

Homily in honor of Patricia Weissich
Church of Our Saviour, Mill Valley
Sunday, June 6th, 2010

Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 23, John 14:1-6

Tutu's Ohana

by The Rev. Richard E. Helmer

When I first visited Hawaii several years ago, I was most impressed and challenged by the understanding of *ohana*, of family: that recognition that we belong one to another --- something that the island peoples taught us and still embody today. This is in stark contrast to the great individualism of the American West, particularly here in California, and most strikingly here in the Bay Area and Marin County, where it's so often "my way or the highway. . ." where the goal is self-fulfillment, often seen in the context of the strapping, profiteering individual. The pressing question is, which is more real – the *ohana* of the islands that you all reflect here today as we come together to celebrate Pat Weissich's life, or the hyper-individualism of "me" that resides outside these doors, the world we live in that isolates and particularizes us into competing elements?

It is my honor to officiate this day in this celebration of Pat Weissich's life, among you, her family and friends. I had the chance to meet Pat in person only once, and that was when we celebrated the remarkably long life her mother-in-law, Camille, at a service here not so long ago. But even then, it was clear that Pat was, in the language of the islands, "Tutu," the grandmother/matriarch of the family – a veritable heart of wisdom, love, and experience, a bright center of her ohana.

Pat and Paul met here in Mill Valley at Tamalpais High School around seven decades ago and were later married with one of my predecessors in this faith community officiating. Their marriage of sixty-four years and Pat's deep devotion to a life of faith remind me – and I hope all of us – of the value of a community of prayer and shared life and memory. To come, in a way, full circle with Paul and all of you, is to live into our recognition that it is not just we who are gathered here today, but in a palpable sense, we are gathered, too, with those who have come before us, and in an imagined but yet mysteriously real sense, those who will come after us.

We hold this reality today in prayer as an offering to our God – our God who is not "out there" like an individuated overlord, but amongst us, here within, connecting us, gathering us in that lovely image from Revelation we heard read today, where strangers and intimates are robed in white, surrounding the throne of God with a community, a family, an *ohana* of praise day and night. It is an image of our true lives that are not about a single moment or even a single life-time of 85 years

– rather, our individual lives are part of a greater tapestry of connections that extend both backwards and forwards across generations. I think of Tutu’s three sons and Hanai and their families – 12 grandchildren; 10 (and a half, for one is on the way!) great grandchildren. Now think back on the generations that came before Tutu – the life and love of an ever expanding family, and you start to get the picture as God might see it. Tutu embodied that heritage for all of you during her time in this life, and even now, we can say, she revels in it in new ways in God’s resurrecting, abundant grace.

Jesus says in the Gospel according to John: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” I hear him to mean a great many – greater than we can possibly count! The abundance of God’s mercy and love, the width and breadth of the “Way, the Truth, and the Life” that Christ embodies, was the abundant life in which Tutu worked and rested. Hers was that life – a life of compassion that set aside the narrowness and individuation of judgment. Hers was rather a life built on the wisdom of patience and forgiveness, those two qualities that nurture and reveal ohana among us, the patience and forgiveness that are hallmarks of the love of God’s great family. Each of you who knew Tutu better than I can put the flesh of memory onto the bare bones of my sketch. But her witness to this life of grace and truth lives with each of you still, just as your lives in turn were carried in her vast memory, her deep insight that nourished family and friends across generations. Think then of the countless children in the preschool where she taught over the years – think of how she held them and nourished them at a fragile, wondrous time in their lives. Talk about a house with many rooms! Talk about an ohana too great to measure!

Pat, your beloved Tutu, countered in the very love and labor of her life the great myth of our Western individualism. She rather lived embedded in community, in ohana, in the family of God. And part of her legacy is her reminder that each of us, too, live in ohana, whether we want to or not! Ohana is the truth in which we live and die, the truth we carry into the world for its healing. Tutu reminds us, that whether we live or die, we forever rest, work, and play in God’s ohana, that great ohana spanning eternity, binding all of creation together, raising it up in Christ always into greater, more abundant life.