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

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

**Online Worship & Sermon October 4, 2020**

**EIGHTTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

PRELUDE *Sonata No. 1: Adagio* | Felix Mendelssohn Katherine Crosier

ANNOUNCEMENTS Lori Yamashiro

OPENING SENTENCES Micah Goshi

Our glorious, liberating God has brought us together to feed our spirits. Here in this place we will be nourished by God’s holy, living Word. Through God’s words of life we will be lifted into a new life that is filled with God’s grace. So, prepare to receive God’s love which is sweeter than honey and far more precious than gold.

A MOMENT TO CONSIDER WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY Judy Keith

 for NCC’s Missions Committee

A PRAYER FOR WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY Rev. Jeannie Thompson

 *That We May Be Satisfied* —by Jack Haberer, *Bread for the Preacher*

 *July 2010 alt.*

Generous God,

Enough is enough! Or is it?

Your love and care are extended way beyond our deserving, Way beyond our capacity to collect.

You provide us more than enough...

But Lord, so much of life disclaims that *enoughness*. We hope for more than we need.

We work for more than we can obtain.

We demand more than we have earned.

We expect more than our share.

At the same time we hear story upon story of people truly lacking the *enough* we consider so basic to our lives... Too many millions of children lack the basic nutrients with which to build strong bodies,

As famine and adult power struggles strip their pantries bare...

God, we do affirm YOUR *enoughness*.

Please, now, bestow on those so lacking:

The home, the food, and the peace they need truly to have enough.

And help us who enjoy a super-abundance

to turn our longing for more into a mission to simplify, to share,

and to follow your lead, that is, to give.

In the name of the one who gave himself, even Christ Jesus our Lord, we pray. Amen.

A Moment of Silence – “God So Loved the World”

Russell Ishida, Paula Yamamoto, duet

Lori, piano accompanist

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 Micah Goshi

Matthew 21:33-46

33‘Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” 38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.” 39So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ 41They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.’

42Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures:
“The stone that the builders rejected
   has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
   and it is amazing in our eyes”?
43Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. 44The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.’

45When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

SERMON *“The Season for Fruit”* Pastor

As usual, there is so much to this story.  That is one of the things that always amazes me about the Bible.  In just a few short verses, a story is told that preachers like me spend whole mornings talking about—and I could, too.

However, I am going to spare you a lot of that because there is one point in particular in this parable that I would like us to take to heart, and into prayer.  That one point is the point that sets into motion all of the activity we hear of in Jesus’ parable: ie. the fruitfulness of the land and the people.

This is what has set into motion all of the drama that follows in the rest of Jesus’ story—it was when the landowner sends his slaves to collect the produce from his tenants that the trouble begins.  It is when the landowner expects and lays his claim upon the fruitfulness of all he has created, that is when things turn deadly.  That is when slaves, and even a son are lost to the materialism of the tenants.

The story Jesus tells is, of course, an allegory in which the hearers are supposed to see themselves—and they do, too, and it is not at all flattering.  In fact, what the chief priests and scribes see is a picture of themselves as violent, scheming, and faithless.

They see themselves portrayed as thieves who accepted the responsibility of caring for the landowner’s property, but who became so enamored of their position that they end-up denying the landowner in the most vicious way possible.

Indeed, the fruit they were supposed to produce is completely forgotten in their desire to be the masters of the land themselves.  So deeply do they desire to possess the land that they even imagine themselves replacing the landowner.  They even come to believe that if they kill the landowner’s son somehow they will be able to take over the land.  They seem to already see themselves as the landowner.

What they have forgotten is that they own nothing.  “Naked came I into the world,” said Job, “and naked shall I go out of it.” They were put upon the land as tenants—temporary fixtures whose function was to care for the land.  They were expected to till and cultivate, and then, in due season, they were supposed to bring in a good harvest.

It should have been a harvest that showed that the land itself had been used wisely and had been cared for faithfully.  A good harvest would have also showed that the tenants had respected and honored the relationship they had with the landowner. It would have showed their integrity, and their obedience to the landlord and their agreement with him.

Instead, several slaves and the landowner’s own son are sacrificed to the greed and faithlessness of the tenants.

At the heart of this tragedy is the tenants and how they came to believe that the landowner had absolutely no claim on them.  Although we are not told the particulars of the agreement the tenants had with the landowner, the thing we can say is that they also came to believe that even that to which they gave their word is no longer important. Nothing is important except their desire.  Their own word, that they gave when they became tenants, it too is no longer binding.

Nothing is sacred.  The landowner is nothing.  The covenant into which they had entered with the landowner—also, nothing.  Even human life is of less value to them than their possession of the land.

Notice how everything that is important is within—it fends off all others in order to satisfy itself. Such a world view is particularly inward motivated. How different this is from the activity of the landowner whose objective was to create and to bring other people into his circle of creation. For the landowner, the focus is outward.

One of the other things about the Bible that amazes me is how thoroughly it reads human nature. Actually, that should always be one of the goals to our relationship with the Bible: which is to allow it to read out to us that which it sees of us. We should allow the Bible to prick our conscience when it reads something in us that is less than perfect, and we should allow it to form us into the people God has made us to be. The Bible, you see, is a living word. The life that is contained in it is yours and mine but only because our beings are animated and led by God’s own Holy Spirit—which is God’s grace made real and available to us.

In the case of the chief priests and scribes who find themselves so harshly depicted, this should have been a call to repentance. Instead, like the tenants in the parable, it made them determined to rid themselves of any reminder of anything beyond their own position, like this man from Nazareth.

So, here we are two thousand years later, and it does not take a long or deep amount of thinking to come up with one or two people whom we could nominate to play the part of the tenants. Indeed, there seem to be more of them every day, so many who seem to have little understanding or commitment to the human community.

So, where is the Good News in all of this?

Actually, Jesus named it in the parable. At the very end, after the chief priest and scribes had condemned themselves, after Jesus affirms their assessment, he then tells them that the landowner is going to bring *new* tenants onto the land. The suggestion is that the new set of people *will* be fruitful.

Believe it or not, *that* is the Good News! It is that you and I keep coming to this book, the Holy Bible—still looking for answers and guidance. We keep coming back to this book because we have come to know the writer. We have accepted Christ. We have been touched by God’s mercy and love. We have invited the Spirit to dwell in our lives.

Most of all: this is our Good News because I believe we want to be fruitful. Through God’s love, we have learned and have come to love our life and the life of the world, and we want to see and experience the flourishing of our lives and the lives of people all around us.

We want to be the *good* tenants. Even though we are often surrounded by *bad* tenants—those who have set themselves up as the landowner—we know they are not. We know it by the destruction they foster and carnage they leave behind.

Our Good News is that we know the real landowner, and we know what we have to do. We need to follow that landowner and honor the covenant that calls on us to emulate the creative nature of the landowner, to co-create with the landowner so that more and more fruit is made available for more and more people.

So, as we read over or listen to this parable, I hope we are all wondering about what kind of tenants we are—as individuals and as a church. “The season for fruit” has drawn near (Matthew 21:34), and we have been given the gospel. We have been called into covenant and entrusted with the land. So may the harvest that we bring to God be abundant.

Amen.

MUSIC FOR MEDITATION *Father, We Thank Thee* | Louis Bourgeois Katherine Crosier

PASTORAL PRAYER

DOXOLOGY

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

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

*For gifts to Neighbors In Need,* *checks may be written to NCC with NIN on the memo line.*

HOLY COMMUNION

by Matt Gaventa, alt.

Invitation

This table is for all of us,

but it is important to remember that it is not our table.

It is not a Nu’uanu Congregational Church table.

It is not an American table.

Wherever you are in this moment,

 your table has become Christ’s table, for all of us.

It is a table of grace.

So, come and take your place at this table.

You are welcome, you are invited, you are called.

Come, let us receive together the meal Christ offers us.

Gift of Song*—“One Bread, One Body”*

Russell Ishida, Paula Yamamoto, soloists

Lori, piano accompanist

Although our lives are filled with an abundance of distractions and disruptions that turn our attention from you, O Lord, you are always faithful and welcoming, steadfast in your grace, and so we give you thanks and praise saying:

Holy, holy, holy God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Indeed blessed are you, O Christ, our Lord,

for risking yourself among us, vulnerable and rejected;

for teaching among us, teaching the radical hope of God;

teaching grace to a world bent on vengeance,

teaching love to a world bent on destruction,

teaching peace to a world bent on tearing itself apart.

You were there, your word was there, even to the point of death itself.

Even faced with terror and hatred and the brokenness of the world,

you rose again, to new life, to new creation, to resurrection,

that we might know something other than the dust,

that we might expect something other than the end,

that we might work for something other than ourselves.

And so you speak to us again,

with these abundant gifts of bread and wine,

with which we joyfully celebrate your dying and rising,

as we await the table of the kingdom yet to come,

and as we dedicate ourselves again to you,

thankful, and transformed, as living and holy sacrifices,

that our lives may proclaim the one crucified and risen.

Great is the mystery of faith:

Prayer of Consecration & The Lord’s Prayer

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,

and upon these your gifts of bread and wine,

that the bread we break together, and the cup we share together,

may retell our common stories together

and reshape our common bonds together,

and remember our common grace together,

in the communion of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ,

the one in whose life and death you have torn down our divisions.

And so may we be one with all who share this feast,

on this day, of all days, with all your children at every corner of your table.

May we share this abundant cup with all those who thirst for your justice.

May we share this abundant bread with all those who hunger for your righteousness,

May we be united with every corner of your story,

united in hope, united in vision, united in purpose,

united in ministry in every place.

As this bread is Christ’s body for us,

send us from this table to be the body of Christ in all the world.

Send us with a spirit of courage, a spirit of power and love,

that we may be witnesses in all creation

to the unending story of your word breathing life into the dust.

Keep us faithful, and fruitful, and hopeful, and peaceful,

until we come at last to the one table of your kingdom,

to feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm,

with you and with your Word, through Christ and in Christ,

the one who came for us, died for us, and rose for us,

the one who prays even for us, the one who first taught us to pray,

saying: *Our Creator*…

Bread and Wine Are Made Available to Us

The body of Christ given for you, and for many.

The cup of blessing, Christ’s life poured out for the life of the world.

*(You may receive the bread and wine.)*

Prayer after Communion

Gracious God, we offer our thanks,

for the whole communion of saint’s witness to this feast,

and for the ministry of churches around the world who gather with us today.

By this broken bread may we each be restored for the work yet to come.

By this shared cup may we each be claimed for the proclamation of your Kingdom.

At this shared table may we be united as children of your promise,

children of your word, dying and made new again,

sent boldly together into the world as servants of your peace.

Amen.

**BENEDICTION**

May the Creator who made the light,

the Christ who is the light,

and the Spirit who ignites the light within

abide with you and all creation now and always.

**POSTLUDE *Postlude: Toccata in E minor* | Johann Pachelbel Katherine Crosier**

**The Communion liturgy was based on a liturgy** written by **Matt Gaventa,** the Pastor of Amherst Presbyterian Church in Amherst, Virginia, and the chaplain at Sweet Briar College. Matt is the 2012 recipient of the David H.C. Read Preacher/Scholar Award from Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, and his writing has appeared in *The Christian Century*, *Working Preacher*, and on the Day 1 Radio Broadcast. He lives in Lovingston, Virginia, with his wife and son, Sarah and Charlie.

Music:

“Sonata No. 1”: Adagio by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847).

“God So Loved the World” by Sir John Stainer: Public Domain.

“Father, We Thank Thee” by Louis Bourgeois, c. 1510-1563.

“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow.” Words: Thomas Ken, Tune: OLD 100th: Public Domain.

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 “Toccata in E minor” by Johann Pachelbel (1653-1707).

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