

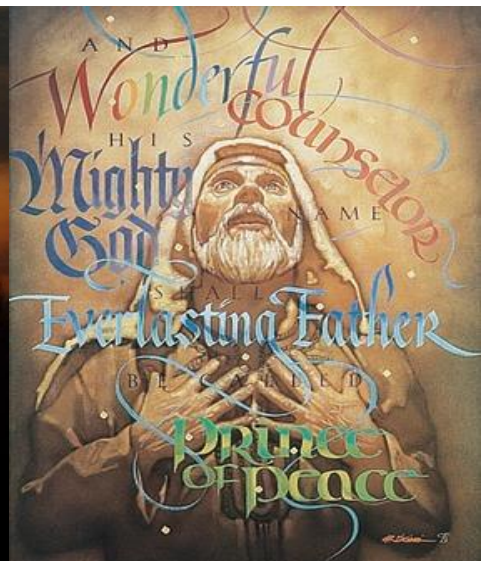
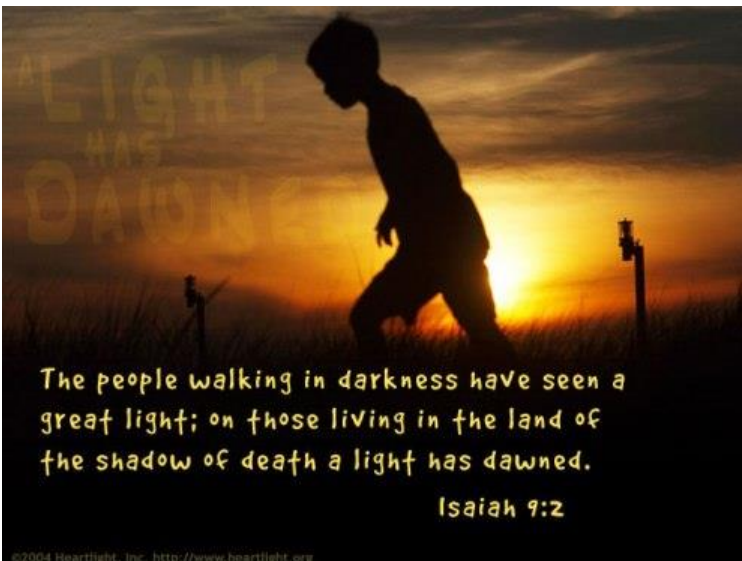
SERMON FOR JANUARY 26, 2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i UCC
Kalaupapa Sunday/3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7; **Matthew 4:12-23**

Message: **"Jesus Defines Us Christians & Gives
Unity to Us!"**

Kekapa P.K. Lee



GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

The LIGHT OF JESUS always brings rejoicing! We just finished Christmas; and we're in Epiphany and today is the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany! Epiphany honors the coming of the 3 Wisemen to the baby Jesus. The word "epiphany" means: *a moment in which you suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way.*

Isaiah is delighted as he sees his nation's fortunes being restored. When the nation is restored—so too are individuals and family—we now can see the way forward to GOD's future!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Isaiah 9:1-7 (The VOICE Bible)

When God's people haven't seen a hint of light or hope of day, God will do something new.

9 But there will be no more gloom for those who knew such hardship. In times past, God humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali; later, God will restore the *honor and* glory to the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee, home of the nations.

² The people who had been living in darkness have seen a great light. The light of life has shined on those who dwelt in the shadowy darkness *of death.*

³ *And you, God, will make it happen.* You bolstered the nation, making it great again. You have saturated it with joy. Everyone in it is full of delight in your presence, like the joy they experience at the harvest, like the thrill of dividing up the spoils *of war.*

⁴ For as you did back in the day when Midian *oppressed*

us, you will shatter the yoke that burdens them, you will lift the load that weighs them down and you will break the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ *It's true.* All the fabric of war will go up in flames: the troops' heavy boots *that stamped us down* and their blood-soaked garb will all be burned *beyond recognition or use.* *There will be a new time, a fresh start.*

⁶ *Hope of all hopes, dream of our dreams,* a child is born, *sweet-breathed;* a son is given to us: *a living gift.* *And even now, with tiny features and dewy hair,* He is great. The power of leadership, and the weight of authority, will rest on His shoulders. *His name?* His name *we'll know in many ways*—He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, *Dear Father* everlasting, *ever-present never-failing, Master of Wholeness,* Prince of Peace.

⁷ His leadership will bring such prosperity *as you've never seen before*—*sustainable* peace for all time. *This child:* God's promise to David—a throne forever, *among us,* to restore sound leadership that cannot be perverted or shaken. He will ensure justice without fail and absolute equity. Always. The intense passion of the Eternal, Commander of *heavenly* armies, will carry this to completion.

Isaiah begins in the dark and paints a grim portrait—the people have been living in the dark; they have been dwelling the chilly shadow of death itself. Worse, Isaiah tells us in verse 4 that the people have been afflicted by a burdensome yoke—a kind of heavy bar/load across their shoulders even as they get driven forward under the stinging bows of an oppressor's rod and whip. The images for us are awful and shocking!

Isaiah is referring here in our lesson today to the exile experience of the people of Judah during the 7th century B.C. Even today—modern-day Americans are an oppressed people on earth and millions of us are also very comfortable in terms of income, lifestyle, and the like. Yet—in some ways we are also a mess! We take daily meds to treat our aches and pains; to life out moods; to control our high blood pressure, to relax our frayed and distressed nerves; and to enhance even or sexuality.

In 2014—we are a driven people! All of this *cultural silliness* seems trivial and minor in comparison to what's happening across the world!

In the New Testament the apostle Paul often talks about the "*powers and principalities*" of our time. We often slide by that kind of talk. We're not really sure what all that means for us in Hawai'i—but perhaps we are too a little scared off by it—too!

That's why we need the Child to whom Isaiah 9 points to! That's why I've included verses 5-7.

And that's why GOD has sent the One who is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty GOD, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace!

(In the VOICE BIBLE: **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Dear Father everlasting, ever-present never-failing, Master of Wholeness, Prince of Peace.**)

Matthew 4:12-23 (The VOICE Bible)

¹² *It was not long until powerful people put* John in prison. When Jesus learned this, He went back to Galilee.

¹³ He moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, a town by the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ He did this to fulfill one of the prophecies of Isaiah:

¹⁵ In the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the road to the sea along the Jordan in Galilee, the
land of the outsiders—

¹⁶ *In these places,* the people who had been living in
darkness

saw a great light.

The light of life will overtake those who dwelt in the
shadowy darkness of death.

¹⁷ From that time on, preaching was part of Jesus' work.

Jesus: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

By now Jesus desires a community around Him, friends and followers who help Him carry this urgent, precious message to people. His message is not dissimilar to John's: Turn away from sin; turn toward God. And so He calls a community to join Him. These first beloved followers are called "disciples," which means "apprentices." The first disciples are two brothers, Simon and Andrew. They are fishermen.

¹⁸ *One day* Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee when He saw Simon (also called Peter) and Andrew throwing their nets into the water. They were, of course, fishermen.

Jesus: ¹⁹ *Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

²⁰ Immediately Peter and Andrew left their fishnets and followed Jesus.

²¹ Going on from there, Jesus saw two more brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. *They, too, were fishermen.* They were in a boat with their father Zebedee getting their nets ready to fish. Jesus summoned them, *just as He had called to Peter and Andrew,* ²² and immediately they left their boat and their father to follow Jesus.

²³ And so Jesus went throughout Galilee. He taught in the synagogues. He preached the good news of the Kingdom, and He healed people, ridding their bodies of sickness and disease.

We've been going in-and-out of Matthew's Gospel since the beginning of December, jumping from end-of-the-world stories to an adult John the Baptist to the baby Jesus and more. But now we're rolling. Jesus was baptized by John last week and starts his campaign to inaugurate the Kingdom of God this week—but what a weird way to start.

Hard on the heels of Jesus' baptism by John and his wilderness temptations—Jesus preaches his first sermon when he hears John has been arrested and picks up where John left off. Jesus' first sermon is a word-for-word repetition of John the Baptist's first sermon from Matthew 3:2. John has been saying and teaching: "Turn around,

change your life: the kingdom of heaven is coming!" Jesus says the same thing—"the kingdom is near—so get ready!"

Jesus now moves away from his hometown of Nazareth and moves to an equally out-of-the-way place called Capernaum—80 miles from Nazareth.

Capernaum, where Jesus made his home, was a town of about 1,000 people. Its inhabitants relied on farming and fishing to survive. Though Jesus has already been named "Son of God," he doesn't live among the rich and powerful, but among the common people. Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

This region had historically belonged to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, but in the first century it truly was "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15, quoting Isaiah 9:1), conquered by Rome and ruled by a Roman puppet whom few Jews regarded as authentically Jewish. Herod Antipas was notorious for his brutality and for his intolerance of any who threatened his claims to power. Into this context of danger and darkness and death comes Jesus, proclaiming deliverance and light and life.

So there in Capernaum Jesus brings in the words of the Prophet Isaiah to reassure the hearers. Isaiah did associate GOD's promised One with Galilee; but that the work would be done there! Jesus makes a point to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom to others so he moves to Capernaum.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" The Greek verb "repent" (*metanoeo*), like the Hebrew verb "repent" (*shub*), means "turn around." Repentance in biblical

thought involves not merely apology, but change: change direction, change your behavior, and change your life.

In the second scene Jesus sees another set of brothers, **James and John the sons of Zebedee**, in a boat with their father. Jesus calls them, too. This scene emphasizes the invitation to Jesus' new community. James and John immediately leave both the boat and their father, who is mentioned three times in the passage. Jesus' call takes priority over family commitments, a startling idea in an era when family connections were a primary source both of identity and of honor, and when the responsibility to care for one's parents was rooted both in cultural custom and in biblical law.

Jesus calls his disciples to a new way of life in the reign of God. At its most basic, discipleship means following Jesus, getting behind him and going wherever he leads. For these first disciples it will be a difficult road, and despite their initial obedience to Jesus' call, in the coming days they will often fail both to understand and to obey him.

In the final verse of today's reading, Jesus himself begins to enact and live out God's reign. In Jesus' teaching, in his preaching, and in his ministry of healing, Jesus announces and reveals God's light dawning on a dark world, God's rule triumphing over the powers of evil and death.

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

So what is the Word of GOD for us this morning?

1.ONE: MINISTRY IS A COMMUNAL ENTERPRISE THAT INVOLVES ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH!

- ✓ People and families are transformed!
- ✓ Gifts are found and practiced and shared!
- ✓ People become one church!
- ✓ The Good News is preached and taught!
- ✓ People are being healed in bodies, minds, and spirits!
- ✓ We as we are the church we learn to live and practice being family!

2.TWO: JESUS CALLED ORDINARY PEOPLE LIKE US RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR ORDINARY LIVES TO DO EXTRAORDINARY THINGS...AND JESUS STILL DOES!

- ✓ Whether we've been a member and part of TFCCCH for 50 years or 5 minutes!
- ✓ We are all unique individuals whom GOD has called to be a part of the family of TFCCCH!
- ✓ We are all a part of being family together—and finding the ways and times to gather and work together in our busy lives!
- ✓ What is GOD calling to you for GOD?

3.THREE: WE ARE PEOPLE OF THE LIGHT AS WE ARE TO BE LIGHT-BEARERS AND LIGHT BRINGERS!

- ✓ Where are you called to bring the Light to others around you? in your family and neighborhoods?
- ✓ Where is GOD calling you to pray for GOD's healing touch on those who are sick as well as being advocates for the poor, the seniors around

us and in our church that nurtures health at every level of our community?

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Jesus is still calling us today—January 26, 2014—to be in genuine and real relationships with the people around us, and to be in those relationships the way Jesus was and is in relationship with his disciples and with us: bearing each other's burdens, caring for each other and especially the vulnerable, holding onto each other through thick and thin, always with the hope and promise of God's abundant grace. Sometimes that call—to be in Christ-shaped relationship with others—will take us far from home and sometimes it will take shape in and among the people right around us. But it will always involve persons—not simply a mission or a ministry or a movement, but actual, flesh-and-blood people!

So there you have it! Jesus has been announced as the Son of God and commissioned to bring in the Kingdom of God. And to do so Jesus chooses a backwater town of no account from which to launch his campaign – strike one – surrounds himself with riff raff – strike two – and leads off with a message that landed his predecessor in jail – strike three, you're out.

Talk story now in your pews!
Let's see what next Sunday brings!