

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sunday, December 31, 2023

Message: We Need Your Blessing

Rev. Irene Willis Hassan

Scripture Reading:

Luke 2:22-40

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”),²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.^[a] 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[b] came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon^[c] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word,

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child^[d] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

Sermon: We Need Your Blessing

There's a human understanding that spans across cultures and generations that we honor our kupuna. The older generation holds valuable wisdom and has paved the way for us to have the blessings we enjoy today, from civil freedoms to modern technology. Younger generations that are beginning a journey on some important mission, be it college, or a church plant, opening a business or inventing new technologies, often seek the blessing of older generations to begin their work. Consecrations like the one we see here with Jesus at the Temple are a sort of passing of a baton from the older generation to the next to continue building on God's work to restore the world.

The writers of scripture found that intergenerational blessing during Jesus' consecration to be so important that they included an entire paragraph describing the prophet Anna's old age. Although Simeon's age isn't stated in scripture, it's assumed by scholars that he was also elderly by context of the story. If anyone was qualified to recognize and ordain the Son of God to embark on His mission, it was the kupuna of His time.

This intergenerational exchange, the universal human experience of understanding that the young embark on the mission and the old bless that mission with their wisdom and guidance, is one of the strengths of this church. In this congregation, you have a huge wealth of historical wisdom and experience that I am so blessed to learn from you. Many of you have seen and survived more than I could ever imagine, and even more of you have a quiet strength and perseverance that serves as such an important anchor in the hectic tides of life that we in our younger years so often experience. If you'll allow me, I'd actually love to make a compilation of your stories this year that we can provide as a memorialized blessing for this church's generations to come. There's so much wisdom here that is a gift to consecrating the next generation of ministry.

The problem, of course, is that there is all of this valuable blessing in this church with nowhere to hand the baton. Many of our leaders, who we honor and celebrate today, are serving their 5th, 6th, 7th terms in these positions. Other vital positions sit vacant, as the baton has been passed back and forth between the same people too many times. It seems that the next generation is not coming to the Temple to receive the blessing of encouragement and wisdom to embark on mission anymore. Why is the next generation not stepping forward to receive that blessing from the older generation? Where have they gone?

My generation is caught in what I call a loneliness loop. Every generation that has come before us has bickered with its elders, the generational gap of the old calling the young

impulsive and the young calling the old outdated is not a new ideological struggle for humanity. However, research shows us that the generational gap that is occurring right now is profound. Our graying churches and declining attendance, combined with the sharp political divide that is especially prominent along age lines, demonstrates for us that the younger generations feel cut off and isolated on a lonely ideological island. The younger generation is lonelier than ever before, stuck on this island, with a reported 73% of us reporting experiencing acute loneliness in our lives – a greater percentage of young people reporting this feeling than ever recorded before.

I've preached on this topic before in a sermon entitled "Terribly Lonely," in which our generations are divided – the older in the churches and the younger on the internet. Clearly, we need each other. The older need the innovative vision of the young, and the young need the prophetic blessing of the old. When we separate ourselves as we have, it makes both sides of our ever growing divide terribly lonely.

What I didn't say in that sermon is that it's the elder generation's duty to make the first move in crossing that divide. In the scripture reading for today, Simeon wasn't scheduled to participate in Jesus' consecration. Mary and Joseph likely expected to bring their two pigeons to the Temple, get blessed by a priest, and go on their way. Simeon interrupted this process by the wind of the Spirit and in doing so entirely changed the narrative of what was meant to be a standard consecration into a prophecy about Jesus saving the world. Simeon originated that blessing, not out of routine or invitation, but out of His sacred duty to God to name a future that would have otherwise gone unacknowledged in that important space.

What if Mary and Joseph hadn't received that encouraging prophecy about Jesus' life in that moment? It's possible that as Jesus grew into a boy and then a teenager, the distance of time may have made them forget that he wasn't just a normal boy. Simeon's prophecy provided the wake up call to Mary and Joseph that the angels and virgin birth in a cave wasn't all just a dream: it was a reminder that they were actively engaged in a mission that they needed to continue progressing. The anchor of kupuna in our lives encouraging us to follow our calling is vital to younger generations so that we don't get caught in our loops, unable to find the way off our lonely islands.

It's your duty, elders among us, to move by the wind of the Spirit and proclaim the mission first. It's your duty to go to the places where the youth are and ignite them into the future of ministry. The older generation have a sacred duty to not just pass the baton to each other, but to interrupt the routine of the young and remind them that they're integral in the sacred story of transforming the world in Jesus' name, too. Jesus didn't sit at the Temple and Synagogues waiting for the poor and the lonely and the

needy to come seek him out; he went into the streets, the fishing villages, and the wilderness to minister to them where they were at. We can't just sit here in the safety of this sanctuary on Sunday morning, hoping someday the youth will come to their senses and walk back in the door. They're not going to – they're stuck on their lonely island and have forgotten how to find the lifeboat to get off. My generation is in a crisis of loneliness and isolation, and we need you to get out of the Temple to come minister to us in the places we occupy.

You, the older generation, have a powerful gift in blessing and wisdom, prophecy and history, that we younger generation don't have. Yet, the problem is that we've isolated ourselves on our lonely island, helplessly watching the news feeds on social media and unable to find the anchor to pull us off that island and into redemption. I need you all to follow Jesus out of the church building and into those places where the division and loneliness reside among our lost younger generation.

I've derived a framework for your church's mission that allows you to do exactly that – meet young people in their context and deliver the encouragement and blessing that we so deeply need. That framework is to provide a ministry to seminary students that will encourage them to create a contemporary worship service for us that is catered to young people. I too, as a young person carrying that baton alongside you, need your blessing and encouragement to move forward. Without that blessing, I don't have anywhere to take that baton to when it's my turn to run with it.

Just as the blessing for the future of Jesus started with Simeon and Anna, the blessing for the future of this church starts with you, the elders of our church. Your wisdom and encouragement have the power to transform the next generation into actualizing God's mission. Thank you for being the blessing that we need, and may God add His blessing to strengthen you in this new season of service to Him. Amen.