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

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

**Online Worship & Sermon June 28, 2020**

**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

PRELUDE Jieun Kim Newland

*Prayer for Notre* Dame | Léon Boëllmann (1863-1897)

ANNOUNCEMENTS Lori Yamashiro

CALL TO WORSHIP The Rev. Jeannie Thompson

—from *Fresh Winds of the Spirit*, Yr. A(p. 91)

Come before God as a family of Christ’s people,

in whom our Risen Savior lives and serves.

**It is an awesome thing that God’s Chosen One**

**continues to minister through us.**

How blessed you are when you reach out

to do more than the expected.

**It is a joy to offer hospitality**

**and provide what others need most.**

Those who give support to the righteous

shall receive the reward of a righteous person.

**The links forged by our faith call forth loyalty**

**that even our families cannot command.**

All who risk themselves for Christ’s sake

will find abundant life through the cross.

**Whether a cup of cold water is required,**

**we want to give ourselves to the tasks at hand.**

Amen. **Amen.**

OPENING SENTENCES

Making time for worship is our weekly effort to put first things first in our lives. Even with the physical distance between us, we are one people—one community called and blessed by God to serve. May our priorities always center on God’s purposes for us. Let us, who have been baptized into Jesus Christ, seek to fulfill our discipleship in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

People who live closest to God are most aware of their shortcomings and need for forgiveness. Saints, more than grievous offenders against God and humanity, are convinced that growth and reconciliation are necessary. All of us know some gaps in our lives between the way things are and how they should be. In humility and expectation let us come to God in prayer.

Let us pray:

Holy God, you see into our hearts. You see the true selves we try to hide from others, the sins we fear would destroy our images, the evils that lurk so deep within us we can scarcely name them, the bad habits that have been with us so long that they no longer prick our consciences. But you also see in us Jesus Christ, the Holy One who took on our sin and covers us in his righteousness. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior, help us to change our ways, receive your mercy, and be your faithful people. Amen.

[*Let us pause for a moment to consider what we have prayed.*]

Assurance of Pardon

On mountaintops and in valleys, in our homes and in our hearts, God knows us better than we know ourselves, and God forgives us when we cannot forgive ourselves. By God’s mercy, we are forgiven; by God’s mercy, we are made whole; by God's mercy, we are equipped to serve others. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE OF GOD

*Even while keeping our “social distance” from one another,*

*let us extend God’s peace to each other.*

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST Laurie Hamano

Matthew 10:40-42 *Rewards*

*40‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; 42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’*

SERMON *“A Cold Cup of Water”* Pastor

One of the commentators I read this week tells the story of a friend of his who was traveling around Ireland researching a book on how people were beginning to work together toward peace. One day, as she arrived at a Presbyterian church in Northern Ireland, the friend was greeted at the door by two women, church members, who engaged her in conversation.

In very short order, the writer’s friend realized that the two women were serving as something like ushers. Actually, their job was to stand at the door of the church and interview newcomers as they arrived. Their first question was, of course, the first name of anyone who was a stranger to them.

Hearing those names, the ushers’ job was to figure out—well, assume, really—the cultural and religious identity of the stranger. Those with Protestant sounding names were welcomed in and shown to a seat among the congregation. Those with Catholic sounding names (names like Patrick, Maria, or Mary Catherine) were told they were “surely in the wrong church” and sent on their way.

Although this sounds like a story out of the dim, misty past, the author who recorded this item was writing in *this* century. The friend who had been traveling in Northern Ireland was a contemporary of his…her story was a story of this century.

You and I shake our heads at the thought of such a practice. Personally, I have been blessed with having served two of the most welcoming congregations in the UCC, in the two other towns where I lived and pastored.

Baker Community Church and Kapaa United Church of Christ—ask anyone in either of those towns what those churches are like and you will be told of just how friendly and welcoming each is.

Although you and I have not yet had a chance to worship together, I have seen evidence to suggest that Nu‘uanu Congregational Church is just like those other two—at least in that respect—and I give thanks for it—for myself, and for you.

Of course, here in Hawaii, we have a hard time imagining people acting this way toward one another—that just is not our way.

In regards to this church: historically, you have been Japanese. Yet, here *I* stand, a Samoan woman.

Our community here in Hawaii has been forged in the crucible of a shared and recent history of migration from one land to this one. The stories of parents and grandparents, and great-grandparents are all quite similar. Most of us are members of ethnic minority communities in this country. All of us (at one time or another) have navigated an educational system that helped us to adapt and conform to a standard of culture, and speech that was, initially, foreign to us.

The thing is: we have mostly done this together. It is like we all grew-up together—we learned and moved forward together. And so, although we are different in so many ways, we are not strangers to one another.

It also helps us that the story of “the troubles” between Protestants and Roman Catholics is a situation with a long history that is particular to Northern Ireland. It is *not* a history to which we have a lot of experience or even a lot of knowledge.

In the passage we heard today, Jesus is finishing-up his discourse on the mission he is sending the disciples to accomplish. After a long lecture about the life they are going to encounter as his disciples—the hardship and danger—Jesus now speaks to them about a kind of compassion that he hopes they will encounter. Specifically, he speaks to them about “a cold cup of water.”

It seems like such a simple thing, but there is a bit of cultural history that goes along with this story that may be helpful in understanding it:

Every morning in ancient Palestine, one of the first tasks of the day was for the woman of the house—or if she was fortunate: a daughter or a servant—would go to the town well and draw out a jar of water. The jar would then be carried back and placed in a cool part of the house. This was to be the water used by the family throughout the day for drinking and cooking.

During the first hours of the day, the water would indeed, have been cold and refreshing. As the day went on, however, the water would begin to grow as warm or tepid as the surrounding temperature of the day. By the end of the day, it would have still been *wet* but maybe *not* so refreshing.

In order for it to be, once again, a *cold* cup of water, *someone would have to go back to the well*. Someone would have to struggle back to the house under the weight of both water and jar when the day was *not* new and cool and comfortable. In other words, someone would have had to have been inconvenienced.

To you and me, this may sound like a small thing, and perhaps it was to the head of the house in ancient Palestine, too. Perhaps it was nothing to order about a servant or even a spouse, even during a hot part of the day. Perhaps the host who made this available had no thought for the comfort of the water carrier. His or her concern was a show of hospitality.

However, when Jesus talks about making this gesture in the name of a *disciple*, the whole focus of the situation changes. All at once, whatever feelings of inconvenience or bother we may feel about securing a cold cup of water for a stranger changes. All of a sudden the task becomes easier because we are doing it out of love and respect for one who *is* known and beloved. Our service is offered to *Christ*.

This was what Mother Theresa once described about her work among the poorest of the poor and dying in India. When confronted by such brutal poverty and sickness, what she looked for and saw was the face of Christ “in the distressing disguise of the poor.”

What she saw was the love and grace that Christ had extended to her, and she met his love *with* love and gratitude.

What Jesus knew is what most of us know—compassion and hospitality is often hard to come by. There are all sorts of barriers and justifications that we all have for withholding or for refusing to extend compassion and/or hospitality.

Sometimes it is too expensive or supplies are scarce—have you ever had just enough for yourself and your family, but not enough to share? (At this point, I would like you to think about how many roles of toilet paper you have stashed away!)

Sometimes the one in need is too far away—Africa, Haiti, etc., etc.

Sometimes it’s scary—the ones in need do not look like us, do not sound like us, do not seem to have the same values as us.

How are we to receive such people?

When I was in seminary, one of the experiences I had was to be a volunteer student chaplain at the Martinez Sheriff’s Facility in Martinez, California.

I was assigned to lead a Bible Study among a small group of men in a sequestered part of the jail. There were only a few men—about five or six. I did this for a couple of weeks before the head chaplain told me their story.

The men in that part of the jail were sequestered from the general population because they were sex offenders and murderers. As I learned the history of just a couple of them, I was disgusted…and frightened—this was all so very much *out* of my experience and my personal history.

Frankly, I did not want to go back. The particulars of the stories I heard were horrendous. Even to this day, I find them hard to think about. If ever there was a group of people I had met who deserved to be left out, excluded, and discriminated against, surely it had to be this group of men!

Did I suddenly remember the passage that was read for us today and get a sudden *burst* of generosity and compassion?

No, I did not…I guess I did not have to. We don’t know each other too well yet, so let me tell you something that I am sure you know, but that I feel compelled to say: I am NOT a perfect person—I’m sure that did not come as a surprise to any of you.

I am not a perfect human being, and so compassion and grace are often hard for me to feel and to offer.

I am often frightened. I get angry, impatient, frustrated—all of those things that make compassion, hospitality, generosity—all of these things are hard, *really hard* to feel and to express, to live.

I did not have to remember this particular passage. I did have to remember Christ. I had to remember that, ultimately, it is not other human beings or myself that I have been called to serve. It is Christ. And I wish that I could tell you that makes it all easy and wonderful, but it doesn’t, not always.

What it does do is make it possible for me to think and act with at least a little more courage and grace than if I was alone and without the example and love of Christ in my life. If I can focus on his courage and love, then the door to my life is pried open a little farther for the love and light of Christ to enter in.

This, I believe, is the way in which healing begins. This is the way hope grows.

We are at an important time in the life of this country and the world. We are living in a time when people have grown so angry and heartbroken with the way things have been for so long. They—*we*—just cannot stand it anymore.

We do not want to live with the divisions and the fears we have lived with so long. We are tired of the lies and manipulation that others have used to their advantage and against the common good, against *our* good, against God’s beloved people.

We are so tired, frustrated, and heartbroken that some of us have finally lowered our defenses. We have cast caution to the wind and have walked out into the streets to find others who will walk with us toward justice and peace. I think that is the most important part of what Jesus was teaching the disciples and what he wants to teach us: that our work in this world is to proclaim the love of God.

Our work is to welcome and build bridges; to listen and also to share our own story. We are to make our way back to the well—even in the heat of the day—so that we may offer a cold cup of water to one who waits at the door to our lives. If we can do this, Jesus promises, our reward will be deep and full.

May our love and our desire to service Christ help us to believe and receive his truth. Amen.

Hymn of Response *“What a Friend We Have in Jesus”* Rachel and Deanna Wong

PRAYER OF INTERSESSION

Creator of all things seen and unseen, you blew the Spirit of Christ into apostles and disciples enslaved by sin, freeing your people from death and captivating us with your steadfast love. You raised the body of Christ, the church in the world, to proclaim the good news of salvation. For the sake of the world we pray, Come, Lord Jesus!

We pray for whom you call into the work of the church. May they know the presence of your Spirit to strengthen, guide, correct, comfort, and challenge.

We pray for the world into which you call your church. Help us to be faithful in giving ourselves away for the sake of the gospel. In your Spirit, let us show the peace of Christ to a world of violence, share the bread of heaven with a world of hunger, offer springs of living water to a world of pollution, and lead the way of truth and life with the gifts of faith, hope, and love until you bring the fullness of your new creation. Then and now we rejoice with the multitudes: praise, honor, and glory to you, Holy Trinity, in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray saying… *“Our Creator, who art in heaven…”*

DOXOLOGY Aria Chock

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God all creatures here below;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Praise God above, ye heavenly host;

Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**BENEDICTION**

**God protect you**

**when the threats of life howl around you.**

**Christ protect you**

**when the shades of sin creep around you.**

**Spirit of God protect you**

**when the flames of passion overcome you.**

**God who is Three in One keep you safely**

**and deliver you graciously to eternal life.**

POSTLUDE Jieun Kim Newland

*March* | Louis Lefébure-Wély (1817- 1869)