

## **KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

**Sunday Worship, July 21, 2024**

**Rev. Elizabeth Finley Hazel**

**“Imagination – God’s Handle to Hope”**

**Scripture: Samuel 7:1-14a & Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

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### **Samuel 7:1-14a God’s Covenant with David**

<sup>7</sup> Now when the king was settled in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, <sup>2</sup>the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” <sup>3</sup>Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.”

<sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup>“Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup>I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. <sup>7</sup>Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’ <sup>8</sup>Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel, <sup>9</sup>and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. <sup>10</sup>And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place and be disturbed no more, and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, <sup>11</sup>from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel, and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. <sup>12</sup>When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings.

### **Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56 Feeding the Five Thousand**

<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

### **Healing the Sick in Gennesaret**

<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. <sup>54</sup> When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him <sup>55</sup>and rushed about that whole region

and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup> And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

### Message: **IMAGINATION—GOD’S HANDLE TO HOPE**

The two scriptures we have today have God speaking directly into the ear of the prophet Nathan or face- to-face in Jesus’s healing and teaching. But how many of us actually have had God speak to us in words or been able to see Jesus and feel his healing touch like the people in the crowds that followed him during the time he lived on earth. Yet we still have hope that Jesus still heals in the 21st century and God is still speaking. I’m going to use a little show- and- tell to show you why. ‘Cause when we say the world is fragmented, that’s a real source of hope. You think I’m kidding? Take this pottery fragment. Yeah, I know you can all see it’s really an old cut-up milk bottle. So, I am asking you to use your imagination and think of it as a piece of pottery you found on the road. You know it is a fragment just by seeing how it’s handle curves up to meet something that’s missing, something larger that made it whole and useful. So, when we say the world is fragmented or our lives pulled apart or everyone is at logger-heads, we are actually saying that there’s something that’s missing that once made everything whole. We know in our hearts where there are breaks in the flow of human connectiveness and we can see the places where it should continue on. Well, the places where it should continue on are the places where God’s realm begins and when we realize that, we know we have in our hands the broken handle to the world the Gospels call the “Kingdom of Heaven” where goodness and kindness and mercy actually do rein, just like we’ve got here the broken handle of a milk pitcher.

And the good news of the Bible is that even in this world, God creates wonder from the very things we first think are ugly, opens up dead ends and resurrects scraps we’re ready to throw out because our God is a creative God. Even more wonderful God has given each of us a slice of God’s own creative power and the more we use it, the more we realize it’s a handle to the divine connection and healing we’ve been looking for. But most times we don’t know it exists until God nudges us to dig it out and use it. What sets that apart from other times an insight makes a light goes off in our heads? ---The times it echoes the words of Jesus. Take this cross, for instance. It’s made from olivewood, so common in the orchards and gardens Jesus walked in and he must have touched the same kind of wood we can handle here today. Its carvers saw it as a physical connection with Jesus—something that existed in Jesus’s time on earth that we can also see and touch. But that’s not the only connection it has with Jesus. It makes his words “the last shall be first” become true. Why? Because it’s not just made of olive wood, but the pruned branches of olive trees. What is more worthless than pruned branches sitting at the curb or ready to burned? Yet these carvers took these cast-offs and, using only hand-tools made them into symbols of the most significant event in Christian history and a top selling item in The Christian Bookstore. They also make nativity scenes this big from olive tree trigs that seem

too small to make anything from just by making them into little blocks to build the back wall from. But we don't have to be wood carvers or sculptures to be creative like that. Adjusting the things we do and say in order to make room in our lives for people in the sidelines—and I know many of you do just that—that's also making very good use of our gift of creativity from the God who made worlds come into being out of nothing.

There are so many ways to shut people out or push people to the sidelines, all we have to do is let our likes and dislikes and favorite things take over. Sometimes we forget that the person who gets shut out is not likely to feel loved or truly a part of our community. And isn't the community somehow less whole if some do not feel they belong? But not everybody attracts us. What do we do when what something someone says does not capture our attention or is on a subject we consider unexciting? Well, we can redirect, reimagine transform it rather than throw it out. You might be throwing out a human soul with it. Does the redirecting and reimagining sound like just a bunch of big words? No, I learned how effective this form of love can be from personal life experience and the grace of God. You see, I was an only child. Because I had chronic hepatitis as a child, I could not engage in much physical activity for 8 years and I had to sit on the side-lines and watch. Because this was before we had all the electronic forms of entertainment we now have, there was nothing for me to do but sit it out and listen to whatever was going on, so I made up some imaginative games to make whatever I had to listen to exciting so my life wouldn't seem so empty and I tell you I thank God every day for that gift, for it helped me enjoy and take pleasure in so many people and things, while I see so many others bored stiff. Then I got married to an engineer, who would read to me from the MIT publication, "American Scientist," as if it were a bed-time story. two of my step-children also became engineers while I am a liberal arts type. Luckily, whenever I was around scientifically oriented folk like them, I didn't have to say, "Can you switch to a subject I know more about? I just switched on my imagination instead. I imagined a tiny little universe far below my sight and substituted tiny planets and galaxies and shooting stars for electrical forces and colliding atoms and the pattern produced by the movements of these forces were directed by what I thought I heard my husband or friend saying. I know a lot of people are bored by someone who goes in depth about something they are not very interested in. So that person has the choice of not being themselves or being isolated when they're in that group. So, in order to be more loving towards them, I feed my curiosity. Why are they so interested in something I am not? So, I pretend I am on a treasure hunt looking for the source of all that passion hidden somewhere in one of the layers they insist on bringing up. And using my imagination for that search has taken me lots of places. For instance, I love to see building shows like this Old House or Aloha Builds, because I love to see how the appearance of a building transforms each time there is even a small change in the roofing, framework, sheetrock, flooring, countertops, paint-job. I love to see how each change makes everything around it look different, until the whole building transforms from drab to stunning, like an everyday miracle. So when I deal with anything where a change in its components can change the whole thing, I look for that everyday miracle, to the point where I find any kind of planning or committee work fascinating because I see how the part

each person has to play in a discussion adds something not thought of before and I imagine the plan being built and taking shape in the middle of the table where everybody is sitting, each contribution having its own color that scintillates when it comes in contact with the others. This is the kind of creativity the One who made worlds come into being out of nothing gives us so we can enjoy more people and more of the procedures we have to deal with in life.

So instead of turning away from a child of God too easily, find something, anything in what you are hearing and remake it into something you are interested in or enhances the direction you are dying to go in. You don't have to take up the whole thing, just a part of it, but by making something of your own from it, you have let the person in front of you touch your life.

And the funny thing is, once you see value in something or someone you thought worthless you've given yourself hope, hope that there is something worthwhile in that side of ourselves we don't like much, the side that causes us to lose points, that holds us back from getting over the hoops society puts in our way, the side of ourselves we lock away in some corner of our minds. I'm going to use the stole I am wearing today as "a show-and-tell" about how God can take something we've stored away in some drawer or corner of our mind we never look into and use it to heal and make whole. My husband has been gone now for more than thirty years and I still call him my spice. So, I know that memories don't have to keep us in limbo, where we walk in places and see sights in our minds that aren't there anymore. Memories needn't prevent us from fully enjoying the present if we treat them like spice and stir them into new recipes where they are transformed. This stole is an example of that. You see, this stole is part of the material from my wedding dress. I got my wedding dress from a store where you could select the style, the fabric and the lace and have your dress made from that. My fiancée sneaked into the store and asked if he could have some of the material left over and on our wedding day, he came up, flipping his tie and said, "Is this familiar?" He had his tie made from the material of my wedding dress. So, we got married, he in his tie and I in my dress. There was still more material left that I folded up and kept in my drawer for decades. I have very creative friends who are sisters and so I gave them that material and asked them to make anything they wanted with it and I would pay them for it. So, they made this for a Christmas present, and told me I could use it as a stole or a scarf. Even though it didn't seem to me to be quite a legitimate stole because it had no symbol for Christ, it did have this meandering lace that I could say represented the journey we take with God. It became a show and tell in of my most popular sermon because I always said, "So you see how this piece from my wedding dress has been totally transformed into a joyful incentive for worshipping God and whole-heartedly sharing God's miracles with you now." I preached about it to so many churches, I got pen marks on it and when I tried to get the pen marks off, I wore a hole in it and then at a store I saw a strip of glue-on lace and I thought I could just make cross-pieces from this lace and cover up this tear. So now this is a full-fledged stole because it now has a cross

symbolizing Christ's love on it. And what made this stole whole, a tear that could have gotten it thrown away. God has some strange ways of making people whole and there are examples of it in the Bible. God can make you whole using the very thing you planned to throw away like this scrap from my wedding dress. Check it out in your lives.