**Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway**

**United Church of Christ Honolulu, Hawai’i 96817**

**Online Worship & Sermon August 9, 2020**

**TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

***Graduate Sunday***

PRELUDE *Blessed Are Those Who Believe in Faith* Katherine Crosier

Johannes Brahms

ANNOUNCEMENTS Lori Yamashiro

CALL TO WORSHIP Gail Wenos, Liturgist

Liturgist: Your light is your Word; your blessings are our lamp.

**Response: Dark and twisting is the road to peace;**

**happy the generation whose light will guide them to its end.**

**ALL: When all our children are taught of the Lord, great shall be the peace of all children.**

OPENING SENTENCES

Worship is a time to celebrate and give thanks that God has given us great hope and a future. Worship opens within each heart and life a space that allows us to go forth into the days God has purposed us to walk in, every single one. Although every day brings its own challenges, we know we can depend on God’s Holy Spirit to fill us with its power. So, let us celebrate this day that the Lord has made. Let us dream big dreams filled with compassion and love for all beings. Let us go forward with God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION Rev. Jeannie D. Thompson

As we gather our thoughts into quietness, let us confess our sins to the One who knows us best—let us pray:

**Lord, we are so easily distracted.**

**We know ourselves loved, but we balk at the cost.**

**Come, Lord, heal our brokenness,**

**and have mercy on us as we confess our sins.**

***(Please offer God your prayers of confession as we keep a brief silence.)***

Assurance of Pardon

God has poured out grace upon grace, freely, in great abundance, even on you, even on me, although we never earned it and don’t deserve it. We are made new through the love of Christ; all our sins crumble away. In Christ we are forgiven, signed with the Spirit, lavished with gift upon gift, released into hope to live for praise and for glory. Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE OF GOD

*In the safest way possible, please pass the peace of Christ to those who are with you.*

CELEBRATING GRADUATE, *Stephanie Chung* Graduation Slide Show

*Let us give thanks for all of the graduating class of 2020—every grade, certificate and diploma.*

*This year, Stephanie Chung graduated from Roosevelt High School and will offer her reflection*

*on how she has experienced the unusual times and circumstances of her graduation.*

A GRADUATE’S REFLECTION Stephanie Chung

This year has been far from what anyone has excepted. What I thought was to be my senior prom, my senior ditch day, and my graduation, turned out to be face masks, quarantine, and zoom. This pandemic has changed millions of people’s lives. And at first, I was upset and angry at the fact that I would not get to experience this milestone in the proper way that I had been waiting for in all my years of school. However, something changed during the many, many days of quarantine. It was the day I saw the disturbing video of George Floyd’s arrest and murder. I was speechless. I had always been drawn to these topics of racism, and racial justice. And when I saw this video, I felt, almost, the responsibility to do something about it. And I can confidently say about half of the world felt the same way I did.

At first it was spreading awareness about the topic on social media. Reposting information, data, donation websites, and support for the movement in whole. But then I had an urge to do more and make a change. During my senior year, I had a cut out pathway to become a nurse. I had my whole plan ready. However, I always knew that there was a career out there for me that I would have a strong passion for. But I never knew what it was until now. During the black lives matter movement, I started realizing how strongly I felt about it, and not just for this specific movement, but for all the minorities who receive discrimination and racist acts. With my background in an ethnic studies course I realized that I had a passion for this that was much stronger than helping people through the medical field. So, I decided that I wanted to help people who faced racism and discrimination. So right now, I am currently majoring in ethnic studies at UH Manoa with an intent to go to law school and become a lawyer who will fight against racism. Throughout the recent years in my life, I have pretty much lived by the phrase: “everything happens for a reason.” So whenever something bad happens, or something doesn’t go the way I planned or thought it would go, I just remember that God has a plan. And this year I have come a step closer to seeing the plan he has for me.

A READING FROM THE EPISTLES Liturgist

Ephesians 1:15-23 *Paul’s Prayer*

*15I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason 16I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

REFLECTION *“Privileged to Participate”* Pastor

In the passage we heard from Scripture—the excerpt from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus—we hear Paul’s joy and excitement for this church. Paul has heard about the love and compassion by which the Ephesians are known. This love is so great that Paul has heard of it even though the church was in Asia Minor and Paul was, at the time, in jail in Rome.

In most of our Bibles, what we heard it called: Paul’s Prayer. And as he begins, it is just that. It is a prayer Paul is praying to God about the people that make up the church in Ephesus. He tells God about all of the good things he has heard of them. In fact, Paul is so excited about them that his words sort of tumble out all over each other in one big, long sentence.

Then, as his excitement builds, instead of praying to God *about* the Ephesians, Paul starts to extol the wonders and blessings of God *to* the Ephesians. Paul’s praise for the people in Ephesus and their faith just naturally segues to God, the object of their faith and worship.

Paul is so excited that they have embraced the same joy he has. He is so thankful that they, too, have turned their lives over to God and have been incorporated into the beloved community. What he wants most for the Ephesians to know is that because they have come to faith they have become Christ’s body. Christ has welcomed them into his very body.

This is why Paul is able to speak of “the riches of the glorious inheritance among the saints” [v.19]—the Ephesians and all the faithful are *heirs*, they are one with Christ and heritors of all his good gifts.

It is important to Paul that the Ephesians are reminded that they have been adopted into Christ—they have become a part of Christ. He also wants them to remember that their life in Christ is not an accomplishment on their part. It is all a gift from the gracious life and heart of Christ.

Paul wants to talk the Ephesians about this because, as glad as he was about them, he has also heard that their love…was not…perfect. He has heard they had forgotten that they, too, were once new to the faith, and he wants them to remember this as they begin to welcome the new people into the church.

Specifically, the Gentiles. They are the new ones. As such, they do not have the training and history that the first Christians—who were Jews—would have had.

All of the stories of the Old Testament, all of the history of the Temple, the journey out of slavery in Egypt, the journey to the Promised Land, all the matriarchs and patriarchs in the faith—Abraham, Moses, Miriam, Sarah, Elijah, Ruth, Hagar, Jacob, Rahab, *even* King David—all of these people and their stories would have been new to the Gentiles.

Their ignorance—if you will—of these foundational stories would have been very strange, even off-putting to the older members of the church. Some may even have been tempted to believe the new-comers were somehow lacking, even inferior. And so they may not have treated everyone as equal members of the church.

Paul wants to remind them that *all* of us are equally welcomed and loved by God, and that this should be our example and our guide for how we live with each other. Each of us, when we come to Christ, are welcomed equally. Christ rejoices over each one of us deeply and gladly, and is especially glad when we come together in communities with common values that are based on the love Christ has shown us.

Such a community will have as its chief objective the desire to share the Good News of Christ with as many people as possible, and in as many ways as is imaginable.

You see: Paul is reminding the Ephesians that we believe that when Christ’s body was lifted-up, it transformed the whole world.

Now, *we* are the body of Christ, and *we* are called to that same mission. Just as Christ’s body was lifted-up, so is *this* body—this body of believers; the body that has pledged to praise and glorify him to all the world—and this mission is open to *all* people.

I chose this passage for worship because it is Grad Sunday, and for Stephanie and all graduates, what I hope they will hear is that the path they take into their adult lives is important. It has meaning. I hope that each and every one of them knows they are welcomed by God, who has gifted them each in a very real and wonderful way.

What I hope they will remember and believe is that what the story of Christ teaches us is that our lives are loved and blessed by Christ. We are blessed by his promise that his love is ours, and will always will be. His Spirit’s guidance will always accompany us.

But there is more, and Stephanie touched upon it in her reflection: the equality Stephanie is concerned about—specifically racial equality—is, I believe, also of great concern to Christ.

We see this throughout his earthly ministry—his constant breaking down of barriers, his welcoming people of all backgrounds—Gentiles, tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners—all were called, healed, and welcomed.

So, I give thanks for the path Stephanie has set for herself, and I know we join in prayers for her continued journey. Her ideas and ideals were inspired by the way she has been nurtured by her family at home, but also by *this*, and this, her church home. In fact, I do not think I am over estimating the influence she has received here at N‘uanu Congregational Church when I say that Stephanie is truly a child of this congregation. I am proud for her that she has found her place *in*, and is welcoming *of* the Body of Christ.

I hope Stephanie, and other graduates, will not be discouraged because, often, just as Christ’s open arms were confusing to others, so will her efforts to usher in more justice and equality into the world be confusing to some people. Some may even be offended.

If that happens, I hope she, and the others, will take heart when they remember that this did not stop Christ from going forth. It did not stop him from welcoming all people, nor from giving everyone an opportunity to draw close, to learn, and to serve. This was his mission: to invite all people, and to offer us all the privilege of participation in his body; in a life where love and compassion is a way of life—it is *the* way of life.

Stephanie, I celebrate your graduation, and the path you have been inspired to travel. I celebrate your determined embrace of your place in the Body of Christ, and I pray that you, and all graduates, will continue to be so inspired.

I hope you will be lifted-up by the assurance that we, your church family, “will not cease to give thanks for you as we remember you in our prayers.”

I pray that all of us will give thanks to the love and generosity of God who calls us God’s beloved, and makes a place for each one of us in God’s family, in the very Body of Christ—a body that is lifted-up and given the strength, the gifts, and the passion that will transform the world.

Amen.

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION *Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Saviour* Katherine Crosier

David N. Johnson

Enchiridion, 1524. Harmonized

PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD’S PRAYER (*debts/debtors*)

*We thank you for your faithfulness to the ministries and mission of our church.*

*Please send your offering directly to the church.*

DOXOLOGY Lianne Chung

**Ho‘o-na-ni i\_ka Ma-ku-a mau,**

**Ke Kei-ki me ka\_ ‘U-ha-ne no,**

**Ke Aku-a mau ho‘o-mai-ka‘i pu,**

**Ko ke-ia ao, ko\_ke-la ao. A-mene.**

**BENEDICTION**

**POSTLUDE** *Allegro maestoso e vivace* Katherine Crosier

Felix Mendelssohn