Nu’uanu Congregational Church

November 5, 2023

By Rev. Jayne Ryan Kuroiwa

*Lights on the Path of Life*

Matthew 5: 1-16

The day that the Church celebrates the saints who went before us, and the saints among us, that’s a fine day to reflect on these verses! Remember that “saint” in the New Testament sense of the word, is a title given to every Christian for we each are made holy, *sanctified*, by God’s grace. A saint is not some impossibly super-righteous straight arrow; but every flesh and blood believer *is* a saint.

If we try, it’s not hard to pause after each “Blessed are” verse and name particular Christians who embodied, in their character, the core values that Jesus lifts up. Give it a try. Who comes to mind when you hear “blessed are the meek”? Can you name Christians, alive or dead who embody “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”? Toyo Nakamura, perhaps?

“Blessed are the pure in heart”—for me, Janet Seaver, my favorite Sunday School teacher filled that bill.

“Blessed are those who mourn”—Millie Darby, a former parishioner of mine, did that with grace.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake”— Martin Luther King, Jr., Ruby Freeman and Shaye Moss.

I invite you to sit with those blessings from the fifth chapter of Matthew’s gospel and remember the very real saints who have been blessings in your own life, and blessings to God’s mission.

During the many years I have been with this tribe of Christians at Nu’uanu Congregational Church, I have heard stories of the saints of this church—former clergy who were pillars of the community, and some pioneers who planted Kuakini hospital. I’ve seen you honor the faithfulness of many who built you up and set you on a firm foundation. The blessings in their own lives, and the extraordinary depth of faith they planted resides in you, individually, and in our fellowship of present-day disciples.

It’s a day to count those blessings, to sit with them and not take them for granted.

But there is still more to do on this holy day. And the gospel demands our *personal* response.

I invite you to sit with the more challenging words that Jesus offers. “You are the salt of the earth”—don’t lose your essential purpose. “You are a city on a hill”—church. “You are a light for the world.” Shine. Don’t hide.

(How can salt lose its taste?) Have you ever asked that? Sodium chloride “is what it is”! How can Jesus say don not lose your sweet because of your salt?

It took me years to understand this. Salt loses its taste when it is diluted or tainted by another substance. Jesus is warning us not to dilute our lives of faith by filling our lives with other wants and wishes. Jesus is inspiring us to be our most pure, our very best—witnesses who light the path of life for others.

This prolonged time of pandemic illness and political turmoil has certainly threatened to dim our flickering light. And the winds of war, and sweeping natural disasters have tried to diminish the wattage of our wicks. But still, Jesus’ words won’t take a back seat. They demand our loyalty, our courage, our individual responsibility.

You are a light for the whole world. Don’t you forget it!

Now shine, do your best! Glow proudly candlesticks! Don’t hide the flame.

You have it within yourself to serve, to give, to pledge and make offerings, to seek, to learn, to grow in your faithfulness. It is my prayer that your witness of faith finds joyous ways of shining in our dark world, blessing the church’s future as so many others have blessed its past.

You have been blessed to be a blessing, friends.

It’s time to shine! Amen.