

SERMON FOR JUNE 2, 2013

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

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

Scripture: **Luke 7:1-10 (Focus); 1 Kings 18:20-39**

Message: **"Praise, Demonstrate & Celebrate Our Faith Over & Over Again!"**

Kekapa P.K. Lee



All the trees of the forest
will sing for joy.

Psalm 96



Gathering in the Word

Today we are learning about who has access and get into GOD's love for **all** people. Access and entry to GOD is free-for-all!

- ✓ It jumps over all human barriers.
- ✓ It is just as accessible to those who have been Christian for 50 years well as those who just accepted Jesus as Lord today! s.

At times—the church has determined, who's **in**; as well as who's **out**! GOD is the one who determines and invites—not us!

Hearing the Word

1 Kings 18:20-39 (The Voice Bible)

A new Bible Translation that reads like a story with all the truth and wisdom of God's word. *The Voice* is a dynamic equivalent translation that reads like a story with all of the truth and wisdom of God's Word. Through compelling narratives, poetry, and teaching it invites readers to enter into the whole story of God with their heart, soul, and mind. This bold new translation engages readers like no other Bible. While care has been taken to accurately translate the individual words from the original texts, careful attention to how the idioms of the original languages are understood in English has also been taken. But it doesn't stop there; *The Voice* considers the narrative links that help us to understand the drama and passion of story that is present in the original languages. The tone of the writing, the format of the page, and the directness of the dialog allows the tradition of passing down the biblical narrative to come through in *The Voice*. The OT & NT Voice Bible was published in 2013.

²⁰ *Ahab did as Elijah asked, sent word throughout the entire community of Israel, and gathered all the prophets atop Mount Carmel.*

Elijah (*approaching the people*): ²¹ How much longer will you sit on the fence, refusing to make a decision *between the Lord and Baal*? If *you believe* the Eternal One is the True God, then devote yourselves entirely to Him. If *you believe* Baal is your master, then devote yourselves entirely to him.

All the people *who were gathered together atop Mount Carmel* were completely silent. *They didn't know what to say to this.*

Elijah: ²² I am the last remaining prophet of the Eternal. Baal has 450 prophets. *Let us do a test to reveal the true quality of our deities.* ²³ Bring us two young bulls, *the common sacrifice to your master whom you depict as a bull.* The prophets of Baal may choose *first* which bull they want. They will *kill it*, chop it up, and *prepare it for a fire* by placing it above wood; but they will not light it. I will do the same with the other bull and prepare it *for fire* and place it above wood, but I will not light it. ²⁴ Then you call upon your god, *Baal*, and I will call upon the Eternal. The God who answers with fire is the one True God.

Everyone *liked this idea and* said, “This sounds like a worthy plan.”

Elijah (*to the prophets of Baal*): ²⁵ You have the pick of the bulls. Take the one you want, and prepare it first because there are many of you. Call upon your god, but do not set fire to the wood.

²⁶ The prophets of Baal picked out their bull and prepared it. They called upon Baal from dawn till noon, crying out, “Baal, answer us *with fire!*” But there was no voice, no reply. *Nothing happened.* All they did was dance around the altar they had built *and cry out to an elusive god.*

²⁷ At about midday, Elijah began provoking them.

Elijah: You have to shout louder than that! The one to whom you cry out certainly must be a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming or

napping or away from his *heavenly* throne. Perhaps he is in a deep sleep, and you must wake him up. *Shout louder!*

²⁸ So all the prophets of Baal began to shout at the top of their lungs *pleading with all their might*. They cut themselves with knives and swords *and spears* until they were covered in their own blood. ²⁹ Midday passed by, and the prophets of Baal kept on with their antics until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But *still*, there was no voice, no reply. No god heard them.

Elijah (*to the people*): ³⁰ Gather around me.

So all the people gathered around him, and he fixed the Eternal's altar that had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah gathered 12 stones, one for each of Jacob's tribes. Jacob was the one who *wrestled with God and whom* the word of the Eternal One visited, saying, "Your name will be Israel."

³² Elijah took the 12 stones and constructed an altar in honor of the Eternal One and carved a ditch out around it large enough to hold 13 quarts of seed. ³³ He set up the wood, chopped up the bull, and placed it on top of the wood.

Elijah (*to the people*): Go get four big jars, and fill them all up with water. Then pour the water out over the burnt offering and the wood. ³⁴ *Now*, do the same thing again.

And so they did it a second time.

Elijah: *All right*, now do the same thing a third time.

And so they did it a third time. ³⁵ The water covered the altar and even filled up the ditch. ³⁶ When it was time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah called out *to the Eternal*.

Elijah (*praying*): Eternal One—God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—reveal yourself on this day as Israel's God. Make it known that I serve you and have done all this because you commanded

it of me. ³⁷ Answer me, Eternal One. Reveal yourself so that everyone here will know that You, Eternal One, are the True God—the only God. Do it so that everyone knows You are turning the gaze of their hearts back to You again.

³⁸ Right then the Eternal One's fire landed upon the altar. The flames consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the ground. The flames even drank up all the water in the ditch.

³⁹ When everyone witnessed this extraordinary power, they all put their faces to the ground in fear and awe and wonder.

People: The Eternal One is the True God! The Eternal One is the True God!

Elijah: ⁴⁰ Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don't let a single one of them escape!

So everyone grabbed hold of the prophets of Baal, and Elijah gave instruction for them to be taken to the Kishon Valley and killed immediately—no exceptions.

Elijah taunts and heckles the prophets of the god Baal in our 1 Kings 18 story—suggesting that the god Baal must be sleeping or ignoring or not listening to his priests. This is a battle as to who is the real GOD! And of course GOD wins hands down! And our Voice Bible in verse 38, “When everyone witness this extraordinary power of the flames consuming the burnt every offerings on the altar that Elijah has built—they all put their faces to the ground—they all bowed down to the ground in fear and wonder shouting out—The eternal One is the True GOD!

Luke 7:1-10 The Voice Bible

In addition to teaching and healing, Jesus also gathers disciples, who are simply students or apprentices. Their classroom is the world—hillsides and beaches, homes and country roads, fields and city streets. Their subject is life—life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus has many students, both men and women, but He forms a special inner circle known as “the twelve.” The number “twelve” is highly symbolic because the Jewish people were originally composed of twelve tribes. However, over the centuries, some of the tribes were decimated. By calling together a new twelve, Jesus seems to be dramatizing a new beginning for the people of God. The original twelve tribes found their identity in the Law of Moses, but now Jesus is giving a new way of life for His twelve to learn and follow.

7 ¹ Jesus shared all these sayings with the crowd that day on the plain. When He was finished, He went into the town of Capernaum. ² There, a Centurion had a slave he loved dearly. The slave was sick—about to die— ³ so when the Centurion heard about Jesus, he contacted some Jewish elders. He sent them to ask Jesus to come and heal his dear slave. ⁴ With great emotion and respect, the elders presented their request to Jesus.

Jewish Elders: This man is worthy of your help. *It’s true that he’s a Centurion,* ⁵ but he loves our nation. In fact, he paid for our synagogue to be built.

⁶ So Jesus accompanied them. When they approached the Centurion’s home, the Centurion sent out some friends to bring a message to Jesus.

Message of the Centurion: Lord, don’t go to the trouble of coming inside. I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That’s why I sent others with my request. Just say the word, and that will be enough to heal my servant. ⁸ I understand how authority works, being under authority myself and having soldiers under my authority. I command to one, “Go,” and he goes. I say to another, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my slave, “Do this,” and he obeys me.

⁹ **Jesus was deeply impressed when He heard this.** He turned to the crowd that followed Him.

John, it seems, is having second thoughts. Is Jesus really the One we have expected? Is He the Anointed One? But who can blame John for these doubts? After all, John is in prison, unjustly held by a corrupt, immoral ruler. Ultimately the desert prophet will have his head severed from his body when the drunken, lusty king makes a silly promise in front of dinner guests. So who can blame John for seeking assurance from the Lord? Jesus, realizing fully the kinds of expectations others have, gently reminds John and his disciples of the Scriptures: “the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead live, and the poor receive the good news.” Luke doesn’t say how John responds to the report as he nears his own end. What is clear is that Jesus has the utmost respect for His colleague and cousin. He doesn’t reject him for his doubts but tries to send him reassurance.

Jesus: Listen, everyone. This outsider, this Roman, has more faith than I have found even among our own Jewish people.

¹⁰ The friends of the Centurion returned home, and they found the slave was completely healed.

The deeper we get into the story of this Roman centurion (*military officer who was in charge of about 100 soldiers*), the better he looks. He likes his servant and goes to bat for his healing and restoration. So he sends his people to find this wonder-worker Jesus. This centurion had earned the respect and affection of the Jews. He had lent a hand in the building of the local synagogue—house of worship for the Jewish congregation!

Jesus responds immediately; but quickly the unnamed centurion sends back to stop Jesus. Jesus is amazed by the centurion’s faith—Jesus had never before ran across such belief, such a willingness to be humble and hopeful, trusting and faithful among his own Jewish people!

Jesus healed the man! What a curious story!

What is amazing for us in 2013 is how we now live in faith in a Jesus who does his work in our lives and beams out his caring compassion and healing for us and those we love but who does all this not in person but through others, through the Holy Spirit—through Jesus' divine power—even today!

Just a few weeks from Ascension Day (Jesus goes back to the Father in Heaven and leaves Earth in a cloud!) and Pentecost (the Holy Spirit comes and falls on the people and the Church!)—today's story can remind us that we indeed live in “the already and the not yet”—in that in-between-time during which our Savior is not physically available to us.

The KEY to all of this—is FAITH!
The KEY is TRUST!

As believers who serve our risen and ascended (*gone back to the Father in heaven*) Lord Jesus—we lean into the gracious gift to give us comfort and assurance at all times and especially perhaps in those times when we too, via our prayers, need to send word to Jesus that someone we love is sick, is suffering, is sad, and is lonely!

- ✓ Faith tells us the message will get through!
- ✓ Faith tells us Jesus is willing and able to help—even if for now in this still-messy world all things cannot turn out in every instance as we wish for it would.

But Jesus is here for us even though we don't see Jesus or can shake Jesus' hand. And we Jesus sees faith in action—I have to think Jesus marvels and delights over this now no less than on that long ago day near the city of Capernaum and that centurion!

Doing the Word

So what is the Word of GOD for us?

1. **ONE: GOD regularly shows up where we don't expect GOD to be and never, ever stops delighting in surprising us.**
2. **TWO: The centurion knows a thing or two about confidence in the one giving him his orders. Do we?**

You see, the Centurion demonstrated allegiance and faith in GOD. Yet this is not *why* the servant got healed.

- ✓ On the contrary, it is the gift Jesus finds in the midst of being interrupted on his way somewhere.
- ✓ It is the example that Jesus can lift up for those who are watching and listening as the power of GOD marches through human barriers that allow us to think we do not need to help someone because they are not one of us, they are on the outside or they are *undeserving*.
- ✓ In the midst of short and long journeys of our lives, Jesus is among us in the presence of interruptions and crises. With Jesus comes the power to heal, to renew, and to rebuild. This is GOD's gift, even in *ordinary* time.

3. **THREE: WHO ARE THE CENTURIONS AND FOREIGNERS AROUND US?**

Perhaps our first question should be 'who are the foreigners?' They won't necessarily be literally foreigners (though they may be) but they will be those whom we have chosen to make foreign to our ways of doing things, seeing things – the ones whose actions we've usually ignored, the ones whose voices are seldom heard, the ones whose opinions are generally overlooked, **the ones who are quietly moved by the holiness of GOD although we've failed to notice it.**

The centurion argued from his own remarkable experience of God and consequently trusted Jesus. His attitude to life and faith was clearly rooted in those experiences, but it wasn't constrained by them. He reached out in confidence and his confidence was blessed.

Sent in the Word

Sisters and Brothers, it's very tempting to build our faith on *exclusivity*—meaning and believing that we are 'in' with God and others aren't. It's also very tempting to build strong personal and group identities in oppositional ways – built on hostility rather than in invitational ways – built on hospitality. But, when we allow ourselves to yield to this temptation, we not only undermine our own security and sense of belonging (*because it's only a matter of time before we have a disagreement with the group, and then what happens to us?*), but we create greater conflict and hardship in our communities, and by extension, in the world.

However, when we allow the Gospel to shift our hearts toward inclusion, we discover, in spite of the pain that relationships always bring, a sense of healing, connectedness and being "at home" in the world that is profound and transforming. When we allow our identity to be built on how we welcome and heal others, rather than on how we look after ourselves, our sense of identity and of our humanity expands and grows richer. Imagine if our worship focused on opening our hearts and lives to others, rather than on making us feel secure in an isolated religious bunker that shields us from those who are different!

And just as we are, Christ invites us to this Table. We know we are not worthy, but he invites us nonetheless. And in the gifts of his Body and Blood he comes to us, he heals our souls, and he makes our hearts his dwelling place.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen!