

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship, June 16, 2024
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan
“The Parable of the Volcano”
Scripture: Mark 4:26-34

Mark 4:26-34

26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle because the harvest has come.”

30 He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Sermon: The Parable of the Volcano

With our new interns from the mainland here, I've been seeing Hawaii with fresh new eyes. You or I might drive over the Pali and think “wow pretty, lucky I live in Hawaii” and then we go back to thinking about our shopping lists or meetings or whatever mundane daily activity is taking us over the Pali. For us who live here, yes, Hawaii is beautiful – but it's just where we live and many of us have been since we were born. This 'āina is our home where we play scrabble and cook with our families, navigate bills, and attend grandkids' soccer tournaments. It's just life.

Yet, for these interns, every new corner turned on our island is a breathtaking moment of wonder. The other day I was taking them to IHS in town and I was rambling on about whatever program I was thinking about and they were all completely quiet. I asked, “are you guys ok?” and they said “Oh! Yes sorry we're just taking it all in.”

You see this sense of awe and wonder in tourists in Waikiki too, which is why it's fun to go down there sometimes and see couples in their matching aloha attire beaming at the beautiful ocean and all the Polynesian tourist novelties surrounding them like free hula shows and sunset tiki lighting. Where we see

places of daily life activities and ordinary memories, many visitors to Hawaii see sacred magic and glory.

The way the islands themselves were formed is similar to how we live on and visit them. Hawaii is a volcanic chain that exists through a series of violent explosions millions of years ago. The Ko'olau were formed by 10,000 ft plumes of lava that created some of the biggest and most disastrous tsunamis in the history of the world during their formation. The formation of Hawaii was dramatic, and looking at the aftermath of this explosion two million years later continues to be a source of spiritual inspiration for the millions of visitors we receive here every year. But for us who live here, it's just our pretty backyard that we look at contentedly while waiting in the drive thru at Burger King.

Faith is the same way as how we look at the beauty of Hawaii. When your eyes are first opened to the almighty power of God, when you have an experience of transcendence or grace that forever changes you, you're like a tourist looking at the Ko'olau and unable to listen to anything except for your breath uttering how glorious the beauty is before you. People who have recently discovered Jesus can do nothing else but proclaim His glory with every ounce of their spirit and recount to anyone who will listen how He saved them from whatever plight held their hearts captive. New followers of Jesus are like tourists coming over the Pali, suddenly filled with such emotional intensity by these 10,000 ft plumes of majestic drama plunging into a crystal blue ocean below them. God is good, because He loves us with such intensity to fill our spirits with such incredible hope and astonishment in both nature and the deliverance of our souls.

Yet, at some point in both our faith in Jesus and in our life in Hawaii, we settle into a quiet routine of acknowledging all the awesome glory He has made in and around us while also paying our bills and going to kids soccer games like people would anywhere else in the world.

For many Christians worldwide, and many Christians in this room, deliverance into Jesus' saving grace was a dramatic event. In this room, there's stories of heartbreak, illness, and tragedy, that God's power in your hearts and this community helped you all overcome. The power of letting go and turning our lives over to God feels like the release of 10,000 ft plumes of lava creating a majestic landscape. Yet, after the lava cools and we're contentedly watching the dormant Ko'olau from the drive thru at Burger King, the divine wonder of it all begins to wear off.

It's important to remember the baptism of that first eruption that created this beautiful life that we've been given by God. It's important to see Jesus as if

through the eyes of a spiritual tourist that has just recently discovered Him. For me, this is what having “faith the size of a mustard seed” means. Even if you’re a seasoned Christian who’s used to being surrounded by Jesus’ saving grace, or a seasoned resident of Hawaii that’s used to being surrounded by incredible natural beauty, it’s important sometimes to see those volcanic memories of that erupting transformation from long ago through fresh eyes. Faith the size of the mustard seed is remembering that God can do powerful things, even when the volcanoes of our faith currently remain dormant in the background of our busy lives.

When we take even a minute to look at Hawaii through the beaming eyes of a tourist, we can find ourselves overcome by gratitude for the privilege we have to live here. When we take a minute to remember our baptism and the explosive moments in which God saved us from turmoil, we find the courage to believe it can happen again, and again, and again.

It’s important to recall these moments of awe, wonder, and faith, if we want those things to continue to grow in us and in our church. Jesus spoke in parables because stories are easier to remember than listed facts. In the parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus is asking us to recall the courage to believe, even and especially when our faith has felt dormant or even doubtful for months or years. Remember the moments when you felt like a tourist to God’s saving power, moments in which your world was changed and the impossible became possible. Maybe that moment didn’t happen yesterday and the excitement of it is slowly fading in your memory. Having faith the size of a mustard seed means to recall those volcanic moments of deliverance in your own life and witness that those moments are still happening all around you, if you only remember to look for them. Those dynamic, transformative moments are happening for our interns who are seeing Hawaii and the unique range of Christian faith expressions we have here for the first time, which is a gift that you have given them. God is working all around us if we just open our eyes to look.

Perhaps you may feel tired or disconnected from the dynamic memories of your younger faith. Perhaps you feel sadness that you can’t hear God talking to you like He used to. Perhaps you feel anxiety that our plans for this church are now coming together, but what if it doesn’t work or go as planned? When you’re a seasoned Christian that’s far removed from the dynamic moments of conversion, you may feel like you’re looking at the Ko’olau in front of you but what’s really on your mind is what kind of condiments you want on your cheeseburger. You know God is there because you’ve experienced Him before, but that dynamic moment just doesn’t seem relevant anymore to the normal ins and outs of daily life.

Yet, moments continue to come up that require us to muster that faith from our original moments of transcendence. Our church is at that moment now, as we launch our new programs. You may be in a moment now in your personal life of doubt and trying to access God's path for you. Look to God the way that a tourist might look at the Ko'olau mountains and relive just a mustard seed of a moment of awe and wonder that anything and everything is possible through Him.

Faith can and will continue to heal us if we remember to access our volcanic memories of God's work in our lives. Face toward hope with the eyes of a tourist seeing God's majesty for the first time. Just a glimmer the size of a mustard seed of that awesome, transformative faith can grow into a towering tree of transformation if you keep looking for it and believe even a little bit that it's possible. God has volcanically ignited you in your faith before. God has volcanically erupted the world into new beauty through delivering us His Son, Jesus. God is breathing transformation into the lives of these three young people in our care through the program we've created for them here.

God can reawaken your faith if you look up in wonder at Him even just a little bit. God has done it before and can do it again, if only we have faith the size of a mustard seed.

Amen.