The Promise of a New Day

Second Sunday after Christmas 2020

Jeremiah 31:7-14

*For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.*

*Jeremiah 31:11-12*

It has been a wonderful, refreshing week away. As many of you know, Jayne and I have been in Arizona this past week, visiting with Gillian and her fiancé, Nate. Several of you, I know, have similarly had time to visit family on the continent or in other places. Some of you have had the good pleasure of having children or other family return to Hawaii to spend the holidays here. Students return from school to spend the semester break back in familiar confines.

But then we return to our lives in the places we have chosen to live. Students go back to school, relatives return to their chosen places to live, and our lives carry on in our everyday lives.

I, along with many of you, I suspect, lament this state of affairs. I have already begun to miss being with Gillian and Nate, not to mention not seeing in person Jess, Rachael, and of course, Orion Hiroshi. Thank goodness for FaceTime, or we wouldn’t have been able to see them at all!

For a variety of reasons, many of our children and our children’s children have chosen to live elsewhere. Too often, their choices have been limited for a variety of reasons, most notably economic. Our children simply can’t afford to move back, find housing they can afford, and make a living.

Which brings me back to the text from Jeremiah. In the passage, the prophet speaks to the people living in foreign lands. The Jewish people, scattered throughout the world, will return home: *I [God] will bring them back from the north. [God] will gather them from the ends of the earth. [verse 6]*

Jeremiah here offers us a word of hope. But we must be careful as to wherein that hope lies. The prophet does not see hope in going back to the way things were. Rather, it is a hope for a new day. When the people return, it is not so that they can go back to the way things were, but to create a new thing. Many of us remember the good old days. We seek to recreate those “good ole days” at our peril. To do so as a congregation is especially dangerous. Those days will never be again, and the time, money and effort we expend trying will only lead us to our demise.

This is not to say that there are not **values** that our forebears embraced that cannot nor should not lead us in the present and into the future. The Iao UCC shares a similar history to Nu’uanu Congregational. It was begun as a way to reach out to the new Japanese immigrants to Maui, just as NCC created a ministry here. They had a dormitory for young Japanese immigrant women, just as we provided housing for a similar population in our history. But that was a need for yesteryear, not now. The mission was to serve a specific community in need, newly arrived immigrants. Back then it was Japanese immigrants. Iao and Nu’uanu embraced that mission. It is our legacy.

Iao recognized that that need no longer existed in that specific way. But there were new immigrant communities coming to Maui. Under Jack Belsom’s leadership, they saw, extended hospitality to and embraced an immigrant community, the Kosraeans. Just as they did for and with Japanese immigrants several generations before, they are doing so with a vibrant community of Kosraean Christians.

We here at Nu‘uanu need not and should not seek to replicate what is happening at Iao. We should honor the legacy of ministry to the Japanese immigrants in the past, but the best way to honor that legacy may be to minister to the needs of our present immigrant community, wherever we may see it. Whether they come from the Far East or the South Pacific, or wherever, let us be about ministry to those God has placed in our midst.

Let us in this new year continue to honor our history. But may we do so by honoring their faith, a faith that was put into bold action, by ministering to those whom God had placed in their midst. God has placed others in our midst this day. May we see them, whoever they may be, and open ourselves to the possibilities for service and caring to them. It is a new day, here in 2020. May we embrace this new day in joy and openness.