

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 27, 2013

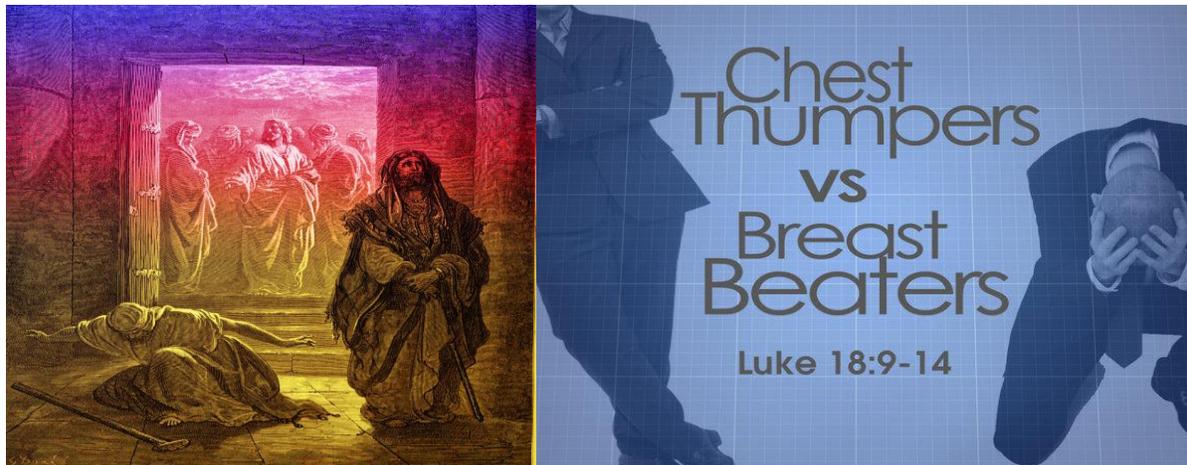
The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

10:00 AM Joint Worship Service on Mission Faire

Scripture: Joel 2:23-32; Luke 18:9-14

Message: ***"Nothing Stands in the Way of GOD's Aloha & No Distance is Too Great for GOD's Grace to Reach!"***

Kekapa P.K. Lee



Gathering in the Word

As the church year (ends November 24th) is coming to a close and culminates in the glory of Christ's reign—we celebrate this morning the transformative power that GOD give to us the church—the Body of Christ called to live together as disciples and followers of Christ! As we dig and explore deeper into what that means—for us to live together as sisters and brothers of TFCCCH—we often wrestle and struggle with internal and external barriers, histories of shame and divisions, and feelings of unworthiness in ourselves and others.

Our two Scriptures from Joel and the Gospel of Luke celebrate how nothing stands in the way of GOD's aloha and love—and no distance or separation is too great for GOD's grace to reach!

Hearing the Word

Joel 2:23-32 (The VOICE Bible)

²³ People of Zion, *shout with joy and happiness in the Eternal, your God; The drought is over; He has sent the early autumn rain as a sign of His faithfulness. He has poured down heavy rain, autumn and spring, as before.* ²⁴ The threshing floors will be covered in grain; the vats will spill over with new wine and fresh oil.

²⁵ **Eternal One:** I will compensate you for the years that the locusts have eaten—the swarming locusts, the creeping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts—my great army that I unleashed against you.

²⁶ *In that day, you will eat plenty of food and always have enough, so you will praise My name, The Eternal One, your God*

who is merciful to you. Never again will my people be shamed *among the nations*.²⁷ Return to Me and you will know that I live among *my people* Israel and that I, the Eternal One, am your God and there is no other. Never again will my people be shamed *among the nations*.

²⁸ Then in those days I will pour My Spirit to all humanity; your children will *boldly and prophetically speak the word of God*. Your elders will dream dreams; your young warriors will see visions.

²⁹ *No one will be left out*. In those days I will offer my spirit to all servants, both male and female.

³⁰ In the heaven *above* and on the earth *below*, I will give signs of *my intervention*: blood, fire, and clouds of smoke.

³¹ The sun will become a void of darkness, and the moon will become blood just before the great and dreadful day of the Eternal One arrives.

³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the Eternal One will be liberated. Mount Zion and Jerusalem will shelter those who survive *exile*, Just as the Eternal says, "Among those who survived, He will call them."

The Prophet Joel praises GOD for a new year, a time of restoration—for the nation and its people. In the midst of destruction—an image of hope emerges and a new beginning is promised! Joel asserts and teaches and reminds us that there are no chosen people—rather all who call upon GOD are saved! GOD's bias and partiality is towards wholeness and salvation for all and our calling as Christians is to open the door to GOD's grace!

Young and old, boys and girls, men and women, the likely and the unlikely—everybody was going to have the

Spirit descend on them that would open visions and dreams and ways of understanding GOD and GOD's kingdom and realm. Everyone would see the great wonders GOD would work on Earth and in the heavens and all would understand what was what and who was who in the grander scheme of things!

The Prophet Joel points to **PENTECOST!** Joel points to a day when the Holy Spirit of GOD would infuse and fill every member of the church in ways that would change everything! For us Christians, the Holy Spirit is a little like oxygen—it is the very air we breathe! The Spirit is the atmosphere in which we live and exist!

For us Christians today—Joel reminds us of the profound gift we have from the indwelling Spirit of God in each of us!

Luke 18:9-14 (The VOICE Bible)

Jesus emphasizes that the kingdom of God will not come through valiant efforts but as people pray, "may your kingdom come," with persistence and with humility.

⁹ He told another parable—this one addressed to people who were confident in their self-righteousness and looked down on other people with disgust.

Jesus: ¹⁰ Imagine two men *walking up a road*, going to the temple to pray. One of them is a Pharisee and the other is a *despised* tax collector. ¹¹ Once inside the temple, the Pharisee stands up and prays this prayer in honor of himself: "God, how I thank You that I am not on the same level as other people—crooks, cheaters, the sexually immoral—like this tax collector over here. ¹² *Just look at me!* I fast *not once but twice* a week and

I faithfully pay my tithes on every penny of income.”¹³ Over in the corner, the tax collector begins to pray, but he won't even lift his eyes to heaven. He pounds on his chest *in sorrow* and says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

¹⁴ *Now imagine these two men walking back down the road to their homes.* Listen, it's the tax collector who walks home clean before God, and not the Pharisee, because whoever lifts himself up will be put down and whoever takes a humble place will be lifted up.

To the original hearers of Jesus' parable there was nothing startling or surprising until Jesus got to the end when he said it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who went home under the blanket of GOD's favor!

The Pharisee was not so much grateful **to** GOD as he was grateful only when he compared himself **to others**. Because when we compare ourselves to others and *how we stack up*—it doesn't take long before the focus becomes what **we do, how we act, what we perform**. What we do with our lives and the many activities we engage in is what shapes our lives.

Was it the crowd of the self-righteous that gathered that prompted and provoked Jesus to tell this parable or was Jesus so keenly and clearly aware of this tendency among us human persons to self-righteousness that Jesus decided to tell it? I suspect the latter reason!

Let's not forget about GOD's grace in Jesus Christ!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us morning?

1. ONE: GOD WANTS OUR HEART RATHER THAN US GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS FOR SHOW!

- ✓ GOD wants more from us than for us to a few good things. Yes—actions matters but our heart behind what we do matters even more!
- ✓ Doing good is not about us, it's about GOD and the kind of person and church GOD wants us to be!
- ✓ GOD wants honest and genuine faith! Even if we are new Christians or have been Christians for 30 years—God wants our heart!

STORY: The joy of helping others. Joy Thief

A woman that I had just met told me an incredible story yesterday. She was 74 years of age and her husband had passed away recently. One of the things that she did to keep active was clean the church. I am sure it was also a way to fill in the time; a void that her late husband had left. She had an amazing peace that her husband was now with Jesus and she rejoiced in the fact that he would never feel pain again. She described that the church paid her \$25.00 per visit to clean the church. But, that she would not be getting paid any longer. She cleaned twice per week so, that came out to around \$200.00 per month. In the short amount of time that we talked, she made it a point to let me know the incredible part of this story. The church had not decided to quit paying her. She did! Getting paid to serve was robbing her, of all her joy, working for the Lord. And she would either do it for free, or not clean. She was finding the work, as a way to say

thank you to God for His Grace, and for taking care of her late husband. \$25.00 was a thief to her expression of gratitude.

You can really see Jesus in people. Jesus is everywhere. I think we expect to make a once in a life time sighting of Jesus. Yes, officer. It was really Jesus! He had a beard, shoulder length hair, white robe and sandals. Of course it was Jesus! I see His picture every Sunday at church.

Look for Him today. Beyond the angry driver, away from the distractions of the newspaper headlines, apart from the needy cell phone, separated from our busy schedule. I hear people say Jesus has just vanished. Maybe \$25.00 is getting in our way of finding Him.

2.TWO: WE ARE FREED FROM SHAME AND UNITED WITH ONE ANOTHER WHEN WE WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD!

- ✓ We are not “same-same”, or alike. GOD has gifted with different gifts of the Holy Spirit—and yet we are to work together for we are Family!
- ✓ Some of us are Pharisees and some of us are tax collectors and are sisters and brothers together!
- ✓ We live and express our faith differently from each other—but we are sisters and brothers in Christ!
- ✓ **And yet—Jesus is our Lord and Savior!**
- ✓ So no compare or contrast ourselves with one another—we are family and everyone is different and we are sisters and brothers in Christ!

3.THREE: WE ARE A PEOPLE OF GOD’S GRACE!

- ✓ GOD’s grace transforms, forgives, empowers and produces a sense of anticipation that GOD is doing good works via us!
- ✓ Let us then be creative, responsible, and loving of each other, our neighbors, and even to strangers GOD brings to us!

Story of Mother in Miami desperate to feed her hungry family:



The woman on the left is a mother from Miami who was so desperate to feed her hungry family that she was trying to steal a lot of food. The woman on the right is Miami-Dade County Police Officer Vicki Thomas. Officer Thomas was about to arrest Jessica Robles but changed her mind at the last minute. Instead of arresting her, she bought Robles \$100 worth of groceries: "I made the decision to buy her some groceries because arresting her wasn't going to solve the problem with her children being hungry." And there's no denying they were hungry. Robles' 12 year old daughter started crying when she told local TV station WSVN about how dire their situation was: "[It's] not fun to see my brother in the dirt hungry, asking for food, and we have to tell him, 'There is nothing here.'" Officer Thomas says she has no question

that what she did was right: "To see them go through the bags when we brought them in, it was like Christmas. That \$100 to me was worth it." But Officer Thomas did have one request: "The only thing I asked of her is, when she gets on her feet, that she helps someone else out. And she said she would."

And guess what? The story gets even better. After word got out about what happened people donated another \$700 for Jessica Robles to spend at the grocery store. And then best of all a local business owner invited her in for an interview and ended up hiring her on the spot as a customer service rep. She started crying when he told her: "There are no words how grateful I am that you took your time and helped somebody out. Especially somebody like me." And to think it all started with one veteran police officer trusting her "instinct" instead of going "by the book".

NOW THAT'S GOD'S GRACE!

Sent in the Word

So go and be GOD's grace to each other today and to others and strangers!

