

Kailua Christian Church
Sunday Message
“BE JESUS, SEE JESUS”
Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV)
Pastor Yumiko Nakagawa
October 17, 2021

Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Good morning, friends! My name is Yumiko Nakagawa and it’s always great to worship with friends at Kailua Christian Church!

I think I joined your worship back in June - and since then I’ve gotten a new job, and I now serve as Mission Pastor at River of Life. I believe many of you are familiar with River of Life, because Kailua Christian has been a long-time partner of River of Life. On behalf of our guests and staff at River of Life, I thank you for your partnership!

For those of you who’ve served at River of Life before, I’d love to hear your favorite memories at the River. For me, it is working with my coworkers -ministers at River of Life. That’s absolutely my favorite part about my job.

Because of the COVID, we had to adjust our operation drastically. Instead of having tons of volunteers to serve the meal in the dining hall, we now have about 10 staff ministers handing out take-out meals every day. These 10 ministers are on the front line, providing the basic needs, building relationships and offering anything they can from a meal, hygiene kits to a prayer.

This is Angela (holding the photo). Angela is one of the ministers who serves on the front line, serving breakfast with joy and smiles every day to our guests. Every day at 6:30am, Angela, kitchen staff and a few other ministers pray together. One morning, it was a rainy day, and Angela prayed for one of the guests she saw outside. The guest passed out outside our door, half-naked, covered with all sorts of stuff. Angela prayed that this guest would come to know God. "God, please help her. She's not supposed to be like that. God, you don't want her to live like that. No one is supposed to be living on the street." She was crying, perhaps because she knows a thing or two about living on the street, how challenging life can be, how cold and harsh people can be to someone like our guests. And how hard it is for someone like the guest to get off the street. So Angela pleaded to our God, "No one is supposed to live on the street."

In Angela's tears and prayer, I saw Jesus. I saw Jesus weeping for the guest, just as He did for Angela so many years ago. He saw her sufferings, and wept for her - Angela, you are not supposed to live like that. Angela, please. And the love of Christ gave her strength to get up on her own feet - she rebuilt her life in a way that many of us would not be able to. Her amazing story is something you can probably learn from her when you come to serve at River of Life :)

And it's not just Angela that embodies Jesus at River of Life. Each minister embodies Christ in different ways. Every day when I go to work, I am so inspired by so many Jesuses at River of Life!

But even though many of us work faithfully and diligently along with partners like Kailua Christian Church, there are always more challenges. Every morning, we pray for our guests to come to know Christ, and get off the street, but the reality is that many of the guests keep coming back for meals day after day for years. No matter how hard we work to serve each guest faithfully, unless there's a systemic change, homelessness will persist. What we do does not fundamentally solve the issue of homelessness.

In such a discouraging moment, I often go back to Matthew 25. Together with our partners like you, we are clothing the naked, feeding the hungry and treating them with dignity. And to us, our King would say: v.40 "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

We may not be solving the issue of homelessness, and many of our guests continue to live on the street, and some of them may seem beyond hope, but we at least, we are doing good things. We are following the example of Jesus - We feed the hungry as Jesus did and welcome the stranger because God first welcomed us. The passage provides encouragement, guidance, and for some a standard to meet as a Christian to go to heaven.

But, this passage offers more than that.

In today's passage, Jesus paints two contrasting pictures. One is the picture of the world A: where the hungry were ignored and the strangers were unwelcomed. And another world, world B is where the naked were clothed and the sick were looked after. And naturally, Jesus upholds world B as His clear choice. No brainer.

If He had said, "well done, you fed the poor, cloth the naked, and take care of the sick as I did," it would have been simple. But, instead, verses 35 -39: "you fed me when I was hungry, gave me something to drink when I was thirsty, "I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

The righteous responds: “when did I do that for you?” Wait, I am honored that the King took notice of what I have done for the least, but hold on, did you say that was you? I don’t think so. These are the people in such a sad state- hungry, poor, marginalized, and not many people wanted to touch them with a ten-foot pole. King? No! I think I would have recognized you.

v.40 “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Here in this passage, we see the secret of God’s Kingdom. The people who belong to Christ inherit the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is fundamentally different from this world.

In world A, much like this world, the kingdom is built with power - whether military, financially or politically. The rich and powerful, like us, receive special treatment, are looked after, well fed, and clothed ourselves in nice clothes. Even Christians congregate around the power and are attracted to riches. Some of us may equate glorifying God’s name with Christians’ gaining political power, social status, and cultural influence.

But that’s not how Jesus inaugurated His Kingdom - Jesus didn’t fight for a political agenda (independence of Israel from the Roman empire), didn’t let people make Him a new religious leader. Jesus didn’t conquer the world with the power.

Quite contrary, Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom by becoming powerless. Yes, Jesus on the earth used His power to heal the sick, to provide for the hungry and to welcome everyone. But, that’s not all Jesus did. Jesus was the provider, protector, shelter for the sick, weak, and marginalized. AND Jesus was someone who became the weak, despised, naked, hungry, thirsty and crucified. Christ, the ruler of all, came to the world as a baby, vacating His seat of power in heaven. And He continued to walk with the weak until He reached the Cross, where He became nothing. Practically naked, nailed the cross, slowly dying, He became nothing. He became powerless and despised. And that’s our King in the Kingdom of God. Kingdom we prayed to see on this earth is ruled by a King who became hungry, thirsty, covered with blood, sweat, tears, and dust and became powerless. Jesus was covered with His own blood, and probably many other things, slowly became lifeless, passed out at the end, just like the guest Angela saw one morning.

And Jesus invites us to do the same - build the kingdom not by increasing our influence, our power, our voices. Instead, build the kingdom by serving the poor, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger and looking after the sick. When the world heads to power, the Kingdom way directs us to go the opposite way, Jesus invites us to congregate ourselves around the ones the world is ignoring.

And I see my co-ministers at River of Life bringing the Kingdom little by little every day. And I make this claim not based on the number of meals we feed, or on the number of people who get off the street. (Though all of them are good measures and goals we strive for!)

I see God’s Kingdom here on this earth, in the small corner of Honolulu, in the way my co-ministers greet our guests by name, ask how they are doing, how their families are doing. In the ways the ministers treat our guests with dignity because of the (sometimes very dim) image of God in them, and dignity because Jesus died for them. Beyond that, I see the Kingdom come on this earth in the ways the ministers treat our guests with respect, because they see King Jesus in the weak, hungry, thirsty stranger.

And that’s what Hilda, our chef, always reminds us. What we are doing for our guests, we ought to do it as if we are serving our King Jesus. When we plate the meal, plate rice, main dish, salad, dressing and dessert as we are making a plate for Jesus. She cooks the best meal she can with the limited materials provided because she’s cooking for our King. She reminds us not to throw food on the plate and that presentation

matters. Because we are plating this humble meal for our King. If Jesus is at our door waiting for our food, don't we work quickly so we won't keep Him hungry? Wouldn't we plate the meal as beautifully as we can?

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

While what we do at River of Life is straightforward, "whatever you did for the least" is not limited to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and taking care of the sick. Whatever you do for the least means anything you do for the least. And I see the community of Kailua Christian Church is doing exactly that. I hope I am not stepping on anyone's toes here, but I take your decision to continue on worshipping via zoom in the current season as what you do for the least among you.

I imagine many desire to worship in person in fellowship with others. And some churches may say continuing on in-person worship is their embodiment of trust in the Lord and their determination to not let fear control them. I agree - choosing to worship in person embodies the trust in the Lord and makes a clear statement about our faith to the world. At the same time, I wholeheartedly believe that many other Christian churches chose to worship online out of care for the weaker and more vulnerable part of the community and our neighbors. And Jesus had both moments in His ministry on the earth - He had a moment where He boldly proclaimed His teachings. He also had a moment when He chose to be with and become the weak, vulnerable and the least among the people. And I commend your kingdom way of loving your community, and I pray that you will continue to bring the kingdom on this earth by choosing to side with the powerless and the weak, especially as you seek the vision for in-person worship. May you continue to be Jesus to the least and see Jesus in the least in your community and beyond.