

The Rev. Giovan King, D.Min.
St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

Pentecost 13A, July 31, 2011
Gen 32.22-31; Matt 14.13-21

Celebrating St. Christopher

One of the many trips across a raging river changed forever the life of St. Christopher, according to legend. Just as Jacob's family's trip across a stream changed forever not only the life of his family, but all of the people of Israel. We hear these stories and they ought also to change our lives, as we are reminded that we, like St. Christopher, are to be Christ bearers, and that we, like Jacob, are called to wrestle with our faith, and with ourselves, until we see God face to face. It is only then that we will experience the kind of abundance we hear of in our Gospel lesson today.

Several of you have mentioned to me that you can't remember ever celebrating the feast day of St. Christopher, traditionally July 25th. That is probably because about thirty years ago, St. Christopher was demoted. He was de-sainted! In light of Vatican II, it was decided within the Roman Catholic Church that St. Christopher was more legend than reality and, as a result, would no longer have a day on the calendar set aside in remembrance of him. Episcopalians followed suit. You will not find St. Christopher in any of the Episcopal books about our Saints, or as we are coming to refer to them: "Holy Women, and Holy Men." Recognizing that his parish was named for a "former but fallen" Saint, a friend of mine who used to serve another St. Christopher's parish, says that he would often jokingly refer to the Parish as Mr. Christopher's.

But, of St. Christopher's story, I believe we can say what I maintain about many of the stories in the Bible, certainly some of the stories Jesus himself told: "I don't know if it really happened or not, but I do know that it is true." Church of the Good Shepherd does not celebrate an actual person, not really, but rather a character in a story told by Jesus, yet there is great truth in the story. And, St. Christopher's story is as true today as it was when the Church celebrated his feast day with great fervor. You see, it is true, in part, because it is about us.

The message of the legend of St. Christopher is that we are *all* to be Christ bearers, bearing Christ to our community and the world. As I mentioned in the children's sermon, that is precisely what *Christopher* means: *Christ bearer*. When Christ was about to leave this earth and he commissioned his followers to carry on his message, the followers probably asked something like: "Jesus, what are you doing ... leaving us like this?" But, that is the idea. Jesus has left the work to us. We, all of us, are to continue to bear Christ, just as if he were right here with us. Because, indeed, he is, just as he was with St. Christopher, from the beginning.

By serving Christ with his gifts of height and strength, St. Christopher was bearing Christ to all of the people he helped. It was a particular trip across the raging river that opened St. Christopher's eyes to acknowledge that. Once we see God "face to face," as it says in our Genesis passage, we are to pick up that message God has given us, the message of Christ, and bear him to the world. We are not to sit back and watch as Christ is borne by someone else, like a rector or a bishop for instance. Bearing Christ to others is not just **my** kuleana, it is **your** kuleana. Aren't you impressed that I know that word?

We are to bear Christ to others, even if at times it feels as if by doing so we face a raging river and an overwhelming weight on us. Even if we find ourselves wrestling with God, or wrestling with ourselves about our faith.

I am doing my first wedding in Hawaii this afternoon. As we rehearsed yesterday, I thought about the vows that the couple will make to each other. They will, of course, promise to love one another "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer for better, in sickness and in health." In other words, they will promise to love one another with everything they've got.

Is this wise? To love with such extravagance, to hold nothing back, to love without limit, "until parted by death"? Shouldn't the bride and the groom hold something back, especially in this day and age? Shouldn't they carefully consider just how much love they can muster for one another and yet still retain their cherished individuality?

Our faith says, "No." Our faith tells us: Go ahead, love with unbridled enthusiasm and extravagance. Love is the greatest renewable resource we have. And it is in giving that you receive, when it comes to love.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus seems to be just about spent. He is so exhausted that he has withdrawn to a deserted place. But by the time he arrives, word has spread and there is a great crowd. And, Jesus somehow summons up even more love and compassion. He cures the sick among them. It grows late; the people are hungry; and the disciples, pragmatically recommend adjourning for the evening. Yet, Jesus commands his disciples to feed the hungry multitudes. The disciples ask, "How on earth are we to do that, with these scant resources?" Jesus blesses the food and basically tells them: "Work with what you've got." Here is the tension that can only be resolved through some fresh, miraculous, powerful intervention. The disciples become the stewards they (and we) are meant to be, and they take what seems like terribly meager resources in hand, and there is enough. In fact, there is an overabundance of food.

So often we focus on the culinary aspects of this story of feeding the 5,000. Pay attention to the spiritual aspects. If those people had not been open to receiving any and all that the Lord could offer, and sharing the same, there would not have been enough. But, open they were; and as a result they were spiritually and physically fed; and there was an abundance – of food, of spiritual nourishment, of love.

St. Christopher was fed with a spiritual strength so powerful that he was able, in turn, to bear Christ not only across that raging river, but into the souls of thousands. The truth is that spiritual food is abundant. God richly provides love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion, and all we have to do is come to the table and partake. It is a feast of community and spirit, a feast of learning and enlightenment, a feast of praise and transformation. God's nourishment is effective and powerful, and there is more than enough for all. There is food for you here. Come to the table. You are invited. We just ask that you share what you are given. Amen.