

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday Morning Worship, May 5, 2024**  
**Rev. Irene Willis Hassan**  
**Sermon: “Beyond Duct Tape”**  
**Scriptures: Mark 12:28-31 & John 15:9-17**

**Mark 12:28-31**

**28** One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

**29** “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” **31** The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

**John 15:9-17**

**9** As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. **11** I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

**12** “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. **17** I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

**Sermon: Beyond Duct Tape**

Some of you may know that I’m not the biggest fan of “feeding ministries.” Ministries that serve handout meals or bags of food to poor people without any sort of spiritual, educational, or vocational components are often (but not always!) paternalistic in nature. They serve to make the church administering the “feeding ministry” feel better about itself, like its “done something” helpful that day, but does very little or even has a negative impact on the people they hope to serve. Feeding ministries often disable folks to go to the shelters to get case management services (the shelters also have food, but more importantly, a whole lot more), or worse, enable folks to sell their government issued food stamps for drugs. Further, it creates a narrative of divide between the “have” and “have nots” that gives the former all the power, which is antithetical to the gospel of equality of all under Christ’s lordship. Jesus said that we don’t live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. “Feeding ministries” stand against much of what Jesus asked us to do.

The verse we read today from Mark 12, the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself”, often serves as the basis for why churches divert to feeding ministries. Yet, Jesus tells us the more important commandment of that verse is to “Love God with all your heart, soul, and strength.” To simply pat yourself on the back for providing a meal once a week and then going back to business as usual for the rest of the week does not do justice to the greater commandment.

I preface this message with my quarterly diatribe about feeding ministries because we, ironically, are about to embark on a feeding ministry: “Pā’ina Night.” We’re planning to serve a community meal once a week that includes worship music and thoughtful conversation about spirituality. The danger of

this ministry is that it can divert to the easy, fruitless practice of feeding ministries that serve a basic need but don't stretch us to use our full soul and strength to honor God's incredible Love.

Luckily, there is a roadmap to stop us falling into the trap of a fruitless ministry. Jesus gives us another commandment in John 15: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Jesus' commandment in John is different from Jesus' commandment in Mark in one important way. Mark's commandment seems to be using "neighbor" as in "love your community," and John's commandment seems to be using "each other" as in talking directly to the disciples being in an intimate community together, set apart from the rest of the world. The commandment from Jesus in John is more powerful than the one from Mark. Anyone who's gotten married or had kids knows it's a more intense experience to love people who are close to you, that you've made dedication to, than it is to love strangers you've never met and may never see again.

There's a time and a place to love your wider community, and a time and a place to love your own fellow Christians, and they're both commandments from Jesus. In the context of Mark 12, loving our neighbors meets an emergency need. I've explained before that Mark was written in a time of chaos. The walls of Jerusalem were literally coming down around Mark as he wrote, while he likely hid in a cave somewhere listening to the screams of his people being massacred around him by the Romans. Feeding ministries to the wider community in situations of intense violence and upheaval like Mark's situation are perfectly acceptable. My generalization about feeding ministries does not apply in places where people are genuinely starving and professional resources for them to find food are not widely available, such as Gaza or Sudan. In situations like Mark was in, the response to "love your neighbor as yourself" applies because people who are actively dying of starvation need bread just as much as they need religious consistency. "Love your neighbor" meets an emergency need.

As we look across the increases in violent episodes among our youth, from school shootings to massive escalations of youth suicide, we're seeing an emergency take place in our own time. The emergency we're seeing is the mass loneliness and depression that younger generations experience as a result of separation from a spiritual community. Because this crisis is rampant among our kids, we are fulfilling the commandment in Mark to love our neighbors and meet the immediate crisis through feeding our community and providing them a safe space to explore a spiritual community.

However, the "love your neighbor" commandment comes as a footnote to the "Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul" commandment because it's meant as a tool to fix an emergency rather than the essential substance of what we are meant to be doing together. If we are simply feeding our neighbors at Pā'ina Night, we've diluted the commandment to love our neighbors as simply meeting an emergency rather than transforming it into the greater commandment. So the "feeding" aspect of Pā'ina Night meets the "love your neighbors" criteria by responding to this emergency by meeting basic needs, but it also needs to be more than that.

Pā'ina Night, and everything else we do at the church, needs to go beyond putting duct tape over an emergency leak. We need to go farther and love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls, and believe that He is doing something so important that we're willing to lay down our whole lives for it and invite others to do the same. The conversations and fellowship we share together at Pā'ina Night can't simply be intellectual brain fuel that can be discarded until the following Thursday. We need to make that space something essential that feeds the souls of everyone there and encourages them to make commitments to transform themselves and the world toward Christ's love through that ministry.

This is the reason why I've called Pā'ina night a new Worship Service of the church rather than a weekly side ministry. Church is the business of transforming humans into the shape that God intends

for them, to the point that those transformed people are willing to give their whole lives to the mission of declaring praise for Him with their every action and breath. We need to speak a message of transformative Hope at Pā'ina night, and that message starts with you.

For Pā'ina Night to work, each of you need to believe that it's going to be a transformational ministry that has potential to complete our joy in Him. We need to believe that we are not simply servants, slaving away at a new task, but instead friends of Jesus who are building a space that matters so much that are willing to lay down our lives to see His word blossom into the souls of others.

I leave this message by asking you to think of the places that God has created transformation in your heart. Think of the places in which your soul is fully invested in Him, to the point of being willing to lay down your time, energy, and very life at His feet. Many of you have asked what I expect you all to do at Pā'ina night, and my answer is this: Your testimony about the love you share together here, and the personal testimonies about how He works in your individual lives, will be essential in that space. I expect you to bring those places of transformation from your own life and in this community to Pā'ina Night. If we follow this great Commandment to love one another just as He loved us, and we share that authentic, transformational love with others, that's where we'll see our "feeding ministry" grow into the work of true discipleship.

I challenge you to go beyond the emergency of the church dying or the youth succumbing to violence and depression. I challenge you to fill those places of emergency with all your heart, soul, and strength in Him, that the work we do together here will be transformational this summer for every person that walks through our doors. May it be so. Amen.