

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 28, 2024  
SERMON: THE EAR SHAPED CHAPEL  
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN**

**Scriptures:**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Acts 2:42-47**

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

**Sermon: The Ear Shaped Chapel**

I'm not sure if any of you follow the lectionary, but I generally do during the season between Advent and Pentecost. The lectionary provides weekly readings that reflect the progression of Jesus' story, from Mary's pregnancy, to His birth, to His baptism and ministry, to His death and resurrection, ending with the Great Commission in which the disciples were sent out to make believers in all nations. This week, we're technically in the liturgical season of Epiphany, but I've jumped to the readings that are typically used for Pentecost. I've done this because after church we're going to be discussing the Pentecost of our own congregation and how we're planning on fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples.

Perhaps unintentionally over the years, you've managed to nurture several young people into their callings to become pastors – Pastor Dale, Pastor Noelani, Pastor Nathan, Pastor Glenn, just to name a few. God has placed in your collective hearts the

gift of supportive encouragement for those called to lead. This gift you've been given by God is truly the heart of the Great Commission. Empowering the next generation into proclaiming the gospel and shepherding God's flock is the heart of expanding discipleship.

I assume you all didn't know this, because God gifted you this ability rather than something you read in a document as a church planting strategy, but this concept of empowering young people into church leadership is exactly how churches grow. Your serendipitous gift as a church is actually a targeted strategy used by church planters to create new churches. The general idea is you find a group of people, or at least individuals that you bring together as a group, who are searching for purposeful empowerment. You then set them up with the skills and knowledge to engage mission, and then send them out to expand the church. Jesus did this, Paul did this, the founders of this church did this, and every successful church plant since that first Pentecost has done this exact thing that you naturally did together over the years.

My proposal for this church is to formalize this natural gift into a Service Learning Community of young pastoral candidates, who will create a contemporary service that expands the empowerment of the Great Commission. Last week, I talked a little about the Service Learning Community I participated in Northern Ireland called Corrymeela Christian Community, and the frustrations of not having single handedly fixed the Troubles of Northern Ireland in the 3 month time that I was there. I told you that the goal of Corrymeela's Service Learning Community wasn't actually to "fix" Northern Ireland; it was to empower future church leaders into expanding their confidence and abilities, which it did exceptionally well.

At Corrymeela, I lived in a large house on the Irish coastline with 60 other young people. The house was called the Coventry, in reflection of the English city that was extensively bombed during the Blitz in World War II, and built back stronger and more robust than it had been before. 20 of those young people living in Coventry House were year long residents, who were the leaders. The other 40 of us were summer participants. A resident pastor from Texas lived with us and conducted weekly reflection meetings. The staff, who operated in a different building, set up the programs for the Northern Irish conflict resolution groups and seminars, and plugged all of us interns into operating the programs. We did everything from cleaning toilets, to preparing meals, to childcare, to helping design pieces of the programs for the staff.

Whenever I was on a rotation to clean toilets and floors instead of participating in the seminars, I initially felt disappointed, like that's not what I was there to do. I can clean my own toilet back home in Boston! However, as the weeks rolled on, I found that the menial labor weeks were just as enriching as the program support weeks. The 5-10 of us who were on cleaning duty would put on loud Irish music and dance around the empty hallways, share stories from our different cultures from Cameroon to Finland, and generally bonded better than weeks where we were concentrating on the mission of the

center's conflict resolution programs. Cleaning toilets became a joy of learning about the world and the many unique personalities it held.

What we thought was unintentionally bonding and strengthening of our cross-cultural Christian friendships was actually very intentional by the program directors of Corrymeela. Years and decades later, all of us still keep in touch over Facebook and Whatsapp groups. Most, if not all, of the participants from that summer in 2010 have continued on to become pastors, community organizers, and peacemakers in intentional ways. Was it because we learned how to develop conflict resolution programs that summer? No, not really. That information was useful and I continue to use a lot of the tools I learned there to this day. However, the bonding and empowerment experience that Corrymeela nourished in us is what kept us both on track with each other and on track with our callings to seek to the Kingdom of Heaven.

You see, I went to Corrymeela between my first and second year of seminary. The first year of seminary was a lot of deconstructing. The coursework asked us to consider closely the pukas of the Bible, arguments for and against the validity of Christian claims, and a lot of warring philosophical content about the nature of God and His relationship to Jesus. I would digest all this information in my classes and then go home, feeling a little estranged and confused about this conviction I found just a few years earlier about Jesus' sovereignty over my life and my soul.

I imagine the disciples must have felt the same way at Pentecost. Jesus was leaving them behind to figure out the path forward without him physically present. The Jewish world that they had grown up with was literally crumbling around them with the destruction of Jerusalem. They suffered rifts in relationships over their convictions, and almost all of them suffered terrible deaths as a result of their discipleship. I identified with the fear and confusion of the disciples embarking on their mission as I went through my first year of seminary and endured the deconstruction of this new found faith that I had recently entered into.

Corrymeela was a refreshing drink of water in the desert of confusing religious deconstruction. I certainly don't blame Boston University for deconstructing my faith – in fact, I have nothing but positive things to say about that institution and the education it provided me. They asked important questions that pastors should consider; questions that have come up time and time again in my professional years about the nature of God, Jesus, and the Bible. But what Corrymeela offered was the revival of Spirit that Jesus breathed over the disciples in their moments of doubt. Learning new dance moves with a mop in the hallways and sharing ghost stories translated from various languages under pillow forts in the main house with people who shared the same faith and mission as me revitalized my spirit into remembering why I was doing seminary at all.

The culmination of Corrymeela's mission to empower religious leadership was its chapel. The chapel at Corrymeela was shaped like an ear. From the top, it looked just like a human ear, and had no windows and the door was rounded to sync with the curved space. It had a unique construction that caused voices to bounce off the walls across the room as long as the voice was whispered. You would whisper into the wall, and that whisper would bounce across the 20 foot room to share your whisper with the person sitting on the other side. In quiet moments of downtime, we would often go to the empty chapel and sit at opposite corners of the room, whispering prayers to each other in our various languages that would bounce into our ears from the odd construction of the walls. On hard weeks during the conflict programs, we would take turns whispering the names of the Irish dead from the Troubles into those walls. The chapel provided a uniquely centering space for all the information, emotion, and transformation that we were developing during our time at Corrymeela.

Kailua Christian Church has been, and continues to be, an ear-shaped chapel that whispers prayers of encouragement to the future generation of leaders to build Christ's Kingdom here on earth. Young people studying religion are overwhelmed by the millenia of conflicting information about their faith, and we have the opportunity to be the sacred space where they come to "meet together and eat together with glad and sincere hearts." (Acts 2:46) Not only will these young people find and create a sacred space of revitalization here in our building and congregation; what they inherit here will be the courage to go out and expand His Kingdom back wherever they came from. This is the Great Commission of Pentecost, and the great gift that this church has in its collective spirit.

Kailua Christian Church is an ear-shaped chapel in its commitment to being "quietly effective." You whisper hope into the ears of the future generation, and that hope bounces across the walls of God's power to echo into the souls that you reach. This church is an ear-shaped chapel that provides a sanctuary of peace and beloved community among the calamities of the world, from homelessness in Hawaii to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela intentionally designed their space to create those strengthened bonds of lasting leadership empowerment, by creating a quiet, whispering chapel in the serene hillside of the Irish sea. This church has the same gift of empowering whisper, and in doing so, has potential to create a flood of impactful discipleship that glorifies God and empowers the Great Commission that He calls us into.

My hope is that the perhaps unintentional gifts of this church will thrive into purposeful mission. The mission is the same that it has always been – to trust in Jesus and create disciples in His name. You all have a powerful gift to do this in your ear shaped chapel here. May it be so.

Amen.