

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 2024  
MESSAGE: FEARLESS  
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN  
SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 3:17B-19**

**Scripture:  
Ephesians 3:17b-19**

17b that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**Sermon: Fearless**

Over the next three weeks, we'll be saying "a hui hou" to our three interns that joined us for this summer. Today is Eliana's last Sunday with us and this sermon is dedicated to her because she committed to flying across an ocean for a whole summer to help our church.

Over the course of the summer, it came to my attention that Eliana is, in fact, a bully. Yes, she looks sweet and as a Pastor's Kid she has Jesus rooted firmly in her heart, which is evident in everything she does. Yet, if you're on the balance of making a decision and one of your options is harder than the other, Eliana will be the first to tell you to go with the harder thing. For example, we went to the Humane Society in June and there were a batch of new puppies there. I didn't need a puppy, but anyone who's seen a puppy almost always has the intrusive thought that they do actually need one. As we passed the puppy kennel I exclaimed this impulse aloud that maybe I should get one, and Eliana immediately shot back with "Do it." When I wavered, saying, "well, puppies are a pain and I don't have a gate on my yard..." Eliana just shook her head and doubled down: "No, you'll figure it out, do it."

I did not get a puppy that day, but I did learn something about Eliana: I say "bully" jokingly, but the actual word I think that describes her is "fearless." It's clear Eliana's world is an open book of possibility. Over the summer, Eliana's fearless spirit came out again and again, in that she always wanted to choose the bravest option of possible paths. We were at the beach one day and a shark entered the bay, and Eliana wanted to climb up the rocks to go see the shark for herself (from a safe distance above it). Another time, the interns went to Waikiki for surf lessons, and Eliana was the first to master the craft and take away the coolest photos of herself surfing, even though it was her first time doing it (I have attempted surfing maybe 30 times and never got as far as Eliana's single attempt at the sport). You can put Eliana in a room full of any kind of people from far-right evangelicals or Atheist Anarchists and she'll approach the situation with genuine curiosity rather than fear. It's clear that Eliana is on a mission to live her life to the fullest and dog gates and sharks are but simple obstacles in her path.

Eliana's courageousness stems directly from her faith. The Bible encourages us repeatedly to not be afraid, but to follow God with boldness to where He leads us. No matter what we encounter or what we see, hear, or experience, God is with us, guiding us and holding us – and Eliana is the personification of this resolute commitment to His constant support.

In our reading from Ephesians today, Paul commands from his prison cell “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” When we are faithful and know that God has our back, we need not fear anything. Paul is telling us that we can learn and experience a wide range of things that are scary and, if we are rooted in Jesus, we will have the wisdom to discern that which is from God and that which is not. The experience of fearlessly trying new things shouldn't scare us because no matter what – He is there, and He will reign triumphant in the end. We can go see all the things, learn all the things, have all the experiences, and know no matter what, God will sustain us through all of it if we believe in Him. If Paul can embody this boldness in faith from prison, so should we in every aspect of our lives.

This summer, the interns have heard from a different pastor every week. These pastors come on Wednesday nights and explain their faith and pastoral call stories and offer advice to the interns about how to succeed in ministry. The range of context and understanding that these pastors present to the interns is vast – they've heard everything from far-right evangelical politics, to far left “spiritual but not religious” justice advocacy, and everything in between; they've heard native Hawaiian kahus provide widely varying accounts of Hawaii's history and Christianity's place in it; they've listened to the folks at IHS's addiction recovery house recount both painful and inspirational encounters with religion. If the interns have experienced nothing else this summer, they've definitely been exposed to the breadth, length, height, and depth of the saints, while also taking away that knowledge is limited and often subjective, just as Paul described.

Anyone who's been to seminary or Bible college knows that very often gleaning all this knowledge and experience can lead to a crisis of faith, as the rock of Jesus on which we stand seems to be submerged in the rushing waters of various opinions or historical perspectives during our studies. Eliana was selected for this program because we knew that all these opinions on ministry, Hawaiian history, and experiences from the homeless shelters may threaten to submerge this rock; we also knew that Eliana would persevere through it and even grow in her love for Jesus as a result of this program.

This was actually the standard in which we selected applicants: those who demonstrated a firm foundation in their faith and could endure a range of opinions and experiences while continuing to be rooted in Christ's abundant love was an important characteristic for us in deciding to call Eliana to come serve our church this summer.

Eliana's fearlessness in wanting to understand multiple perspectives, and boldly engage new experiences, reflects the characteristics that Paul writes about in this chapter.

Instead of knowledge and experience breaking down our faith, Paul encourages our experiences to strengthen our resolve in Jesus' message that love wins and nothing and nobody can break that. Eliana knows that she can endure all these different and sometimes conflicting messages that she's heard all summer and know the truth: that through the deliverance of His Son Jesus, God showed His radical love for us, and nothing we hear or do changes that. She's fearless because she knows the Rock of Ages will be with her through all of it and she need not be afraid.

As Eliana prepares to leave us, may we be encouraged by her fearless spirit that shows us that with God, there is always a way forward. That path may not always be a puppy, but it will be in saying "yes" to where he leads us, even when we find it scary. Eliana leaves behind with us a piece of her courage to follow God into the unknown. She leaves behind her willingness to engage knowledge and experience while knowing that no matter what, Christ's love surpasses it all.

Whatever experiences we have, things we hear, or problems we have to solve, let us be like Paul and Eliana and boldly declare that God will always reign victorious in our lives because of his abundant love for us. When you give your heart to Christ, you become rooted and grounded in love. Love's roots are stronger than the roots of any natural tree, and whatever hurricane of life that comes at you can't knock it over. So may you be bold and courageous, learn much and love deeply, because Christ loves you and there's nothing that can take that away.

Amen.