

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship, June 23, 2024
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan
“Phone Call to Heaven”

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 21:15-16, Luke 9:47-48

Mark 10:13-16

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Matthew 21:15-16

15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

Luke 9:47-48

47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.”

Sermon: Phone Call to Heaven

At Pa’ina Night this week, we discussed the topic “What would you say to your child self about the nature of God?”

The question is really reversed, because according to our scripture readings, Jesus wants our child selves to tell our adult selves about the nature of God. So, in prayer, I tried accessing child Irene to ask her about God.

The first time I remember thinking about God was when my grandmother died when I was 5 years old. My mom bought me this cool phone, the kind from the 90’s that was see through with neon lights and wires inside it. It wasn’t hooked up

to anything, and my mom told me I could use it to call Grandma in heaven whenever I wanted. She explained that I probably wouldn't be able to hear Grandma's voice, but that she would be listening to me.

For the next several weeks, I kept the phone by my bed and called Grandma every night before bed to tell her I loved her and missed her. I asked Grandma questions about what God looked like, what Heaven looked like, and imagined the answers that she was whispering to me through the silent phone. It didn't occur to me for a second that what my mom told me might not be true – I believed wholeheartedly that Grandma could hear me on the other end of the line. That phone helped heal my grief for the loss of my grandmother and eventually one day I found myself not needing the physical phone anymore to be able to access Grandma's spirit watching over me.

My child self simply believed the story about the phone, where any adult handed a similar grief tool might look at it as a dubious and silly thing. We might sadly look at a 5 year old talking to a lost loved one on a defunct phone and smile sadly at her brokenhearted naivete. But the thing is, 5 year old Irene recovered from and picked up hope and empowerment through that tool. She learned how to carry the voice of love by talking on that phone. She learned how to process sadness efficiently. She learned how to talk to and about God and imagine what the loving, peaceful place of the Kingdom of Heaven looked like. So that 5 year old making phone calls to heaven was, in many ways, much more mature about processing her grief and accessing spiritual curiosity than many of us are in our adult years.

Through the experience with the broken phone, I hear my child self telling my adult self to allow more imagination to permeate my faith. Children are willing to lean into imagination because they don't understand all the mechanics of reality that pull back the curtain of illusion. By the time we become adults, that reality has beaten us back enough times to be skeptical of the magical phone to Heaven and its utility to bring us in communion with those that we lost.

But we need that imagination, because imagination of the unknown matter just as much as the realism of our present experiences of being adults. I needed the magic of that phone to help me cope with my grief, and that magic helped me learn how to talk to God and imagine His Kingdom for the first time.

I recently had to use the imagination phone again, although unfortunately I don't have the cool one from the 90's anymore with the neon lights and see through wires in it, just my square iPhone that everyone else has. When my friend Jamie

died in 2022, I continued texting her old phone number pictures, stories, and prayers that I thought she would enjoy or things that I simply needed to say to her. I asked Jamie what God looked like, what Heaven looked like, and imagined her holding her son and beaming contentedly in the light of God's magnificent glow. I knew Jamie wouldn't ever respond, but I summoned the magic of my childhood faith through my one-sided conversation with Jamie to not only imagine her spirit crossing into God's care, but to imagine the beauty that God was creating for her and her son in His Kingdom.

My text messages to Jamie recently went from green to blue, which on an iPhone means that the number she used has been recycled into new hands. This meant that I probably shouldn't text Jamie anymore, as not to antagonize a random stranger that now occupies her old phone number. But because I tapped into a sense of childlike imagination to communicate with a dead friend that I logically knew couldn't hear me, I felt at peace with the end of the one-sided messaging chain. The text messages to Heaven that I sent Jamie, and the phone calls to Heaven that I made to my grandmother years before, helped wrap my grief in gentleness and reimagine God guiding each of these loved ones into the new journey they're now embarking alongside Him.

My child self-taught me to use imagination to cope with the darkness of lived reality. I didn't use my imagination to hide from or deny the awful truth that Grandma and Jamie are dead. Instead, I used the imagination of my phone calls to Heaven to expand and soften my heart so that I could heal and grow.

Jesus wants us to access our childlike imaginations and faith even when it seems silly because our ability to be curious and imaginative like a child helps us heal and grow. When we heal and grow, we live into being the people that He means us to be. And when we become who He means us to be, that is when we grow the Kingdom of Heaven that we imagine joyfully is waiting for us.

Amen.