

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday Worship, June 2, 2024**  
**Rev. Irene Willis Hassan**  
**Sermon: Ghost Part 2**  
**Scripture: Psalm 139**

Psalm 139

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
3 You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
5 You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
7 Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9 If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and night wraps itself around me,"[a]  
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.  
13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
15 My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.[b]  
17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them.  
18 I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end[c]—I am still with you.  
19 O that you would kill the wicked, O God,  
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—  
20 those who speak of you maliciously  
and lift themselves up against you for evil![d]  
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?  
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
22 I hate them with perfect hatred;  
I count them my enemies.  
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
24 See if there is any wicked[e] way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.[f]

### Sermon: Ghost Part 2

This sermon is dedicated to the memories of Rev. Warren Nakano and Jiggs Tamashiro, may God hold and guide their families.

When I first came to you, I preached a sermon called “Ghost” that talked about the memories of good times past of the church haunting the increasingly empty halls. In that sermon, I talked about how during times when we feel fearful, or caught in darkness, or feel like we’re being haunted by the past, are when we’re most likely to do the work necessary to flourish in transformation. You have done that in spades, and that work is coming to fruition here and now. This message is a follow up to that one, 10 months later.

So, as you know (and may be fraudtfully evident to some of you), I’m not actual-ly trained as a local church pastor. I trained in seminary to be a Chaplain, which is what I was for most of my career until now.

Chaplaincy is predicated basically on “storytelling.” A chaplain’s main function is to help people explore their life narratives in a way that brings them peace and hope. However, people who are in settings that have a Chaplain – such as hospitals, shelters, and warzones – are often unable to reach into the narrative of others’ lives because they’re so focused on whatever immediate danger they’re battling, whether it’s cancer, homelessness, or combat. When experiencing a very real and present threat to our lives, the dreamy, thoughtful “narratives of our lives” doesn’t seem relevant. I need medication, I need housing vouchers, I need to survive tomorrow, they say. I don’t have the mental space to reflect on my life like you’re asking me to, Chaplain.

So why do Chaplains bother with this “storytelling narrative” thing among people who don’t seem to have the ability to focus on their life narrative in the midst of whatever crisis they’re experiencing?

The Psalmist often highlights the same experiences as our friends in acute crises do. Psalm 139, as well as most of the Psalms, often lift up a situation of anxiety or dread that flows into praise for God watching over them in their time of need.

Taking time to express gratitude to God and recognize his steadfast Love even when we are grieving, anxious, and heavy burdened is important. During my time as a Chaplain, I came across dozens of teary-eyed people who would state that everything has gone wrong in their lives, as they sit in the shattered shell of their war-torn homes or on a bench at the homeless shelter, but like the Psalmist, they thank God for remaining with them through the struggle. Sometimes when I sit with someone who is so clearly broken and telling me they’re praising God anyway, I’m grateful for their resilience, but I also wonder if it’s a sort of “fake it til you make it” situation in which they’re hoping what they’re saying is true, but they’re not really feeling it.

“Fake it til you make it” is an important tool in faith and recovery from painful experiences. The phrase itself comes from “Alcoholics Anonymous”, a program that teaches people to stop drinking by believing that God can help them before they actually feel like it’s true. However, Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a program that I have great respect for, doesn’t use “fake it til you make it” as its only tool for helping people stop drinking. People in the program are expected to attend meetings weekly, daily, twice daily, or however much they need where they – you guessed it right –

Talk about the narratives of their lives.

This dual system of a.) believing God can get us through hardship and b.) processing our stories through the lens of how God works through our stories is reflected in Psalm 139. Psalm 139 follows the “fake it til you make it” model of the Psalms, but it also integrates God following us through the narrative of our entire life, not just the teeth-gritting parts that we have to “make it” through. The Psalmist says “O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.” God is with us in every part of our narrative, not just the points of pain in which we’re having trouble accessing His plans for us. He follows us everywhere, from the beginning to the end and everything in between. He knows exactly how the whole thing is connected even and especially when we do not.

This is why Chaplains insist on walking with people through their narratives even when it seems to be an awkward context to do so. Chaplains are essentially asking the people they work with to contextualize their current painful experience into the broader story of what God has done in their lives. If we just rely on “fake it til you make it” instead of incorporating the narrative of how we got here and where we’re going, we risk forgetting what we’re “faking it” for. If we can’t name the story about why we’re persevering through difficulty, the purpose of “faking it” loses its power.

In my sermon “Ghost” from last August, I essentially asked you to “fake it til you make it.” We’re not yet at a sustainable place following several years of intense soul searching that our congregation has endured, but we are hopeful to God that our faithfulness through our difficulties will prevail in a renewed future. Yet, as you all know, it’s been a lot of work building these new programs, making big decisions together, and suffering losses along the way from valuable members and friends like Pastor Warren, Jiggs, and others. We may wonder whether all the effort we’re putting into each other and the church will actually produce anything, and we nervously defer to God’s wisdom and power to placate those concerns.

It’s important we don’t approach this summer as gritting our teeth through anxiety. Instead, let us remember the narrative of our church and our lives, the memories both good and bad, that brought us to this moment by the journey He designated for us. As we move through this time from darkness to dawn, let us remember the words of Psalm 139 that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” God knows every exact part of our souls – our history, our gifts, our fears, our futures; He knows every fear and wonder that we experience. God wants you to remember who you are, all of you in the continuous story He is writing for you,

not just the crises and anxiety of the present moment. He wants to connect your story together in the way He ordained it.

The narrative of your lives and of this church matter for making sense of the present. Pastor Howard Yoshida is a powerful part of the narrative of this church building its nurturing character and centeredness on Jesus. Warren Nakano, Dale Vallejo-Sanderson, Connie (Ching) Mitchell, Jiggs Tamashiro, Nancy Arakaki, Irene Kanetake, and so many others have woven the tapestry of this congregation's narrative that lives in our present and our future. The nurturing, deep love of Stella Wakamatsu and Nani Oda guide our hospitality in the present. John Sakamoto's "quietly effective" maintenance of historical and media records provides a beacon to remembering who we are through these anxious seasons. Those happy memories of the past aren't just a ghost haunting you in the hallways, they're the encouragement for you to remember who you are and what you're still doing here.

So, as a trained Chaplain, I invite you to survey the narrative of your journey. I invite you to survey the narrative of your own lives and how it surrounds whatever difficulty is troubling you personally. I invite you to survey the narrative of this church and how it culminates in this new moment we're experiencing together here now.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. God is on the journey with you. That journey is in the joy of your memories, that journey is the anxiety of the present, that journey is the hope for the future. It's all connected, and as a Chaplain, I ask you to remember that road of connection that keeps your feet moving toward that future you seek so that you don't forget why you're going where you're going. God bless you and guide you, as He always has and always will.

Amen.