

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2024
THE SERMON ABOUT THE JELLYFISH
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

Philippians 4:4-9

4 Rejoice[a] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.[b] **5** Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about[c] these things. **9** As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

Sermon: The Sermon About the Jellyfish

This is our last week of saying “a hui hou” to our summer interns, and this message is in honor of Darby, who has dedicated her whole summer in service to our church.

As you may recall, the interns preached throughout the month of July. When Darby was contemplating what to preach about, she considered telling a story about a jellyfish from early on in her time here. She did not end up preaching about the jellyfish, so I will deliver the sermon about the jellyfish on her behalf for you now.

You may have noticed that Darby wears glasses. Most people who wear these devices on their faces have trouble seeing without them, as is also the case for Darby. She was swimming at Kalama Beach Park – without her glasses on, because that would be a bummer of a thing to lose in the waves – and through her blurry vision, she thought she saw a piece of blue rubbish floating on the waves. Dedicated as she is to being a good citizen of Hawaii, she rushed over to get it out of the water, only to discover that the rubbish was squishy and stinging her. She realized her error and chucked the man-o-war back into the waves.

If that had happened to me, it probably would have ruined my day. I’d be frustrated about my mistake, I’d be frustrated that now my hand hurt, I’d be frustrated that I looked ridiculous for picking up a jellyfish instead of swimming away from it. However, this wasn’t Darby’s reaction: Darby recounted this story to us in tears of laughter, ending it with the footnote that she wanted to *turn it into a sermon*.

When we say we want to turn experiences into sermons, it’s because we’re doing what Philippians 4 calls to do: rejoice, and the God of peace will be with you. Sermons are meant to inspire, encourage, and challenge us toward growth in Christ. They’re not supposed to end with

frustrated crying while walking out of the ocean with a burning hand, feeling humiliated. Sermons end with how the experiences we go through bring us closer to God, and how others can do so also. This is the entire goal of the Book of Philippians – known colloquially as Paul’s “Friendship Letter” – to encourage Christians through hard or stressful experiences into finding joy in their communities of Christ. And this is exactly why Darby walked away from her jellyfish encounter wanting to turn it into a joyful, inspiring experience for others to hear: because Paul asked us to frame our experiences this way through his letter.

Darby had a habit all summer of turning places that the rest of us would find upsetting into places of joy, growth in Christ, and the peace of God that surpasses understanding. Another time from this summer, the interns recounted a story about Batman the church cat capturing and releasing a live B52 cockroach at Eliana’s feet (cats, what can you do), so Eliana grabbed some nearby cockroach spray and began firing at the cockroach. As she slipped on the cockroach spray that she had blasted at the cockroach in her panic, Darby walked in the room and began laughing at the absurd scene of the cat releasing a cockroach bomb at Eliana, Eliana panicking and then slipping, and the cat, cockroach, and Eliana all being mutually hysterical about the situation.

Darby wasn’t laughing at Eliana’s expense: she did come to Eliana’s rescue and (I think) successfully helped get the cockroach and guide Eliana to safety. Darby was laughing because she knew that she was going to be carrying a lifetime memory of that snapshot moment of community living in Hawaii, and she rejoiced at having these funny and farcical moments to take home with her. Darby lives and breathes the rejoicing that Philippians calls for.

But the thing is, finding joy in upsetting places isn’t an easy skill to cultivate. Being a Christian is hard. The original apostles all died in horrifying ways, from being boiled alive, to flayed to death, to hanging upside down on crosses. Being a Christian is hard because Christ asks us to renounce our cultures, our families, and even our own lives to follow Him. Being a Christian is hard because it asks us to get past our comfortable places of routine and strengthen ourselves into His hands, feet, ears, and mouth, so that we might spread the Kingdom of Heaven throughout the world. Being a Christian is hard because it asks us to repent of the parts of ourselves that do not serve Him and find entirely new ways of existing. Finding joy in all of that is not easy.

Being human means knowing that you’re going to have jellyfish and cockroach moments, where we’re stung, uncomfortable, disappointed, fearful, and anxious. However, being a Christian means recognizing that these moments of anxiety and fear don’t run our lives: Christ does. We don’t always have the answers; in fact, I would argue that we humans very rarely have the answers, but we have to trust that God does. He has a peace that surpasses all understanding, and in that peace, we can rest our anxieties and fears and instead laugh at the absurdity of them against the amazing backdrop of His greatness.

Darby knows that a jellyfish sting or a stampeding cockroach have no power in comparison to the abundant greatness that is our God. Darby spent her summer laughing off the places of anxiety and fear. Even in situations where she genuinely felt sad or anxious during her stay here, Darby faithfully walked with Jesus through understanding herself and His light shining in her while she navigated feelings of distress. Instead of letting that jellyfish get her down, she continually looked to God for whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,

whatever is commendable, that she saw around her. She saw the purity of love in each of the faces of this church and is walking away forever grateful to you all. She rejoiced in the pleasing places of concerts, hikes, sunsets, and events that people like Diane, Aaron, Matt, Joan, Katelyn, and others blessed her with. She sought the voice of God's justice and honor through her conversations at IHS.

Darby didn't seek all those places of God's joy out of a polite gratitude for the opportunity; instead, Darby lives into her joy for what is commendable and pleasing in God's world fully. She does this because she knows that God seeks that joy for her, even when she's anxious, or fearful, or sad.

God's news is good news that He delivers joy unto us when we trust in Him. Like Darby, we should continually search for the places where God is building our story through each farcical or even difficult experience we encounter. God is course correcting our hardships into places of triumph. God can make all paths new and beautiful if we let Him. Fear not, my friends, there is a joyful sermon waiting for you in the aftermath of your jellyfish stings.

Amen.