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

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

**Online Worship & Sermon September 6, 2020**

**FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

*(Today we will celebrate Holy Communion, so please have your communion elements ready prior to service.)*

Prelude *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word* | Dietrich Buxtehude Katherine Crosier

Announcements Lori Yamashiro

Opening Sentences Stan Chong

We have come to worship and give glory to the only one who deserves such devotion: our gracious and mighty God. This is the Holy One who pursues us out of deep concern for our well-being, and whose mighty acts deliver us into life and righteousness. Lest we believe this to be our achievement, let us remember God’s nature. God is love, all love, all grace and goodness. We are the recipients of God’s attention and salvation because this is who God is.

Call to Confession Rev. Jeannie Thompson

Amid the countless things that human beings cannot fully comprehend about God, there stands this: God so loves us as to bathe us with grace and feed us with mercy and forgive our sins. Confident in the love of God, let us pray together:

Unison Prayer of Confession (Unison)

 **Lord God, while we were still slaves to sin, you died for our salvation. Yet we still worship the false gods of the world, forgetting that you are Lord. Loving worldly wealth, we have not loved you with our whole heart nor love our neighbors as ourselves. Trusting worldly strength, we have not trusted your word nor followed the Word-made-flesh. Forgiving by worldly norms, we have not shown mercy to others as you have shown mercy to us. Forgive us yet again, we pray in Christ’s name. Amen.**

A Moment of Silence

Assurance of Pardon

 Friends, hear the good news of the gospel: who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, and Christ sent the Spirit to us that we might always have an advocate and a guide. So, let us give thanks, and recommit ourselves to believing in the good news of the gospel, and accepting the mercy that is ours through the love of Christ.

Passing the Peace

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

A Reading from the Hebrew Bible Stan Chong

*Exodus 12:1-14 The First Passover is Instituted*

*1The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.*

*14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.*

SERMON *“Meals to Remember”* Pastor

As we begin, I would like you to keep in your mind the old saying: we are what we eat. I would like you to keep that in your mind, and I would like to ask you to think of the many things besides food that we “consume” and make a part of ourself.

Today is the first Sunday of the month, and so we will celebrate together the sacrament of Holy Communion via this video gathering. However, as you are watching this video (if you should turn it on at 9:00AM on Sunday), I and the Sunday School children will be celebrating Communion in real time, via a Zoom.

We will do it differently—more interactively—with the children because they are just coming to know this ritual, whereas you and I have known it for many years. It is a celebration. We celebrate Christ’s love and sacrifice for us. We celebrate that through Christ, we were made free from sin and death.

We also celebrate and remember that at that last supper, gathered in the upper room with the disciples, Christ asked us to remember him in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine—his body, his blood, his life given for us—and not just once a year, but every time we sit down to table to be fed. We are to remember Christ, and the God who feeds us and frees us to life. Christ was to be the new Passover, he is the lamb given to us and for us.

The passage from the Bible we heard this morning is about the first Passover. The first Passover was given to the Hebrew people in Egypt, and as we have heard it read to us, much has happened in the life of the Hebrew and Egyptian people. The Hebrew people’s life in Egypt has been filled with hardship and sorrow. However, God has sent Moses, the Hebrew child who lived. God has sent him back to Egypt with a mission. Moses was sent to reclaim for God the Hebrew people, the whole nation is to be freed to live with dignity, and to be God’s chosen people.

Although Moses was initially reluctant to be sent on this mission, he does, at last, go. He puts God’s demand before Pharaoh and makes it plain that refusal will incur consequences. Unfortunately, Pharaoh’s heart is continuously hardened so that no matter what kind of plague comes to the land, he will not budge. He will not be deprived of his cheap labor: the Hebrew slaves. Moreover, he will not bend to Moses, or Moses’ God. He will not let himself be lowered because he is Pharaoh, and no one is greater than him.

But then comes, the final plague. As we heard, the final plague is the one that will break Pharaoh’s will: the plague that killed the first born in every Egyptian family. The Angel of Death is going to visit each and every Egyptian family, high and low, bringing death to each one, even Pharaoh’s own family. However, the Hebrew families will be passed-over.

Pharaoh has been warned, but now God turns God’s attention to the Hebrew people. There are things that are be required of them, too. There are arrangements to be made; people and belongings to be organized—and God does not want to leave it to human effort. God tells Moses just what the Hebrew people must do to organize themselves and get ready.

One of the things I would like us to notice in this passage is that God’s instructions to the people are very specific. Through Moses and Aaron, the people were told what to cook (a lamb, with bitter herbs, and unleavened bread), how to cook it (roasted over a fire—not raw, and no boiling), and how to eat it (in a hurry with sandals on, staff in hand, and loins girded).

The liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt through God’s intervention would be the event that marked a new beginning, a new relationship between God and God’s people. It was also to be marked on the calendar as the “beginning of months” and “the first month of the year” (12:2).

While the Egyptians marked their calendars by the appearance of the sun and moon, the Hebrew people were to mark their calendars forever with a story — this story; a foundational story that would interpret their past, preserve their present, and most importantly, shape their future as a covenant people chosen and preserved by God.

The Passover was not just to be a one-off deal, but “a day of remembrance” to be celebrated as a “festival to the Lord” as a “perpetual ordinance” throughout all generations (12:14). It was, and is, the Passover that marked God’s people and gave them meaning and purpose and life in the world.

As we look back over this passage the rest of this episode in the life of the Hebrew people, there are many things that can and should capture our attention. There are, in this part of the story of the Hebrew people, incidents and situations that are meant to be remembered. They are meant to shape the Hebrew people, and they are meant to shape the hearts, minds, and spirits of them and all who have come, and will come after these original participants in the first Passover.

And so, I believe we are meant to notice how powerful God is, and how God’s objective is to show the Hebrew people and Pharaoh which one of them is the most powerful. It was supposed to be a demonstration that left no doubt in anyone’s mind that God is the ultimate power in the world.

Pharaoh would not accept this and the consequences to his people and his own family are tragic. They are also violent and frightening, and many of us when we read or hear this story, we wonder why this had to be so. Why could not the story end with Pharaoh bending to God’s will after nine plagues? Why all the carnage?

To be honest, I do not have a definitive answer. Like many people, I would have brought the story to a different conclusion. I would have had the Egyptians giving up after nine plagues!

My conclusion, though, would have been more wishful thinking than reality based.

What is acknowledged in this story is that Pharaoh, and most people, are hard-headed. We are not, happily, mostly hard-hearted, but it must be admitted that many of us are hard headed. God can and does show us over and over just how powerful God is—during this pandemic, one of our members directed me to a Facebook page called, *The View Outside My Window.* In it people all over the world show each other how they are coping with being kept at home. We show each other beautiful pictures of God’s good creation—they are pictures of hope.

And so, we know God’s power and how powerfully beautiful God’s Spirit is, and yet we doubt, we falter and descend into fear; we trust more in our own efficacy than in God’s.

Worse, often when the world begins to change, when more and more people step up and step out in bold trust in the love and compassion they have been shown and have come to believe in; when this happens, very often others will do their best to stop them. These are people, they are the ones that go boldly, we look at in wonder and admiration as they live their lives making “good trouble” in the world; trouble that calls out entrenched hatred and bigotry for what it is; trouble that lifts up people and gives them hope; trouble that is not afraid when God does a new thing, or calls us to give-up our hard headedness and step into a hope-filled future.

 There are many others, too, who will not go forward into such a future. They remain fearful, and even suspicious of other’s freedom. Many others will then cling to old ways, and the strong men that come forward in such times saying that they can solve our problems. They can make us great again. They, and they alone, can make us free.

The tyrants themselves live for such moments. Fear and hopelessness is what gives them their power.

When things like this happen, as it so often does in human history, we are meant to return to this story. We are meant to remember and take heart at the power of God, and God’s ability to preserve life, and open the door to freedom. We are meant to give thanks that God will always hear our cries for freedom, for justice, and compassion. God will always send for us, no matter where we are. God will always extend a hand of help and welcome. This is what we can wrap our whole lives around.

We are also meant to remember that it was this mighty act of powerful love on which Jesus was acting when he gathered his disciples together in the upper room. Rather than sit and be served, he washed their feet.

Afterward, he invited them to the table where he blessed the bread—that is: he thanked God, and consecrated the bread to use in their lives—then he broke it and offered it to all. After supper, he also took the cup, he gave thanks, he blessed it, and he offered it to his beloved people.

Remember this, he said, my body broken for you and for many; my life poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Remember this meal whenever you sit down.

Remember me, and how you are fed, even now.

Once again, God was acting powerfully in the lives of God’s beloved people through Jesus’ birth, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection.

Today, we are Zooming Holy Communion with the children. We will share with them the power and the love that is in God’s mighty acts…and in their act of remembering.

And so, I ask you to pray for them, and for all of us. Pray that his meal will be a foundational story for the children and for us, and that they and we will use it to interpret our past, preserve our present, and most importantly, shape our future as a covenant people chosen and preserved in love by God, and that we will all be shaped by this holy meal of love; that we will, indeed, become what we eat.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MUSIC FOR MEDITATION *O God of Truth* | Scottish Psalter, 1615 Katherine Crosier

PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD’S PRAYER

*We thank you for your faithfulness to the ministries and mission of our church.*

*Please send your offering directly to the church.*

DOXOLOGY

HOLY COMMUNION

by Maren Tirabassi, alt.

Invitation

Once again, for Holy Communion,

 the table where each of us is seated can be the table of Christ the Lord,

 if we will make him welcome.

Therefore,

 I invite you to remember the Gospel of Luke and how it recounts for us

 the story of the day Christ blessed the table in the house of a tax collector.

Zacchaeus would not have dared hope for the honor.

It was Christ who found him and inspired him to generosity.

It was Christ who touched his life and led him to a new desire for justice and charity.

So, throw open the door for Christ

that he may sit at your table, partake of your bread, your cup and your heart,
for, Christ “must stay at your house today.”

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

 Pastor: Holy God, we are one bread, one body, one cup of blessing.
Though we are many throughout the earth
and this church community is scattered,
in your many kitchens, and living rooms,
rest your hands lightly upon these elements
which we set aside today to be a sacrament.
Let us ask God’s blessing upon them.

 **Unison: Generous God, there is no lockdown on your blessing
and no quarantine on grace.
Send your Spirit of life and love, power and blessing
upon every table where your children shelter in place,
that this Bread may be broken and gathered in love
and this Cup poured out to give hope to all.
Risen Christ, live in us, that we may live in you.
Breathe in us, that we may breathe in you.**

 Words of remembering

 Pastor: We remember that Paul the apostle wrote letters to congregations throughout places we now call Greece, Turkey and Macedonia, and they were the first “remote” worship resources.
Our online service has a long heritage.

The Communion words sent to the church at Corinth were these:

 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed
took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

 Pastor: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God: the Bread of Heaven.

 **Unison: We are one in Christ in the bread we share.**

 Pastor: Let us in our many places receive the gift of God: the Cup of Life.

 **Unison: We are one in Christ in the cup we share.**

*“One Bread, One Body”* Russell Ishida and Paula Yamamoto

 Accompanied by Lori Takeyama-Goshi

*(Join in singing the refrain.)*

*After you have received the bread and wine please*

*cover the elements of this holy meal, and let us give thanks together:*

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

 Pastor: Let us pray in thanksgiving for this meal of grace,
rejoicing that, by the very method of our worship,
we have embodied the truth that Christ’s love
is not limited by buildings made with human hands,
nor contained in human ceremonies,
but blows as free as the Spirit in all places.

 **Unison: Spirit of Christ, you have blessed our tables and our lives.**
**May the eating of this Bread give us courage to speak faith and act love,**

 **not only in church sanctuaries, but in your precious world, and may the drinking of this Cup renew our hope even in the midst of pandemic.**
**Wrap your hopeful presence around all whose bodies, spirits and hearts need healing, and let us become your compassion and safe refuge. 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 *Toccata in A Minor* | Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck Katherine Crosier**