

Bishop Robert Fitzpatrick, Hawaii

Let us pray.

Almighty and most merciful God, grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit, we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Aloha.

It is a great honor to be with on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Taiwan. I am particularly grateful to Bishop Chang for inviting me. As they say in Hawaii: Mahalo.

I have learned from my native Hawaiian siblings that when one is a guest in that culture you are expected to share something of your genealogy. In the Polynesian tradition, it is a way of making connections and grounding yourself in a place. As a Bishop, however, church genealogy is passed through ordination: the laying on of hands of Bishop to Bishop.

So as the Bishop of Hawaii, your Bishop Chang and I have the same great, great grandfather Bishop. Bishop Harry S. Kennedy was the Bishop when the Episcopal Church was organized on Taiwan 70 years ago. It was another age. Bishop Kennedy was the Bishop of the Missionary District of Honolulu from 1944 until 1969. It included Hawaii, Guam, Okinawa and Taiwan. He had oversight of churches established in the wake of World War II throughout the Pacific. In the decades that followed, Hawaii became a diocese and Taiwan became a diocese. We have remained sister dioceses throughout those years. So, I am here as your brother.

The gospel lesson today is from the end of the Gospel of Matthew. It contains the Great Commission with a clear call: “Go and make disciples.” It seems a fitting reminder as the children of dioceses grounded in the wake of a bishop who did just that: “He went and made disciples.”

I particularly want us to consider today: What does it mean to make a disciple now in the Episcopal Church. – or as Presiding Bishop Curry says: The Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement.

I was not raised in a family that went to church. In fact, I was baptized as a 19-year-old university student in an Episcopal Church near the campus. It was in 1979 and I was baptized according to the rite in the then brand-new Book of Common Prayer.

I had to make the promises of the baptismal covenant my own. As the water was poured on my head, I was thinking about those promises. Ever since, those promises at baptism have shaped what it means for me to be a disciple. Yes, the meaning may be different for the 19-

year-old New Christian than they do today for a 66 year old Bishop – but they still shape the way I seek to live.

So when you and I – as followers of Jesus Christ in the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement – talk about discipleship, I think we must look to the questions of the baptismal covenant. The questions that we answer together at every baptism and every confirmation in our Episcopal Church.

You'll remember that the first 3 questions are answered with the words of the Apostles Creed.

Remember the Apostles Creed is the creed of baptism.

The first question: **Do you believe in God the Father?**

And we answer: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Think about what we're saying. We begin by asserting we believe that there is a power greater than we are. The ground of our being. The source of life. That which none greater can be conceived. We begin with an Audacious claim. There is God.

And the second question though makes God human – real: **Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?**

And then we answer, retelling the story of Jesus:

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of this Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilot. Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead, and on the third day he rose again.

Well, we're retelling the scriptural story of Jesus.

But more deeply, we're telling how we know God. It is in the stuff of humanity. By retelling the story of Jesus, we're telling the story of God who came among us. Of an out of work Carpenter. An itinerant preacher. One who preached peace and mercy to those who only knew oppression, illness and rejection.

We're claiming that God came to us in the stuff of human beings. So that whenever we look in another person's face, we see the material of God. Flesh and blood. Broken humanity. The humanity of hurt and separation. All taken into God in Christ at the cross and at the resurrection made holy with God. This will impact how we see the world.

And so then the third question: **Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit?**

And we finish the Creedal questions with the words: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

God is still here. Here among us. Here with all of those who've gone before us. Here. Now.

The next 5 questions are about how to live as disciples. How can answering the first 3 questions from the Apostles Creed impact the way we live?

We answer each of the next five questions with the statement: I will, with God's help.

But think about what those questions mean for how you and I live our life of faith.

Will you continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

This is a simple question with parts:

- Will you go to church and gather with your family?
- Will you take communion?
- Will you study the Bible?
- Will you talk to God?

The question is about putting ourselves into right relationship with one another as disciples and with God. For those of us who have decided to follow Jesus, this is kind of the first basic step. I'm going to be part of this body. This group. This family of God.

But whenever you're part of a family – just being a human being -- we mess up. We human beings are finite, limited creatures. So the next question: Will you persevere resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? Is a pretty basic question: We promise to say I'm sorry and to try to change.

I don't know about you, but I have to say I'm sorry every day. Usually, it's to my wife -- Bea. Because at the office I've had too much coffee or it's just been stressful, I can sometimes come home grumpy. She usually suggests that I drink a glass of water and go for a walk. And I come home and say I'm sorry. But also I have to review my day -- every day -- to tell God I'm sorry for the things I have done and left undone. It's about being back in right relationship with God and with those for whom I care.

Each of question gets a little harder.

The next one is: Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

I'm promising that everything I say and do will reflect the love of God. One of the reasons I have to say I'm sorry every day is I'm not always good at this. It is a reminder that the words

that come from my lips may be the only words of peace and mercy that the next person I meet hears. My actions and my words as a follower of Jesus show the world what it means to be a Christian.

It's simple, you know – Are you choosing to be kind and to show love?

I have two sons now in their late 30s. One is now a school teacher and the other an officer in the army. When they were very small, the oldest was maybe five and the other about 18 months younger, they would fight as little boys will do. But I can remember the older one when I asked what was going on. Why did you hit your little brother? He would answer very seriously: “James made me mad.” And I'd have to remind him that no, James didn't make him mad. That he chose to be angry and he chose to hit his brother. He didn't like what James had done or didn't do. But that being angry and hitting his little brother was a choice. This question is about our ordinary choices and the words we use – Whether we're 5 or 95. We show others – we make disciples – by how we live.

It does get harder.

**Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?**

Loving every neighbor as myself. I don't know all my neighbors. I live in a high rise building in Honolulu. Neighbors come and go. But if I'm to look on everyone as my neighbor. That means even those who perturb me are my neighbors. Even those? Even people who are angry with me? Even those who sometimes want to hurt me?

One of the realities of life is that sometimes you have to talk to people who are hurt or angry. Sometimes the person is angry over and over and over again.

Let me share the spiritual practice that I've developed for myself to help me with those difficult people -- those unpleasant neighbors. I admit there are some that I'm not always sure that I love. I know God loves them. But I'm not always sure about me. So, if I get a call from a particularly difficult person or I know a stressful conversation is coming, I look up from my desk and there on the wall at eye level is a crucifix. As I say a prayer for the person before they come in, I try to imagine their face on the face of Jesus hanging there on the cross. That Jesus is my brother. That person coming in to see me or that person on the phone is more than my neighbor. That is my brother. That is my sister. And I'm called to love them.

Which takes us back to the most difficult question of all, I think. Because it's the biggest.

**Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?**

Every human being! I'm responsible now for everyone. For the whole of creation. That's why I need you – my fellow disciples of Jesus. That's why we need one another. It's why we go back to that first question. And we promise to gather, to break bread together, to pray together. And then you and I can be empowered to act – to act on behalf of our loving, life giving God in this broken, angry, hurt world. You and I – in our own little ways – can be the body of Christ. We make disciples of Christ by being disciples of Christ. So that those who do not know God can see through us the love of God.

So I hope you can see why I think these promises outline for us, as the followers of Jesus in the Episcopal Church, what it means to be a disciple. These questions outline our faith in action. It's not easy. We have to keep gathering, we have to keep praying. We have to keep saying I'm sorry and living a renewed life. We have to keep trying again, day by day. And together. As the body of Christ. We can make disciples by being disciples. And we can be God's love in the world. This is what you have done in the Taiwan for 70 years and what you are called to be for years to come.

Let me leave you. With the words of a prayer that I say every morning when I rise. It is the prayer of Saint Richard of Chichester, 13<sup>th</sup> century English Bishop:

Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ.  
For all the benefits you have given me.  
For the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Most merciful Redeemer., friend and brother,  
May I know you more clearly.  
Love you more dearly.  
And follow you more nearly  
day by day. Amen.