

SERMON FOR MAY 5, 2013

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC
6th Sunday in Easter/Immigrant Rights Sunday

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services – The Lord's Supper

Scripture: **Acts 16:6-15 (Focus); John 14:23-29**

Message: **"Easter 6: Our GOD is a GOD Who Welcomes Everyone!"**

Kekapa P.K. Lee



This is the modern outdoor chapel at the site where St. Paul likely baptized Lydia, the first Philippian believer in Christ. Acts describes the event as taking place in the river, just outside the city, near the bridge. It appears that the small Jewish community in Philippi had been meeting there for prayer each Sabbath because they lacked a synagogue building.

This site lies just outside the NW gate of Roman Philippi and only a few meters from the foundations of the Roman bridge. Nearby stands the modern Greek Orthodox chapel of St. Lydia.

Gathering in the Word

How many of us here this morning: We or our parents or grandparents or great-grandparents were born outside Hawai'i and the U.S?

- ✓ Kekapa's Grandfather, Lee Sha Gun was born in Buck Toy Village, Southern China.
- ✓ Way back over 2000 years ago—my ancestors come to Hawai'i from Tahiti and

The first Sunday in May—May 5th, has been designated **Immigrant Rights Sunday** in the whole United Church of Christ and its four settings: local church, association, conference, and national. Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries are urging all of us to lift up immigrants on this day: to learn about their concerns, honor their contributions to our country and communities, hear their pain, pray for their well-being, and listen to hear where God is leading us regarding issues of immigration.

Welcoming the stranger is an authoritative word from GOD to the people of GOD (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). But too often—the strangers among us are rejected and treated like enemies. All of us have immigrant roots—including my Hawaiian ancestors who emigrated from the southern islands of Tahiti.

Hearing the Word

Acts 16:6-15 (New International Version 2011 Bible)

Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from

preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Lydia’s Conversion in Philippi

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. ¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

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What prevents Paul and company from entering into the regions of Asia? (16:6-8) Verse 16 tells us that the Holy Spirit “prevented” and barred them from going in the direction and route they wanted to go. Maybe someone ate a bad piece of meat and spent a whole day in bed. Similarly for us when our plans are scrapped and canceled because of heavy rains & thunder, a flat tire, or a death in our family.

Sometimes in retrospect, we come to understand that mundane though the cause was at the time—and annoyed we may have been at that time as well—things really did “turn out for the best!” One in a while we thank God for having prevented us from going to that place we were planning to go—because we were desperately needed at home that very weekend. Or, had we gone on that trip we would not have had one last time to say goodbye to mom

one last time before she died. Once in a great while we've heard the story about the person who got stuck in traffic and so missed his flight on a plane that crashed on that very day!

Yes—we don't know if the Spirit's way of *preventing the apostles from going to where they wanted to go* was anything like this. Being apostles, Paul and company maybe did receive more direct information from the Spirit than maybe the rest of us are used to receiving; but the fact is that the Spirit even today—is incessant and never-ending and persistent in what the Spirit does—the Holy Spirit is never still and always moving!

In our Gospel John 14:26 reading—Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come as a ***Paraclete***—as the one who comes alongside of us, so as to remind us of everything Jesus taught and said and to further lead us into all truth. The ***Paraclete*** (the Holy Spirit) comes alongside us even now to coach us, tutor us, lead us and to guide us! Like the act of breathing—we're not even conscious of the Spirit's presence in our lives most of the time.

But the promise remains: GOD is in control!

No, not everything makes sense and there any number of bad choices we all make as well as outright tragedies that take place in our lives that may have little or nothing to do with GOD's desires for our lives—nevertheless-we can take comfort knowing that the ***Paraclete*** was here with us!

Where the Spirit did lead this band of apostles was to Macedonia (*a mountainous region of northeastern Greece; southeastern Europe today which was a part of Yugoslavia in 1980s*). Macedonia was ripe and ready for the Gospel

There in Philippi Paul meets **Lydia**—a Gentile non-Jewish woman. Lydia listens, but the Lord must open the heart to believe (verse 14). Lydia’s faith become immediately active: she is baptized along with her whole household and Lydia opens her home. Lydia “prevailed upon” Paul and his companions to stay with her and accept her hospitality. Social and cultural barriers crumble and this corner of the empire is beginning to be changed by God’s grace!

Lydia practices: “*Mi Casa Es Su Casa*. My home is your home.”

Here at the end of the Easter season—we continue to experience and to live out that fellowship—“prevailing upon” the world to hear, and see, and know the mercy of GOD in our Risen Jesus Christ!

John 14:23-29 – NIV 2011

²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of GOD for us on this 6th Sunday in Easter 2013?

1. ONE: GOD HAS MADE GOD’S HOME IN OUR MIDST!

- ✓ GOD has come in the Holy Spirit to take up residence in our very body & self!
- ✓ Having hardships in our lives can and does co-exist (*To exist together, at the same time, or in the same place; to exist simultaneously*)—the Holy Spirit and our hurts and Jesus’ love and our hardships!
- ✓ **And** we all know deep down in our hearts exactly why **that** fact is such very good news indeed to all of us!
- ✓ **Amen?**

2. TWO: THE RISEN CHRIST DESIRES US TO LISTEN, HOST AND WELCOME TO REVERSE THE VICIOUS CYCLES THAT KEEP WOUNDING NATIONS, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND PERSONS!

- ✓ All the immigrants and people who no look like us or speak the same language in our mist and our neighborhoods! This true too of non-Christians as well as people who talk different and do things different from us!
- ✓ We are to push the boundaries of community norms to embody Christ's life-transforming good news!
- ✓ Everything we do should shine Christ's light for the glory of GOD and the well-being of our sisters and brothers!
- ✓ **Amen?**

3. THREE: THE RISEN CHRIST INVITES US TO THINK BIG AND PRAY FOR GREAT THINGS AND ACT TO BRING OUR VISION TO LIFE—EVEN THE VISION OF TFCCCH!

- ✓ We are challenged to take chances!
- ✓ We are still working on our **VISION** and **MISSION** and goals for the next 5 years +!
- ✓ There's a tight connection between love and our deeds and actions (what we do)!
- ✓ **Amen?**

Sent in the Word

Hospitality (*welcome, warmth, kindness, generosity*) is the essential challenge of the Gospel.

Matthew Fox, in his book *Original Blessing*, suggests that the true meaning of "holiness" is hospitality. Hospitality is, essentially, the offer of safety, comfort, nourishment and friendship to both friend and stranger. The Scriptures show that this is a high ideal in God's purposes. What this means for us is, initially, an opening of our hearts to welcome the stranger and friend, offering safety, comfort and love.

Then, this must overflow into practical hospitality, opening our 'homes' – our communities, our churches, our neighborhoods and, yes, even our literal homes, to those who need shelter, safety, nourishment, acceptance and friendship.

How, in our church and its worship, can we become more welcoming and more hospitable to those who are homeless and friendless and new immigrants?

Talking Story & Prayers

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