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

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

**Online Worship & Sermon October 11, 2020**

**NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Prelude *Our Father in Heaven* | Georg Boehm (1661-1733) Katherine Crosier

Announcements Lori Yamashiro

Opening Sentences Rev. Jeannie Thompson

 Turn your face toward God. Invite the Holy One to come into you, and know that a heart that welcomes God creates a place of worship pleasing to God. As the Savior comes into your life, receive the gifts of love and peace that he offers you. Accept them and do not put them aside. Rather, clothe yourself in them that your whole being may be renewed to reflect God’s glory.

Call to Confession

 Come, you who are carrying the weight of your life on your shoulders. Let us immerse and refresh ourselves in God’s mercy. Do not be afraid or doubtful, but lay bare before God the sins you carry.

A Prayer of Confession

Righteous Savior, we come to you with our hands filled with stones. They are the stones on which we have stumbled. We cannot seem to put them down. Instead, we feel their heaviness and are ashamed and long to hide them, but we cannot. Sometimes, we are tempted to fling them at others hoping they will take on the hurt and fear that boils in our hearts.

Take them from us, we pray, and free us for better things.

Help us so that we may raise open, holy hands to you in praise and thanksgiving.

Help us so that we may offer open, loving hands to friends and strangers that they may know the joy you have given us to share.

Help us fold together our hands in prayer so that we may be ever closer to you, the source of all mercy and goodness. Amen.

A Brief Time of Silence

Passing the Peace

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

A Reading from Holy Scripture Ezekiel Wada

## Philippians 4:1-9

*1Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*

*2I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think* about these things. *9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Reflection *“Reflections on Access to the Peace of God”* Ann Ito

Please join me in a moment of prayer:  Gracious God:  May the reflections that I try to share and the meditations of our hearts and minds be acceptable to you, our soul source of Goodness, Mercy and Peace.  Amen.

Before I go any further, I’d like to note two things:  The first is that these are my personal reflections based on my own life as someone with multiple disabilities and on the lives of my family and close friends with various disabilities.  I also had the privilege of serving a very elite group of persons with disabilities, notably, thousands of students with disabilities at the University of Hawaii at Manoa as they pursued bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral study.  I also was able to serve on one of the two UCC bodies addressing disability concerns.

The second is that I wish to thank my precious, first grandson Ezekiel for his wonderful rendering of today’s Philippians lectionary reading and to wish him a very “Happy Birthday tomorrow!”

Today is Access Sunday, designated by our denomination, the United Church of Christ, to give churches an opportunity to consider how it is that we treat persons with disabilities, how we welcome and include them in all of our activities from nursery and preschool, through Sunday School to Adult Education, to worship and leadership, and service both in the local church and national setting, as well as in the larger community.

The UCC has established two boards, the Disabilities Ministries Board and the Mental Illness Network.  During my Disabilities Ministries tenure, there was an effort by both boards to come together as one body, but it was decided best to pursue similar goals of accessibility by separate paths.  I think I can fairly summarize their efforts by attaching significant words to the letters in the word “Access.”

“A” is for architectural access from the accessible parking stall on an accessible path to and through the entire sanctuary, to the restroom and all gathering spaces in the church.

“C” is for communication access, be it in print or audio format, both or virtually as it currently is.

“C” is for confidentiality of disability status such that people do not have to share medical records with the church to justify their access request.

“E” is for empathy or equity.

“S” represents Soul Access to God and the final

“S” stands for access to service in the church as laity and clergy.

I believe Nu‘uanu has done reasonably well in this regard of access.

To illustrate the point, I would like to share some of my experiences growing up.  I was diagnosed at age 7 with legal blindness.  By this time it was becoming difficult to read the printed page and the blackboard; and by the time I was an adolescent, I had become quite the social misfit and unlearned person.  I could not manage make-up and dressing properly.  I could not participate in the most popular social events of viewing Japanese movies at one of the three downtown Japanese theaters, as I could not navigate in the darkened theater and my Japanese was insufficient to understand the dialogue and reading subtitles was out of the question.  I had been effectively rejected and excluded by my peers and passed on from grade to grade by teachers who did not know how else to handle me.  I was passed from grade to grade not on merit.

*(Numerous barking dog and telephone interruptions.)*

As God would have it, about this time, my longstanding UCC connection “KICKED IN” with Makiki Christian Church Preschool, Central Union Church Kindergarten and NCC Sunday School for some 8 or so years, and amidst my loneliness and despair, I began to realize that God did love me as I was, and I was not without value as a human being.  At about the same time, technology produced a machine that enlarged printed material on a screen and for the first time since the second grade or so, I could actually see and read my school work.  It took me hours to do the reading as I could see only one letter at a time and perhaps because my brain, my occipital lobe, had been so deprived of stimulation, it sucked in what it saw, albeit very slowly and I soon realized that I had a photographic memory.  Wanting for the first time in years to actually earn passing grades based on merit, I worked hard and almost obsessively to do all of my reading and to learn everything that was expected of me.  In that coming together of life, I found dignity and self worth and THE URGENTLY NEEDED PEACE of God.

The Philippians verses that Zekie read earlier almost provide a guide so that each of us can be blessed with the Peace of God which we all need over our lifetimes.

“Rejoice” Paul says, and let your “gentleness and kindness be known.”  Do not worry but through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the Peace of God that transcends all human understanding, will guard your minds and hearts in Christ Jesus.

Further, (particularly during our tumultuous times) think on these things:  Whatever is true, honorable or noble, just or right, pure, pleasing or lovely, commendable, if there were any excellence or something worthy of praise, think on these things.

And finally, Paul says:  do what we have learned or received from him or seen in or heard from him and that critical peace of God will be ours.  May we all have the empathy to help one another know the peace of God.

In closing, I ask for your indulgence to let me share my interpretation of the much beloved 23rd Psalm.  Remember that I was the lost and rejected and excluded lamb who came to believe that I, too, could be cared for by the shepherd.

“The Lord is MY shepherd.

I SHALL NOT Want.

He makes me lie down in GREEN PASTURES;

He leads me beside STILL WATERS;

He RESTORES MY SOUL.

He LEADS me in RIGHT PATHS for HIS NAME Sake.

Even though I walk through the DARKEST Valley,

I SHALL FEAR NO EVIL. For You (God) are WITH ME.

Your rod and your staff, they COMFORT ME.

Your prepare a table before ME in the PRESENCE of MY ENEMIES.

You anoint MY HEAD with OIL.

MY CUP OVERFLOWS.

Surely, GOODNESS and MERCY WILL FOLLOW ME ALL the DAYS of my LIFE and I SHALL DWELL in the HOUSE of the LORD MY WHOLE LIFElong.”

May we each help one another, despite our different abilities and disabilities to have true access to GOD’S Goodness, Mercy, and Peace.

May it be so.

Amen.

Music for Meditation *When in the Hour of Utmost Need* | Katherine Crosier

Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703)

Pastoral Prayer Pastor

Doxology

*Thank you for your faithfulness to this church and its ministry.*

*You may send your gifts and pledges directly to the church.*

**Benediction**

**Go from this place now refreshed by the Word and led by the Spirit.**

**Go forth wrapped in the grace and mercy of Christ.**

**Go forth to love and serve the Lord. Amen.**

**Postlude *Lamb of God* | Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) Katherine Crosier**