace. We endeavor to embrace *manawanui po'okela*/utmost patience because it is of God.