

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 15, 2013

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

Third Sunday of Advent

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-10; Matthew 2:1-11

Message: ***"Advent 3: Crank Up' the Joy & Light in Our Church—TFCCCH!"***

Kekapa P.K. Lee



Gathering in the Word

Advent (*the arrival, start, beginning, dawn*) is a time for all of us gathered this morning on the Third Sunday of Advent for hopeful transformation. GOD's Creation all around us and all humankind lean towards wholeness and holiness! Our GOD is always at work in and around us—restoring the broken, healing the sick, welcoming the outcast and always present with those among who are mourning!

- ✓ The Prophet Isaiah sings the glad songs of restoration!
- ✓ Mary's Song of praise expresses the interplay of her unexpected pregnancy and the liberation of all humankind!
- ✓ Jesus in Matthew's Gospel echoes Isaiah 35—Good news is lived as well as spoken!

Hearing the Word

Luke 1:47-55 (The VOICE Bible)

⁴⁷ My spirit celebrates God, my Liberator!

⁴⁸ For though I'm God's humble servant, God has noticed me. Now and forever, I will be considered blessed by all generations. ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One has done great things for me; holy is God's name!

⁵⁰ From generation to generation, God's loving-kindness endures for those who revere Him.

⁵¹ God's arm has accomplished mighty deeds. The proud in mind and heart, God has sent away in disarray.

⁵² The rulers from their high positions of power, God has brought down low. And those who were humble and lowly, God has elevated with dignity.

⁵³ The hungry—God has filled with fine food. The rich—

God has dismissed with nothing in their hands.

⁵⁴ To Israel, God's servant, God has given help,

⁵⁵ As promised to our ancestors, remembering Abraham and his descendants in mercy forever.

Isaiah 35:1-10(The VOICE Bible)

³⁵ *Imagine* the wilderness whooping for joy, the desert's unbridled happiness with its spring flowers. ² *It will happen!* The deserts will come alive *with new growth budding and* blooming, singing and celebrating with sheer delight. The glory of Lebanon's *cedars* and the majesty of Carmel and Sharon will spill over to the deserts. The glory of the Eternal One will be on full display there, *and they will revel in* the majestic splendor of our God.

³ *So, with confidence and hope in this message,* strengthen those with feeble hands, shore up the weak-kneed *and weary.* ⁴ Tell those who worry, the anxious *and fearful,* "Take strength; have courage! *There's nothing to fear.* Look, here—your God! Right here is your God! The balance is shifting; God will right all wrongs. None other than God will give you success. He is coming to make you safe."

⁵ Then, *such healing, such repair:* the eyes of the blind will be opened; the ears of the deaf will be clear. ⁶⁻⁷ The lame will leap like deer *excited; they will run and jump tirelessly and gracefully.* *The stutterer, the stammerer,* and the tongue of the mute will sing out loud *and clear* in joyful song. Waters will pour through the deserts; streams will flow in godforsaken lands. Burning sands *and hardened wastelands* will become pools, *shimmering with life;* the thirsty ground will *drink deep from*

refreshing springs. *Abandoned villages* where predators once lurked will become grassy playgrounds. Dry, arid land will turn lush and green.

⁸ And the road to this happy renovation will be clearly signed. People will declare the way itself to be holy—the route, “sacred.” Only those who are right with God will be able to walk its pleasant path, and nobody—no visitor, no dimwit—will get lost along it. ⁹ There’ll be no lions lying in wait, no predators or dangers in sight. Only those made right with God will journey there. ¹⁰ Those whom the Eternal One has recalled from a punishing exile, they will go along so easily. They will walk this path, Come waltzing to Zion, singing their way *to that place of right relation to God*. An aura of joy never-ending will attend them; they will clasp gladness and joy to their hearts, While sadness and despair evaporate into thin air.

Isaiah 35 is pretty close to the exact center of this sprawling and extensive prophetic Book of Isaiah—it has 66 chapters! This morning’s section may be the Isaiah’s high point in his 66 chapters!

In Isaiah 35 the good news is on the renewal of Creation—everything that is currently dangerous or life-threatening in Creation—all that is chaos and not cosmos—will be tamed and made better!

- ✓ There won’t be dead patches of earth or burn-over regions but only lush and verdant places whose beauty will take our breath away!

- ✓ We will travel safely on the Way of Holiness, cheering one another on and regaling (*feasting and enjoying*) one another with good news!

In verse 10 we are told that we'll wear crowns of joy because "gladness and joy will overtake us! We'll be overtaken by gladness, consumed by joy and captured by holiness! For now we have at best—inklings (*a hint or a light idea*) of what this will be like for us!

But the day will come, Isaiah says, when that experience will characterize our everyday living! C.S. Lewis said, "Joy will be the serious business of heaven!" **So indeed joy will landscape the entirety of the New Creation of GOD! It will be tangible and real and palpable and obvious!**

Sorrow and grief will dissipate the way a strong wind can blow away every cloud in the sky and leave nothing but a blue sky so achingly beautiful to make tear leap to our eyes! This is the picture Isaiah tells!

Even in this time of promise of GOD's Creation and promises—

- ✓ There are sisters and brothers among us who are hurting and in pain because of death and illnesses!
- ✓ Some of us and around us are in a bad space!
- ✓ In this time the 3rd Sunday of Advent—there are folks around us who are sad—and the ***hoo-ha*** (*the loud noisy aggressive controversy or disturbance – it's a slang*) of the glittery holidays only make things worse!

It's our calling and compassion to come alongside our sisters and brothers—young and old—who are hurting and point to a better day that will come. **That's what our Scripture lessons are telling us—that GOD has come to us in Christ—the first Christmas—and will come to us again!**

- ✓ We do this not in some light and fluffy, namby-pamby (*weak or silly*) way!
- ✓ We do not wave off as unimportant whatever is making life difficult for now!

But we do offer the true counsel and reassurance that our GOD sees us in this distress—that's why the SON of GOD was made flesh and came as a human baby in a manger: to know us quite literally from the inside out—that the day will come when GOD will make all things new and well!

And that healing work of GOD will take place not in some far-off wispy world the likes of which we can know nothing about for now. **No—healing, saving, redeeming work will take place right here in our world, our church December 2013!**

We will know the joy **here** and we will be overtaken by gladness **here** and we will sing our praises to GOD for all GOD's wonders of creation and redemption!

As Christians—sisters and brothers—we can go a step beyond anything Isaiah was able to say by remembering that not only will the glory and splendor of GOD's One

and Only has already been here on this Earth—but was already raised to new life that assures us that everything Isaiah predicts ***will happen*** because we know that in Christ is already ***has happened!***

Matthew 11:2-11 (The VOICE Bible)

² John, meanwhile, was still in prison. But stories about the Anointed One's teachings and healing reached him.

Quite frankly, John is perplexed. He has been awaiting the Anointed, but he believes that person will be a great political ruler, a king, or a military hero. Jesus seems to be all about healing people and insisting that the poor and the meek are blessed.

So John sent his followers ³ to question Jesus.

John's Followers: Are You the One we have been expecting as Savior for so long? *Are You the One Scripture promised would come?* Or should we expect someone else?

Jesus: ⁴ Go back and tell John the things you have heard and the things you have seen. ⁵ *Tell him you have seen the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers cured, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and the good news preached to the poor.* ⁶ Blessed are those who *understand what is afoot and* stay on my narrow path.

⁷ John's disciples left and Jesus began to speak to a crowd about John.

Jesus: What did you go into the desert to see? Did you expect to see a reed blowing around in the wind? ⁸ No? Were you expecting to see a man dressed in the finest silks? No, of course not—you find silk in the sitting rooms of palaces and mansions, not in the middle of the wilderness. ⁹ So what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes. Yes, a prophet and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ When you saw John, you saw the one, whom the prophet *Malachi envisioned when he said,*

I will send my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare the way for you.

¹¹ This is the truth: no one who has ever been born to a woman is greater than John the Baptist. And yet the most insignificant person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

A straightforward and commonsense reading of Matthew 11 would tell us that John the Baptist—unhappily rotting away in prison—has been getting reports about the work of Jesus—reports that struck him as not being nearly as interesting or dramatic as John had hoped for. So John sends out a delegation of his followers to ask Jesus an explosive question born of doubt: “Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else? You know—someone better?”

- ✓ John is asking the question!
- ✓ John is the one Jesus directs his answer to!

So what does Matthew 11 have to do with Advent? When Jesus answered John doubtful query, “Are you the One?”—Jesus pointed to what he already had been doing!

- ✓ Maybe preaching hope to the poor or the widows or to the marginalized people did not seem like much.
- ✓ But who needs hope in our world more than the ignored, the invisible, the grieving, and the “little ones” Jesus will talk about in Matthew 18?

So two weeks out from Christ—Matthew 11 reminds us in the Church of what we are really about—and sometimes it is **not** the things that we in the church try to be all about. Too often today even churches want to make a splash, shake up the State legislature, and engage in power politics and headline-grabbing behavior!

But Jesus leads another way!

- ✓ Jesus lead us to the Cross first and then calls us to sacrificial living in a discipleship that needs to anticipate (and not be shocked by) resistance and even outright persecution!
- ✓ So here in mid-Advent—Jesus uses John’s doubts as a teaching moment for all of us to remind us of what it truly important—and that is simple faithfulness to the Kingdom of GOD in which our true citizenship lies!

If we here this morning believe that Jesus is the One—then we can properly wonder how we’ll we’re following Jesus and if even the way were are celebrating and promoting Advent and Christmas at TFCCCH is reaching out to the poor, the grieving, the marginalized and the sick and dying in ways are may be quiet—but nonetheless—the business of grace that we are called to be preoccupied with at all times and in all places.

Then so be it!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of God for us on this Third Sunday of Advent—what do we need to do to **“Crank Up Joy and Light!” at TFCCCH?**

1.ONE: ADVENT CALLS ALL OF US TO BE A CHURCH OF SPIRITUAL HEALING—PERSONAL, FAMILY, CHURCH, NEIGHBORHOODS, and WORLD!

How do we Christians (the haves) help and support those are the “have nots” in our neighborhoods and the world? Lots of things are happening nationally across our country as well as in our nation’s Capitol and both houses of Congress!

2.TWO: ADVENT REMINDS US AGAIN THAT “ANOTHER WORLD” IS POSSIBLE THAN THE ONE WE ARE EXPERIENCING NOW!

That the day will come when GOD will make all things new and well! And that is what TFCCCH is about—to be the community of hope, reconciliation, forgiveness—and wide-open-arms of hugging!

3.THREE: ADVENT REMINDS US THAT WE ARE A PEOPLE OF GOD’S JOY!

Just because you don’t smile all the time; just because you are a person who at times exudes a

certain amount of melancholy and sadness or quietness; or just because we Christians know how to weep as well as how to laugh—none of that means we cannot have and share **joy!**

- ✓ We can't often plan for that kind of a joy.
- ✓ We can't orchestrate events to bubble up joy in us!
- ✓ Joy is a sheer emotive and touchy kind of force—in the “bring-tears-to-your-eyes” sense—and many of us feel this kind of joy all the time.
- ✓ Isaiah has reminded us that the day will come when joy will not be a fleeting—on-again/off-again phenomenon and experience—it will overtake and overwhelm us! Joy in Jesus will be everywhere!

Sent in the Word

STORY - Never Stop Shining, Life is full of Clouds -

~ By Michael T. Smith ~ © 2012

I'm telling Michael Smith's Story:

I try to shine on those around me, but clouds sometimes block my view of them. My friendship and love, my life-light doesn't get through to them.

A friend or family member experiences the death of a loved one; my child was bullied at school; an internet friend had a car accident; a co-worker was sick; an acquaintance lost a home in the bad economy; or a friend lost a job.

Clouds surround them. They don't see my rays of hope for their healing, my love and my concern for their pain.

Maybe they just don't want them. They block me with clouds of despair. My loving and caring heart can't break through.

They want to be alone.

I've lost jobs. Friends called or emailed me to say, "I'm sorry. Be strong!"

I said, "I will. Thanks for calling." At the time, I couldn't care less, because I was in pain. I didn't want to talk. I sheltered myself with my own clouds.

When my first wife Georgia died, I was in deep pain. I surrounded myself with dark clouds of grief. There were friends who tried to shine on me, but I blocked them with my clouds. They shook my hand or hugged me; I felt nothing, because when they asked, "How are you doing?" and I responded, "Not so well." They backed away, blocked by their clouds. They were afraid to shine on me, afraid to hear the truth.

There were real stars too. They were the people who kept shining. They hugged me, consoled me and were not afraid to hear the ugly truth. They didn't weaken when I cried, but kept shining brighter until they broke through. They were my saviors. They were the lights who wouldn't give up. They shined until my clouds broke and they warmed my heart.

I never give up on a person going through a tough time. They reject me for a bit, but if I keep shining, I get through and they are grateful.

Just the other day, as I drove to work, I saw the most amazing sunrise. There were beautiful clouds in the sky and smoke from multiple wild fires blocking the sky, but this beautiful sun - our sun - God's sun - fought its way through. It never gave up. It never does, because it keeps shining until it has a chance to reach me.

I do the same. I never stop shining.

ⁱ Crank Up: get going or set in motion; *Fig.* to motivate; to get someone started.