

SERMON FOR MAY 7, 2013

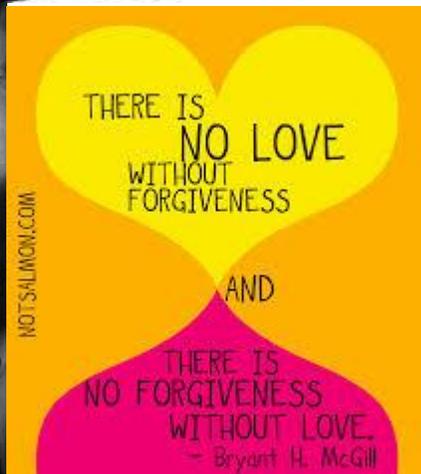
The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)
7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Mother's Day – 7th Sunday in Easter

Scripture: **Acts 16:16-40 (Focus); John 17:20-26**

Message: ***“Easter 7: Changing the World by Practicing Aloha and Forgiveness!”***
Kekapa P. K. Lee

FORGIVENESS
is not something
we do for OTHER PEOPLE.
We do it for OURSELVES
-to GET WELL and
MOVE ON.



LOVE is patient
is kind
it does not envy
it does not boast
it is not proud
it is not rude
it is not self-seeking
it is not easily angered
keeps no record of wrongs
does not delight in evil
rejoices with the truth
always protects
always trusts
always hopes
always perseveres
never fails

1 Cor 13:4-8a

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!!!!!!

Chinese-simplified:	母亲节快乐
Chinese:	Mu Qin jie kuai le
Cantonese:	Móuh-chān-jit faai-lohk!
Cantonese Traditional:	母親節快樂
Hawaiian:	Hau 'oli Lā o nā Mākuahine!
Japanese:	母の日 (Haha-no Hi omedetō)
Korean:	Oboi Nal
Portuguese:	Feliz Dia das Mães
Sāmoan:	Manuia le Aso o Tina
Tagalog:	Maligayang araw ng mga ina

Gathering in the Word

On this Mother's Day 2013 and the 7th Sunday of Easter & Ascension Day this past Thursday—Jesus goes back to the Father in Heaven—and next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday!

- ✓ GOD is alive!
- ✓ GOD is at work in our lives—all of us!
- ✓ We can trust GOD's loving-kindness in every circumstance!
- ✓ We can experience joy even in the most challenging situations!
- ✓ There are no guarantees of success and security—but there is the promise of companionship, care, comfort, not to mention images of hope and possibility to bring light to our darkest hours!

**This is the day the LORD has made!
Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen?**

Hearing the Word

Acts 16:16-34 (New International Version 2011)

[Last Sunday our lesson was about Lydia & how her whole household were baptized—now Paul continues his journey.]

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” ²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the

foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace." ³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out." ³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city.

⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

So Paul's having an 'interesting day'—Paul has just left Lydia in Philippi and has moved to a place of prayer and there he meets a slave girl with a peculiar and unusual gift for predicting the future. She was possessed and influenced by a pythian spirit (*as in the snake python associated with the Greek god Apollo at the oracle in Delphi*). So because of this gift this girl could read palms and tea leaves, deal with Tarot cards and so tell the future—she was psychic and clairvoyant and a seer. The girl's owners counted on this too. They had a little business going and were making money from this girl.

So Paul and Silas were close by and this girl started to follow them around the town of Philippi and was shouting something about a most high god and a way to salvation! Her owners didn't mind at first—the more attention the girl was getting—the more money for their bank account! Paul and Silas ignored her for a few days—but it eventually got tiresome and annoying so Paul cast the spirit out of her as much to shut her up as to help her out! Not much more about what happened to the girl—other than her owners discovered that their income had just stopped and they hauled and dragged Paul and Silas before the Philippian Chamber of Commerce.

The case against them looks to be open and shut—then as now—religion is not supposed to interfere with the economy! So in the blink of an eye—Paul and Silas are hauled off, whipped mercilessly, and then tossed into jail! In verse 24 the jailer locks Paul and Silas into irons and stocks in what was likely a very brutal and vicious

procedure—resulting in an awful posture in which the apostles were forced to spend the night!

They were not able to sleep—so they began to sing. They gave glory to God and to Jesus in so striking a fashion it appears to have quieted down the whole prison! All the prisoners were listening, not talking; listening, not swearing; listening, not telling dirty jokes. The only one *not* listening was the jailer—who was sleeping.

Then comes an earthquake that wakens the jailer. By the time the jailer is able to find his lantern, he apparently discovered to his horror that all the prisoners were gone! Knowing full well that his punishment would be—he thought he's save the warden the trouble of killing him later by killing himself right then and there!

But Paul is kind enough to stop the man, pointing out that as a matter of fact—no one had escaped and so the jailer did not fear punishment from his boss. It was GOD who had orchestrated the earthquake and the unlocking of those leg-irons of all the prisoners! And we assume, in short, that God is looking out only for his own followers—for the good guys!

But not true! The purpose of this quasi-jailbreak (*'almost-but-not-quite'*) was not to save Paul but the jailer! When Paul points out that all the prisoners were all still there—the implication that all what was happening was for the sake of this jailer!

And it works! The jailer's first question is, "What do I have to do to get saved?"

- ✓ Why did he ask that?
- ✓ Why didn't he just order everyone back to their cells instead?
- ✓ Why did he ask, "Why haven't you all run away?"

Of all the questions he could have asked, this immediate inquiry about salvation seems odd!? **Yet** there's some about Paul's kind compassion that made this jailer realize he was in the presence of someone who knew what life is all about. Paul was stable, so calm, so obviously at peace with the universe; and in light of that—this jailer suddenly saw his own life with clarity and clearness he'd never know before!

- ✓ He wanted to know what he had to **do**—which is what everyone wants to know.
- ✓ How do I have to live, where do I have to send my money?
- ✓ What do I need to avoid and what do I need to try in order to get in good with GOD?

Most people approach salvation the same way they approach their health:

- ✓ There's got to be a winning formula out there somewhere.
- ✓ So they ask their doctor, "What do I need to do to be healthy?"
- ✓ The doctor responds: you need to exercise every day, give up smoking, monitor your cholesterol, and get plenty of fruit and fiber into your diet.

- ✓ That's the drill, and very few folks are surprised to hear it.
- ✓ Very few people assume that good health will just happen.
- ✓ **You have to do something!**

People come to pastors the same way,

- ✓ "What do I have to do to go to heaven?"
- ✓ How can I get right with my GOD? My Maker?

Some pastors are only too happy to take on the role of a spiritual physician, a religious Dr. Phil. So they dole out advice like this:

- ✓ Follow the 10 Commandments!
- ✓ Pray every day!
- ✓ Don't drink!
- ✓ Don't dance!
- ✓ Don't swear!
- ✓ Go to church twice every Sunday!
- ✓ Give your tithe cheerfully to the General Fund!
- ✓ And so forth!

So many folks think it's about getting *merit points*. People ask, "What must I do?" and the church all-too-often answers by handing out a long list of Do's and an equally long list of Don'ts! If you fit this bill like the rest of us, *then* you might get in. And most people are not surprised to hear it. They assume salvation will not just happen!

You have to do something!

So what must you **do** to be saved? **Nothing!**

The “doing” part was Jesus’ contribution to salvation. All that’s left for us is to believe that Jesus really pulled it off on our behalf.

“What do I have to do” the jailer pleaded. “**Nothing,**” Paul essentially replied. “**Just believe that Jesus did it all for you and you’re set for life—eternal life!**” Then, to remind the jailer and everyone that **grace** is always on the lavish side, Paul throws in, “*You and your whole household will be saved!*” **That little extra flourish and grand gesture points to the fact that salvation comes from the outside as a done deal! Salvation will catch up this jailer and, as a matter of fact, everybody associated with him before they get a chance to do anything!**

So the jailer takes the apostles at their word and **believes**. The apostles then **baptize** him and his family in a midnight bath that ends up filling the whole house with joy and holy laughter. **Because as it turns out it was not the apostles who had been prisoners that night—it had been this jailer!**

That’s why this story ends with the wonderful irony in **verse 36**: While they are all gathered around the jailer’s kitchen table munching on bagels and dried salmon for breakfast the next morning a telegram arrives from the Chamber of Commerce who had thrown them in jail. The telegram says the jailer can release Paul and Silas—but

everyone already knows that they're free—they all had been free all along!

- ✓ The power of Jesus of Jesus' Gospel is what sets prisoners free from the real bondage of this sinful world!
- ✓ Magistrates and authorities cannot touch this power because they don't understand it!
- ✓ In a *tit-for-tat* (*taking action harming someone who harmed you*) world which is all about earnings and success—a grace that is so utterly free doesn't compute!
- ✓ **But that's the Gospel for you—it's downright other-worldly!**
- ✓ Yet it breaks into our world with wonderful regularity, just like it did for Paul and Silas and that certain Philippian jailer, his family, and his whole household!

John 17:20-26 (Greek > English Translation)

Jesus Prays for All Believers

²⁰Yet not concerning these only do I ask, but also concerning the ones who are believing through their word in me, ²¹In order that all may be one, just as you, Father, in me and I in you, in order that they also may be one in us, in order that the world may believe that you sent me.

²²And I the glory which you have given to me have given to them, in order that they may be one just as we one,

²³I in them and you in me, in order that they may be having been perfected into one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and you loved them just as you loved me. ²⁴Father, whoever you have given to me, I will in order that where I am they also may be with me, in

order that they might behold my glory which you have given to me, because you loved me before [the] world's foundation. ²⁵Righteous father, the world also did not know you, but I knew you, and these knew that you sent me, ²⁶And I made known to them your name and shall make known, in order that the love with which you loved me might be in them and I in them.

This is what we get from John 17:20-26:

1. Through Jesus, no less than the fullness of God was in the world (and something of that fullness remains in the world through **us** when we abide in Christ by the Spirit!
2. Jesus' presence in the world was clearly the culmination and result of GOD's plan that spanned cosmic history!
3. Therefore, we serve one BIG GOD who has big plans that go far beyond any one era and period of church history and that transcend and goes beyond even whatever brokenness and disunity we Christian and the Church may unhappily experience now!

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us this Mother's Day 2013 & the 7th Sunday of Easter (Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday!)?

1. ONE: IT'S BY GOD'S GRACE THAT WE ARE SAVED!

It's by GOD's grace that the Holy Spirit helps us believers learn about GOD's Creation designs and what it means to live happily within GOD's Creation designs!

And of course it takes time learning and experiencing—even a lifetime. Perhaps it's like a marriage.

- ✓ It takes a matter so second to speak your vows and so *get* married!
- ✓ It takes the rest of your life to find out what that means and to really live out your marriage!
- ✓ The amazing this is that when you get to your 50th wedding anniversary—you are no more married then than you were in the first minute that passed after you made your vows half-a-century earlier!
- ✓ So with grace—it only takes a moment to roll over us but it is so powerful that nothing in the later life of living for GOD can add to it or *ever* accomplish more than what grace did the moment when we first believed!

2. TWO: LET THE JOY OF GOD'S GRACE SET THE TONE FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!

- ✓ Joy can lead you to a life that imitates and lives out and glorifies Christ!
- ✓ Joy leads the way!
- ✓ Don't let rules rule your life; allow Christ to rule with the Holy Spirit rather than the rules!
- ✓ Don't criticize others—take care of your family and you and your sisters and brothers who are not perfect either!

3. THREE: THE CHURCH GIVES GLORY TO GOD WHEN THE CHURCH HUMBLY IS DOING QUIET THINGS TO SERVE THE POOR AND PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THOSE BROKEN & OPPRESSED!

The glory of Jesus is not the extraordinary spectacles of light and mind-bending special effects—no—the **glory of Jesus emerged in the course of his ministry was...**

- ✓ **When Jesus gave hope to the poor!**
- ✓ **When Jesus forgave the sins of the broken and exploited and marginalized persons!**
- ✓ **When Jesus reached out to his enemies in love!**
- ✓ **When Jesus displaced grace to the least deserving!**

Sent in the Word

We're not going to get in GOD's way or GOD's plans for the world of GOD's church. Too often we reduce the

church and the church's mission—even here at TFCCCH—to “bumper sticker” slogans like:

- ✓ “Got Jesus? It’s Hell without Him”
- ✓ We reduce the gospel to “Four Spiritual Laws” and “40 Days of Purpose” and “Chicken Soup for the Soul”

Do we have any idea of big a GOD we serve, how grand GOD’s are purposes, and how all of that is on display in us within the Church when we stay united with Christ and with GOD the Father and are filled with the Holy Spirit?

GOD’s GLORY is all around us even here this morning on Mother’s Day and the 7th Sunday of Easter—because GOD’s GLORY is in each of us!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Amen!

