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

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

**Online Worship & Sermon October 25, 2020**

**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Prelude Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend (Lord Jesus Christ, be present now) Katherine Crosier

| J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Announcements Lori Yamashiro

Opening Sentences Garrett Iha

The lord has told us: We are holy, for the Lord our God is holy.

Therefore, we are called to be fair, and to treat all people with equality. Indeed, our treatment of each other should always display tolerance, goodwill, and honesty.

So, let your heart be filled with God’s love for others, and love your neighbor as yourself. This is a good and acceptable way to love and serve the Lord.

—Based on Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Call to Confession

It is in our confession where we realize our desire for God and our hope for God’s mercy. It is in admitting the truth of our lives that we take the first step toward wholeness and healing. So let us make our confession, first in silent prayer.

A Prayer of Confession

God of all the saints, God of all the sinners, hear our prayer.

We would be saint-like — holy, good, patient, loving.

But we end up feeling more like sinners — full of failures of morality, selfish, mean.

Perhaps you see us simply as human — as beloved, and flawed, and trying, and failing and succeeding.

In all of this, forgive the wrong that we have done, and bless the good we have accomplished.

Keep on loving us, and helping us, and molding us more and more into the image of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

*A Moment of Silence*

An Affirmation & Passing the Peace

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

A Reading from the Gospels Garrett Iha

Matthew 22:34-46

*34When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

*41Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 42“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” 43He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,*

*44‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’?*

*45If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” 46No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.*

Sermon *“Loving God”*

The passage we just heard relates for us the end of the questioning Jesus has been going through with the various Temple groups. It is fitting that Jesus silences them with a call to love God because this is where all life begins. It is what can bring an end to all of our confusion and questions. This is what Jesus’ mission has been about all along: a recasting of what it means to have faith in God, and the practice of being in relationship with God.

Jesus, as you may recall, had made quite an entrance into the Temple just a few days before. Before he settled down and began teaching he drove out all of the vendors and money changers who had been selling and trading in one of the outer courts.

That very public action is what brought Jesus to the attention of the Temple authorities. It made them angry and wanted to have him arrested or throw him out, but they realized that he was very popular. They feared they would make a bad situation worse. Indeed, they were afraid that the people would take Jesus’ side over them.

This made them even angrier because each group felt a particular responsibility for keeping the order and decorum of the Temple. And each feels that Jesus has put their authority in jeopardy—and he has.

So, each group has been publicly questioning him, trying to discredit him by attempting to catch him is some kind of a theological error, or some kind of lawless behavior or thought. They would like to embarrass him in front of the people who gathered to hear him, or they are hoping he will say something that can cause him to be arrested by the Romans.

After the Sadducees have had their turn the Pharisees take theirs. Hence, this last question: what is the greatest commandment?

Jesus not only gives them the greatest, he also gives them the *second* greatest. “This is the greatest,” he says, “Love God, and this is very much like it: love your neighbor as yourself.”

Rather than some new or esoteric uttering Jesus’ answer is completely conventional. Indeed, his answer comes directly from Scripture.

Loving God is from Deuteronomy and love of neighbor is from Leviticus. And I find myself especially glad that Jesus included that second “greatest” commandment because it opens-up the first in a way that it might not have been.

Certainly, in regards to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, Jesus’ answer was a demand that they search themselves and the way they exercised their authority over the people. Could they really say their love for God was demonstrated in the way they expressed their authority over the people? Did they really love their neighbor as they loved themselves?

The implication is that loving God is going to inspire a love for others that shows itself in ways that are generous and caring. And if the answer was not in the affirmative, then could they even say they loved God?

Jesus’ answer was meant to inspire them to consider *both* things: love of God, and love of neighbor. For Jesus, one cannot and should not be separate from the other.

For the context of this passage, Jesus was pointing out that the Sadducees and the Pharisees were quite capable of following all of the laws and requirements of tradition. However, he was also pointing out to them, and to us, that following the *form* proscribed for loving God is not actually loving God, and we can know how well God is being loved by how well God’s beloved people are either thriving or suffering.

So, in the gentlest way possible, Jesus silenced the Pharisees and the others. The question, however, becomes: how has his answer started a conversation in our mind, and heart, and spirit?

For most of us, the question of whether or not we love God was settled long ago—when we became church members, when we were confirmed, or when we were ordained.

What I believe this passage asks of us is that we examine that question again. For so many of us, church membership or confirmation happened so long ago. Indeed, my ordination was many years ago. A great deal has happened in my life, and in yours.

It is, I believe, worth reflecting on how the love we have for God feels to us now. How do we experience it? How do we express this love? How do we love others in God’s name?

These questions become even more urgent when we consider how we are being called into mission as a church. As a congregation, there are several important projects this church has participated in and led in the community. What can we say and learn about that time and those missions? What were some of the conversations about loving God that inspired building a dormitory, or sheltering survivors of domestic abuse, or welcoming homeless families to our campus and cooking a meal for them?

How is our history of loving God pointing the way to our future?

What Jesus’ answer was meant to do is to show the Pharisees who he was. He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Our answer is no less about our identity—what it has been, and how we are growing and evolving in our faith and the love we have been shown, and the love we have to offer.

What is more, we are being tasked with these self-reflections and assessments at a very important time in the life of the church. You see, next Sunday is All Saints Sunday.

Next Sunday, we will worship again via video, but many of us will also get in our cars and come here to church to receive the elements for Holy Communion. We will do this knowing that seven of our members have died and are now in God’s care. Thus, we will remember them and who they were as members of this family of faith. We will give thanks for what they taught us with their lives, and we will reflect, again, on the living legacy we are providing for our church and loved ones.

So, the questions have been asked. Jesus has silenced those who tried to discredit him. He has also, I hope, inspired new reflections and ruminations in all of our hearts and minds about the love we have been given, and the love we have to give—to God, and to God’s beloved people.

And as we think and pray on these things, I pray that God’s deep love for you will hold you and give you joy and encouragement. And I pray that we—Nu’uanu Congregational Church—will find ourselves refreshed and excited about what has been, and what is to come in our lives with God and each other.

Amen

Music for Meditation Blessed Jesus, We are Here | J. S. Bach (1685-1750) Katherine Crosier

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord’s Prayer

Doxology

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

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

**Benediction**

**May Christ, our light, illuminate the path before you.**

**May the Holy Spirit go into the world with you.**

**And may God make to strong, and brave, and true.**

**Amen.**

**Postlude Trumpet in Dialogue | Louis Nicolas Clerambault (1676-1749) Katherine Crosier**