

Kailua Christian Church
Message: God's Logic
Sunday, November 19, 2023
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan

Scriptures:

Psalm 111

- 1 Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
- 2 Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
- 3 Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
- 4 He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
- 5 He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
- 6 He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
- 7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
- 8 They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
- 9 He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.
- 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it^[a] have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.

Matthew 25:14-30

14 “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; **15** to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once **16** the one who had received the five talents went off

and traded with them and made five more talents. **17** In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. **18** But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. **20** Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' **21** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' **22** And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' **23** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' **24** Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' **26** But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. **29** For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. **30** As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Sermon: God's Logic

Recently, I've been working on making membership classes for the new folks who have joined us. Last week, we talked about all the expectations of leadership that comes with membership to a church. This week, I'll talk about the benefits.

Surprise: there are none – not in the sense that we think about material “benefits,” anyway. If you join the church, we'll ask you to commit to doing stuff. In return for the stuff you do, you don't get anything material that we wouldn't give you if you were simply a friend or someone in need who randomly walked in the door.

In this way, the church isn't like some other organizations you join in your life. We don't offer a material return on investment. There's no punch card for a free drink after 10 meetings attended. There's no free shipping on tithing over \$100. There's no interest payments on higher shares purchased.

Sound good to anyone? Anybody sold on this idea yet?

No, you're not, because it's not a logical exchange to be expected to do things with no physical reward. Very little of what we do in the church is traditionally logical, in the way that we define logic as rational inputs producing proportionate outputs. The premise of what we gather for isn't even logical: we believe in a being we have never seen who sent a Jewish

carpenter to die for our sins and save us all. It sounds looney. And our finite human brains don't like that because we're naturally wired to want things to be logical.

That's what the slave with the single talent argues to the master. He tells the master that his business methodology wasn't logical: the master was reaping where he didn't sow and gathering where he did not scatter. Therefore, the slave planned to preserve what he was given rather than use it, because he didn't want to be caught up in an illogical scheme.

But the thing is, as much as we try to hold onto our human logic of inputs to outputs and make it work in every aspect of our lives, it doesn't. In fact, the most important parts of our lives defy our input-output logic. For example, children are a huge responsibility. They require enormous chunks of your time, money, and everything else, yet we keep having them. Like the church, children are not required to give anything back to you despite all the hard work you pour into them. Yes, logically you can say we have children to create the next generation of humankind, we create children so that we have someone to take care of us when we're old, we create children because we're biologically wired to do so. But be honest – did any of you actually have children for those reasons? No. The real reason we have children is not logical, we have children because children multiply love. Love isn't logically useful; love doesn't get you more money or power. Love is an ambiguous thing that's hard to empirically define. Yet, we know it when we see it and feel it, and we know it's the most important thing we have, despite its elusive measurability and definition.

Same thing with purpose. We want careers that fulfill us. Do we logically need our careers to be purposeful? Not really. I could make more money as an engineer than as a pastor, but I'm not an engineer because that wouldn't be a purposeful use of my heart and gifts. Some of us do make decisions to take the career that pays better but provides less personal meaning to us, but in those circumstances, we often find we need extracurricular places of purposeful fulfillment through volunteering or hobbies. The human desire to be purposeful doesn't have any utility to make us function or succeed, yet, we know it's important and we need it.

Same thing with forgiveness. The most influential Christian movements for social change defied input-output logic as well through the use of Jesus' radical forgiveness. If someone hits you, it biologically makes sense to either fight back or run. The actual term for this reaction to threats in animals is called "Fight or Flight." Yet, when we look at the Christian-led movements of the 20th century, such as The Civil Rights Movement in the USA, or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, those leaders didn't use our biological impulses to react to threats and oppression. They used forgiveness and nonviolent resistance from Jesus' instructions in the Gospels, and their movements remain some of the most successful in history for sustained societal transformation.

As I talked about last week, discipleship isn't always easy. It isn't always this glorious feeling of love and purpose and harmony. Sometimes it feels like a headache of reporting and maintenance, or sometimes it's intense sorrow and helplessness of meeting others or ourselves in our darkest places of need. There's a lot required from discipleship, with little to no material reward in return. Sometimes the magical places of joy, love, purpose, and hope that God's logic rewards us through our discipleship seem elusive. For this reason, a key aspect to discipleship relies on gratitude. Almost all of the Psalms begin with a complaint

that transforms into praise, because gratitude is God's tool for redirecting us to our memory of those places of joy, love, and purpose that God's logic rewards us in our service to Him.

Gratitude is another glorious aspect of God's logic. When we want to give up, when we feel ourselves shrinking into the need for material reward for our discipleship, when we feel like we've hit a wall and we can't keep serving, we can't keep praying, and we can't keep multiplying our talents in the form of spreading His word, let us remember to recenter ourselves in gratitude and praise for Him. Gratitude is God's source of renewal for our spirits. Gratitude is God's invitation to recenter toward the things in life that truly matter. All these tools of God's logic transform us past our biological impulses, past our survival logic of inputs and outputs.

The things that defy logic in our world are some of the most important. Becoming a member of a church isn't technically logical, because you don't get a return on investment like a paycheck from a job or frequent flier miles from your membership with Hawaiian Airlines. What you *do* get from discipleship in the church is a return on investment in God's logic, which is an infinitely better return than anything human logic can get you. When humans say kids are difficult and expensive, God says Love will reimburse those expenses in ways that far surpass your imagination. When humans say money is important, God asks: will you be remembered for your money, or will you be remembered for what you did to make the world a better place? When humans say it's easier to hit someone threatening you than try to understand them, God says the hitting will just continue back and forth until you learn to do it His way. When humans say it's too hard and I want to give up, God says remember why you started doing it in the first place and live in that memory with gratitude.

Membership in the church is an invitation to leave our logic behind and enter God's logic. God's logic is infinitely wiser than our logic, every single time. Our logic looks for a balanced input-output return on investment, which works for some things, but not the really big things. God's logic ends wars, strengthens families, and provides us with meaning that transforms the world. God's logic multiplies abundance infinitely, and for that, we recenter ourselves in gratitude to Him. This is the gift that you'll find in discipleship, if you choose to accept it. God invites you to be transformed by love, purpose, radical forgiveness, and gratitude that will result in infinite abundance to your life. It's far more than a free coffee or upgraded flight seat, or even that paycheck or stock investment that you can't take with you when you die.

If you need a guarantee for a return on investment by becoming a disciple, know that God's return on investment always, always outpaces anything that we could ever dream of. Discipleship in a church brings alive God's logic through the joy of transforming lives alongside other disciples who will hold you and love you through all seasons of life. Discipleship looks like being in a community that will support you through forgiving instead of shrinking into your animalistic impulses to fight or flee. Discipleship will bring you so much more than any of the small inputs and outputs you experience in the other parts of your life. And we, the church, will be here to walk with you through that journey.

This is your invitation to discipleship: that your rewards be treasures in heaven, such as love, purpose, forgiveness, and gratitude, which are immeasurably the greatest treasures one can invest and multiply into others. Go forth and multiply, my friends.

Amen.