

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday Worship, July 7th, 2024
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What About the Secret Place?

Scripture: Psalm 61:1-8 (NRSVUE) & Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NRSVUE)

Psalm 61:1-8 (NRSVUE)

1 Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer. **2** From the end of the earth I call to you,
when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I, **3** for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy. **4** Let me abide in your tent forever,
find refuge under the shelter of your wings. *Selah* **5** For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. **6** Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all generations! **7** May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint
steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him! **8** So I will always sing praises to your
name, as I pay my vows day after day.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NRSVUE)

3 For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

2 a time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; **3** a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down and a time to build up; **4** a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance; **5** a time to throw away stones and a time to gather
stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; **6** a time to seek
and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away; **7** a time to tear and a time to
sew;
a time to keep silent and a time to speak; **8** a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war and a time for peace.

Sermon: What About The Secret Place?

Good morning everyone! Today I'd like to tell you about a secret place. I grew up in a small town in Maryland with my family. If you talk to me for more than 10 minutes, then you know my family is extremely important to me. Hi Fam! Whenever we are together I feel safe.

Our home in Maryland was the best kept secret in Carroll County. I have wonderful memories of my brother's friends flooding to our house to have dinner, to play pool, or showing off their ridiculous moves on *my* Just Dance. For those of you who might not know what that is, it is a video game where people compete for who has the best dance moves. Spoiler Alert: none of them did. But I digress, I can make fun of my brother's friends later.

Before the terrible dancing, My mom would lovingly make enough food to feed the whole town and so, we'd all find ourselves around the dinner table eating, talking, and laughing for hours. My dad would inevitably let out this contagious belly laugh in response to his own puns. (My fellow interns can attest that this is something they have witnessed *me* doing frequently in the last month). Like Father, like daughter, I suppose. My parents created a space (whether they knew it or not) that was a shelter in the formative seasons of our lives. My faith was strong and my identity and sense of self was safe. This is because the physical boundaries of our home, our tables, and our meals, were never changing while the world around us did.

Clearly, (*look side to side like I lost something*) we are not in Maryland anymore. We are on our own fun adventures! In the last few years, my brother has moved to the other side of the world to Egypt. My parents have sold our house in Maryland and moved to our new home in Florida. We are no longer a few floors apart, we no longer have the same kitchen table to share a meal. We are in a season of transition, wandering, or as you might say here in Hawaii a holoholo season.

For me, when I reflect on this change from family meals to individual meals, it is scary. During my first year in Boston, I had deconstructed my faith in a way that I no longer felt secure, *and* I had to transition into a space that was not familiar at all in the matter of a few months. I felt like I had gone too far from the Darby I knew in Maryland.

"Maryland Darby" was a fearsome creature. She went to church with her family, she danced without a care, she led bible studies, worked at Christian camps, and would talk about Jesus without hesitation. Whereas, "1st Year of Boston Darby" felt like she tiptoed in her faith, she rarely went to church, and even more rarely talked to people about Jesus. (Take a breath). Now, I am here. Working in a church in the most beautiful place on earth surrounded by a new Ohana trying my best to get back to God's secret place.

God always finds a way to call us back to the secret place. Last Friday, I went holoholo to the bookstore and the local art gallery in Kailua town. At the bookstore, I found this (hold up travel Bible) and at the art gallery I got the inspiration for today. I made a comment to the manager of the art gallery that I was an intern at a church and that I had to give a sermon. He responded, "what about the secret place? What about the place God promises to meet us?" I said, "That's interesting." And went on with my day. Fastforward, to last Sunday, I went to Kalama Beach Park for some devotional time before church and I opened it where the string was left and it was right at Psalm 61. (Mind-blown hand motions). So, similar to last week when Pastor Irene talked about how Ezekiel's PTSD that "made him weirder at parties" we are going to dive into why the author of Psalm 61 was crying to God to be a refuge and to shelter. More importantly, I promise you that I will connect it to the meals with my family, just ride this wave with me.

Overall, the book of Psalms are prayers to God that were written by a variety of authors both before (around 600 BCE) and after the destruction and exile of God's people (around 500 BCE). Erich Zenger suggests that Psalm 61 was written during the reign of King Hezekiah. Zenger highlights the two ways that people have interpreted this passage presumably written by the king. One way was that Hezekiah was on the brink of death and was calling out to God in the middle of the Temple at Jerusalem. Which is important because the Temple was a physical place of refuge. Another is the spiritual interpretation of the passage where Hezekiah cries out to God because he is scared that his faith is faltering.

Zenger focuses on this spiritual interpretation when he writes, “His [King Hezekiah] courage is broken, his heart powerless. So he cries to YHWH, because he hopes for support from him. The image that dominates the subsequent petition makes clear what that support should look like. The petitioner wants to be placed on a rock, but the rock is too high. The petitioner cannot climb it by his own strength, and hence cannot of himself achieve a secure standpoint.” Every comfort that King Hezekiah knew had been changing before his eyes. His body was deteriorating, his connection with God was fleeting, and he had lost hope in ever getting back to where he once was. In other words, King Hezekiah was in a season of holoholo.

Yet, in that holoholo season King Hezekiah does not wade in the discomfort without inviting God into his wandering. He was vulnerable enough with God to say, “I don’t want to go through this alone.” Similar to Hezekiah, I have been going through a holoholo season, but I have been pretty reluctant to invite God into it.

During this last year specifically, I was fighting a battle that was not meant to be my own. I asked myself, “Why am I so afraid of meeting God in His secret place?” Fear is the easiest answer to that question. Fear of letting Him see the parts of my heart where I questioned my own abilities. Fear of letting Him see that I was insecure about my relationship with Him because of my educational deconstruction. Fear of letting Him see my tears when I couldn’t articulate my sadness. Fear of letting Him see that I, like Hezekiah, felt my faith faltering. Fear of letting Him see my anger that I held towards Him for allowing everything to change so quickly. Fear of letting Him see my weirdness at parties. Fear of letting Him get so far away. Yet, *my* fear is what was preventing me from seeing that He was right in front of me. But, God doesn’t miss a beat.

I felt comforted in remembering that God does not move away from us. He does not expect us to holoholo on our own, even though that’s what the world wants us to believe. Like an Ohana, He invites us to show off our terrible dance moves to Him, so He can dance with us. He asks us to laugh and share our fears with Him, so he can listen. He asks us to rest with Him, so He can be our refuge. And He invites us to have a meal with Him, so he can rejuvenate us.

So, last Sunday when I was reading this on the beach I remember hearing God say, “if you are scared, stressed, and afraid then stop fighting. Rest with me.” Which led me to Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. As Pastor Irene read, there is a time for everything. When I look back on “Maryland Darby” I see that it is where I was born, planted, laughed and where I danced. Whereas, “1st Year of Boston Darby” I got stuck in the breakdown and gathering stones of knowledge without inviting God into it all. Yet, here in the last month, little by little I have invited God back into my fears. Little by little and I am replanting seeds of “Maryland Darby” and “1st Year of Boston Darby” together to transform into the Jesus follower that God wants me to be.

I invite you all to pray with me. Have you ever felt insecure and fearful? What would it look like, if you invited God into your fears? What would it look like if we let Him holoholo with us? What about the seasons of change? What season is God calling you to? What might it look like if we were able to see all people around us through the lens of Ecclesiastes 3? I don’t know the specific answers to all those questions. But the one thing I know for sure, is that He promises to meet us and we would see the transformative, faithful, and steadfast love of Jesus as we invite him into our holoholo season.