



Still Here All Along:
The One God Has Placed in Our Way
October 7, 2026

Beth Daniel: Hey, everyone. This is Beth Daniel, and I'm here with my colleagues, Adam Mixon, Adam Borneman, and Katie Nakamura Rengers. We started a conversation based on one of Katie's blog articles called "Here All Along", and it prompted so much conversation that we wanted to continue talking and exploring it.

Katie Nakamura Rengers: Before we dive into some deeper conversation, just a little reminder of the context that we're talking about here: I am the brand new, as of four months ago, priest in charge of an Episcopal church called St. Elizabeth's. We are located in one of the last working class neighborhoods in downtown Honolulu. And when I arrived here, I discovered that this is not only one of the most diverse — ethnically, culturally, language-wise — congregations in the Episcopal diocese here, but also that we have this really interesting Catholic worker house in our backyard. And this becomes important, because what we are talking about is the presence — or maybe noticeable absence — of younger adults in our congregations. And it turns out that, in relationship to this Catholic worker house, my church has quite a number more younger people than I had been expecting.

Adam Mixon: Yeah. I like what you said, Katie, about "welcoming the question". I was listening to a sermon online a couple of days ago, and it was okay. It was resonant, about 70% of it. But then there was this turn where the preacher started talking about faith being the answer, and somehow questions being manifestation of a lack of faith.

Katie: Oh dear.

Adam Mixon: I think that's come across a bunch of traditions though. I mean, it's inherent in this belief that we can't ask the question, or that we can't have doubts, or we can't be uncertain about a thing. So we want to give these pat, quick, easy answers, instead of just walking with people towards something.

Adam Borneman: Yeah. And not only not rushing towards answers or perfect plans and sticking with questions, but, similar to that: as I'm listening to this conversation, the thing that keep coming back to me is, first of all, your title "Here All Along" also makes me think of just the notion of we have, what we need. I mean, there's a lot of different ways we can talk about that theologically. And-and it's also making me think of just the value of really staying in the present, which Jesus talks about a lot. And it's such a convicting reminder to say, "Pay attention to what's in front of us right now. This is what God has for us. We need to be willing to sacrifice our aspirations or ideals for whatever God has in front of us right now."

And I don't mean to moralize your story in that way, but that's where it hits me, that's where it sits with me, is a really powerful witness and conviction about staying right here right now, because we have what we need, because God is gracious. And usually, that shows up in surprising ways with the witness of individuals like you're describing.

Beth: Yeah. One thing I really loved about this is when I first read it, I thought about all those people, and I thought about the road to Emmaus. In the midst of life, there's a breaking of bread, and then they

recognize Jesus. It's easy to look at this, go, "Oh, well that might happen to Don in the wheelchair", or "That might happen to guy number three." But what I loved is you put yourself in that position; that there was a moment when you looked around as the leader and noticed that it was actually Jesus standing right there.

And I think that's just such a really important lesson for us who are leaders. We often want that for everybody else: "Oh, I just wish they could recognize the Spirit in their midst. Oh, I wish they could recognize Jesus' work in their life." And what I love about this piece is you encourage us, as Adam said: we are the ones who might need to recognize what's going on; to slow down, as Adam said, to pay attention, and to realize that it's right there. And we miss it so much when we're worried about those spreadsheets and those worship numbers.

Katie: Or we-we have an idea of what Jesus looks like in our midst, and the Spirit just completely erases that, and puts somebody else there.

Beth: Yeah.

Adam Mixon: You raised a point, an important thing to call out, is the way we tend to preoccupy ourselves with who's not present. It's across traditions. We are always reaching for who's not, almost as if we're reaching beyond who is. And isn't that the flaw of the priest and the Levite on the road going from Jericho to the Temple, the reaching beyond? "I got to get to the Temple. I got to go where I got to do this deep, rich, spiritual work." And we walk right past, step over, the one that God has placed in our way for us to not just demonstrate the gospel, but to experience it as well.

Katie: Oh, that's a great metaphor.

Beth: I resonated so much with this context and environment. I grew up in Wales. It does not have great weather, but it is beautiful. And I grew up in a very deprived area of a deprived country. So, mainly coal mining, a lot of unemployed coal miners, a lot of stay-at-home moms. The '80s, when I was around 10, were really hard, and that was the most beautiful community I have ever been a part of in my life. I'm convinced that people who are struggling take care of each other well, and know how to do that in a way that I think the Church struggles to do. I don't want to romanticize the difficult context where you have been called, but are you already seeing, kind of — it seems like you are — the beautiful elements that don't have the name "church" on them, but are so "church": mission, community, taking care of those who are thirsty, hungry, unclothed. Have you noticed that in your context?

Katie: I think there's a rawness to this kind of ministry. It can't be covered up, it can't be beautified, set by God. And I think dropping these three young men, so-called Catholic workers, into this context, I think for them, it forces them to ask some of the questions that they're asking. It was a different one of the three who said the thing about wanting to wrestle with the idea of living with contradiction, because he does it every day. And I think that living with contradiction, seeing the Holy Spirit, seeing the face of Jesus, it happens in every context, no matter where we are. Here, it can't be papered over. It can't be covered up. It's easier to see.

Adam Mixon: Yeah, that's right up my alley, Katie. That's one of the beautiful things that I enjoyed about serving in North Avondale for all those years. There were no walls or well-manicured lawns to hide the struggle behind. Sometimes the most difficult person to walk with, or to help, is the one who thinks they

don't need it. All of that's kind of laid bare. So we have these wonderful, amazing opportunities, again, to encounter grace, and then to also express it in ways that are meaningful.

Beth: Katie, it sounds like you are in a context where...that God has prepared you for this calling. I mean, you have traditions in your background, but you also have innovation. How are you working those muscles in this context as you're what — four months into this new call? I'm sure you're still feeling it out, but it seems like you need to hold that in tension. And I think a lot of pastors and ministry leaders should hold things in tension in a way that maybe we don't understand as clearly as you do in this place. But how are you bringing those two worlds together for this particular community?

Katie: So my background in-in Birmingham, I ran a coffee shop church for four years, that then continued during and after COVID into a five day a week breakfast ministry, and an aspect of Sunday worship that is now blossoming into this dinner church with my successor there. It was amazing, because we touched on so many different aspects of Christian life together. So service, community, worship, and there were aspects of that Christian life that never saw each other. So people who were involved in one aspect of that life, but not in another aspect of that life, and sometimes appreciated the things that they couldn't see, and often didn't appreciate the things they couldn't see, or couldn't see why they were taking up time or energy or resources, or, right, that they even existed at all. In Honolulu, St. Elizabeth's is a community a lot like that, an organization, an organism a lot like that. But unlike my church plant, it's been going like that for 125 years.

So yeah, maybe I would put it that way. This is a church that's living a lot of different aspects of the gospel life, but they don't always see each other. They don't always feel each other. They don't always know how to support each other. And a lot of my work here, I'm discerning, is about how to get us to integrate that spiritual life and community, knowing that not all hands and feet can be involved in everything, but we can see one another, and appreciate the different aspects of the body of Christ that Paul talks about.

Adam Mixon: It sounds to me, Katie, like your drive is to lead that congregation into a similar encounter you had with these three young men that have been there all along.

Katie: Yeah. If we're talking about different parts of the body, they're bringing the spiritual questions, but often, right, they are spiritual questions that we wrestle with on Sunday morning in our readings and during our sermon, but they don't see that aspect of the church life. They're not there, right?

Adam Mixon: They don't see it. And the ones who don't see it are kind of like, "Nah."

Katie: Yes. And that's just a microcosm of my denomination. That's probably a microcosm of the Mainline, probably a microcosm of the Church of Jesus Christ. And I guess it-it always has been, because Paul is talking about the eyes and the ears and the feet.

Adam Mixon: But I appreciate the way you celebrate your journey and the way you continue to carry us along with you as you tell your stories. It's helpful and it's humanizing.

Beth: We might not be in Honolulu, but the opportunities you mentioned, the wrestlings that you mentioned, the Bible references that you mentioned, I think all of us who are trying to do this odd, wonderful, difficult, beautiful work, we're all wrestling with these things. And so I'm grateful that you

put this down, and helped us really reflect on our own contexts, and people are people, regardless of which island they're on.

Katie: Amen.

Adam Mixon: Amen.