

*Guest Preacher—St. John the Evangelist, Keokea (Kula), Hawai'i*

[Jeremiah 23:23-29](#) | [Psalm 82](#) | [Hebrews 11:29-12:2](#) | [Luke 12:49-56](#)

## Let's go to all that we can not yet see!

### Prayer

### Introduction

It's been a big few weeks for schools across these islands as they spring back to life after the summer break. While we should—to be fair—acknowledge the amazing work of year-round school staff and administrators—those who continue in the office while students and faculty take a much-needed break—there's nothing like the sound and the energy of a school as young people bring their hopes and dreams, their fears and anxieties back to campus.

At Seabury Hall, we began the year with Spartan Day—an orientation filled with field games and music, together with much-needed snacks! It's a day almost entirely planned by the Senior Class, which helps them bond as a cohort, while also providing a time for students in grades 5 thru 12 to get to know one another.

It was a big day for the Society of Catholic Priests yesterday as well. This small but passionate collegiate group of priests around the globe devotes themselves to the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, to daily prayer, and to the discipline of praying and supporting one another. As a member, I had the chance to go on a field trip to O'ahu yesterday, where we toured the Father Damien Archives in Honolulu. One relic is an old scarf-sized handkerchief that Mother Marianne Cope gave to Father Damien as an improvised sling. As most of you would know, Father Damien, as a missionary to the quarantined settlement at Kalaupapa, Moloka'i, himself contracted Hanson's disease and died there in 1889 at just 49 years of age.

At the archive, it was incredible to see Fr. Damien's life and ministry—so often depicted through black and white photographs—come to life-filled through the beautiful red and gold gifted handkerchief now encased in plexiglass. Surrounded by such vivid history of Father Damien, I couldn't help but think of the Rev. Shim Yin Chin [here on our wall], who himself traveled thousands of miles (in his case from modern-day [Guangzhou](#) in China's southern Pearl River Delta) to bring the vivid teaching of the Gospel to these rural, yet cultivated slopes of Haleakala. Rev. Chin, of course, founded a legacy of ministry here at St. John's on which incoming priest, the Rev. George Wong, will build in partnership with all the faithful.

All of this is to say that this week, and these five weeks in fact—that is five Sundays including today before the Rev. Wong takes his place at this altar—this week and this interim-*interim* period (as we might like to imagine it) is a time of energy and change, of transition, and anticipation. In this, Seabury Hall—and all schools in Maui (in fact)—join St. John’s in looking in hope to what is to come while also—in faith—giving thanks for the legacy of those who have come before. And while our readings today—particularly the Gospel—may strike us as abrupt, challenging, or even problematic—there’s much Good News to be found here: for St. John’s; for Seabury Hall; indeed, for all schools this at this very moment. Together with today’s inspiring words from the Letter to the Hebrews, and the reassuring—yet ever-corrective words of the Prophet Jeremiah, we find guidance, strength, courage, and all the healthy boundaries we need as we learn and teach together.

## **Hebrews**

The historical tone of this week’s reading from the Letter to the Hebrews puts us back into the oral archives of Christian salvation history. That is, to say, we are reminded here of the times filled with adventure, of heartache, of signs and miracles, and of the much pain that the ancestors of

our faith have endured throughout the ages. There have been triumphant moments—like the crossing of the Red Sea and the tumbling walls of Jericho. Yet there have also been moments of extreme violence and drawn-out suffering, such as experienced by the Hebrew patriarch, Samson, before his death or as encountered by Blessed Saint Peter before his crucifixion. No doubt, Father Damien went through great distress in his latter days as well. Here, perhaps, our thoughts go to our beloved in Christ in Ukraine, or North Korea, or Yemen, or Mosembeque, who endure pain or death—at this moment—for their Christian faith. Yet, also, perhaps, these may inspire our own courageous witness to the Gospel while—at the same time—helping keep our smaller “first-world” problems in a healthy perspective.

### **Jeremiah and the Gospel**

In today’s reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, there’s a mix of fear and awe to be experienced, together with the mysterious comfort and reassurance of God’s abiding and intimate involvement in our lives. So too, in the Gospel from Luke today, where Jesus reminds us that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—really *does* care and love us no matter the appearance to the contrary. Indeed, the Holy Trinity loves us—so much so—that, as an overwhelming

presence of love in the world, God offers us healthy boundaries in the hope we don't keep messing things up all the time!

In Jeremiah, this love of God is near and uncovered, not hiding “in secret places” but out in the open so that all can see and experience God’s gaze. “Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.” While this could be taken as an all-fear proposition (that is, in our minds, we could transform God here into some sort of false Santa Claus creepily checking up on who is naughty or nice)—God’s words, in fact, are much more real and reassuring. God looks *for* and asks directly *for* the truth: the word spoken “faithfully.” Yet like an infinitely loving parent, God looks us in the eye in the fullest expression of charity, and realizes the answer we’ll give before we stumble for the righteous version of our story. Here, God is enshrined as the ultimate teacher as well, the educator who knows students’ quirks (and perhaps clownish tricks) but always foresees their ultimate, God-given potential.

In Luke, our notion of some God or some image of Jesus as a squishmallow or a doe-eyed Disney deer is thoroughly squashed. Yet this false idol is replaced with something much better. Here we find an *authentic* image of God incarnate who loves us passionately and who will fiercely speak the truth that we rarely dare to hear. Rejecting our temptation to be the

founders of our own personality cults, God in Christ calls forth the most authentic version of ourselves. This self is the unadulterated self, the first-camera-shot version—before the false-airbushing and filtering of social media has kicked in. Yet far from being an individualized epiphany, the selves that God in Christ beckons out is a collective experience of reconciliation and renewal.

So rejecting the idols of *my self, my family, my school, my parish, and my country first*, Jesus asks us to get real—to wake up to the real and present opportunities for deep peace, true shalom, in which justice for all dwells richly, and through which humans of all ages, of all skin colors, and of all identities finally stop talking over one another. Luke’s Jesus then is the *real* dialogue maker, the arbitrator whose stress level until their work is completed is *to the max*—yet who stays with the interests of all parties until the divided ones truly learn and know the Truth ... that will set them free.

## Conclusion

Friends, at [the 9:30 service/this service] we will pray for school students, staff, and administrators and bless the backpacks of young people who seek to know the way of truth and life. This way is the courageous way of knowledge, a knowledge born of wisdom. This way finds the power to

challenge the shallowness, the pettiness, the greed, the resentment that keeps us from love of neighbor and love of self.

These students—and all those in schools around the globe—join us here at St. John’s as *we* seek to put healthy boundaries of ministry care around us. These boundaries, established in love and maintained by grace, enable us to get over our egos and into our truth-telling. They are those things that are witnessed in the Letter to the Hebrews and through the lives of the saints such as Father Damien and the Rev. Shim Yin Chin. And these are the boundaries contained in the warnings of love-filled truth-telling from the Prophet Jerimiah and our crucified and risen Lord.

There is just brief a moment, just five Eucharist-filled Sundays in this interim-*interim* period before the Rev. George Wong arrives at this altar. Yet while this gift of time is short, the Gospel is long, and wide, and deep. So may this Good News take us downward. May God’s joy fill our hearts as we leave the surface. And may we all hold our hands in prayer as together we depart the blinding-filled certainty of what we *can* see, for the amazing rich darkness of God’s mysteries. That is friends: *all* that we can *not yet* see is waiting for us in the love and mercy of this moment.

The Lord be with you ...