

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024
MESSAGE: WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN**

Scripture: John 20:1-18

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look[a] into the tomb, 12 and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” 14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir,[b] if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,[c] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Sermon: When One Door Closes

Easter is the reminder to us that God can transform any terrible thing into something beautiful. It’s hard to remember the power of redemption when so many terrible things are happening in the world that seem so deeply removed from redemption that we can’t imagine it ever getting better.

We look at the numbers from the Israel-Hamas war and mourn for the violent deaths of 1,200 in Israel, which is a story still in search of redemption. We look at the 35,000 killed in Gaza and can't even imagine what it might look, smell, or feel like to walk down a street in Gaza City right now, let alone sleep under a pile of rubble while starving to death. Preaching redemption in the streets of Gaza might feel like a morbid joke right now. Even in our own backyard, thousands are still displaced and mourning the loss of homes, family, and stability in Maui, seeking a redemption that has yet to come.

When we survey these dark nights covering our world in sorrow, it's certainly hard to see what the other side of renewal might look like. When we consider these terrible things, we are like Mary, weeping in front of the tomb and wondering where the Lord is in all this madness.

The curious thing about Mary's story is that she didn't recognize the redemptive moment when it was standing right in front of her in the form of the risen Christ. Because that's the thing about redemption – we find it hard to imagine when we're in the thick of our pain, and then when redemption finally comes, it often looks far different than we could have ever possibly imagined.

We are experiencing a redemptive moment for our church today. On top of today being Easter, today is also New Member Sunday – it's the first New Member Sunday we've had in 5 years! One of our new members who will be joining our church today, Matt, has a similar story to Mary. Matt has an experience of weeping and loss that transformed into a new reality that looked entirely different than he could have ever dreamed, and he's given me his permission to share it with you today.

Matt, our worship musician, was in the Army. Specifically, he was in the 100th Battalion of the 442nd Infantry Regiment. He loved this career and all the places it took him, all the people he met, and the camaraderie of army life that it brought him to "Go For Broke" with his fellow soldiers. Then one unfortunate day he was medically discharged from this military world that he had assumed would be his world for the rest of his life. Matt found himself broken and grieving the loss of his plans, his future, and the very core of who he thought he was meant to be.

Like Mary, Matt tried to bargain to have his losses returned to him. He said that he tried to join HPD, the closest thing to military service he could think of – but that door also remained shut. During this fragile time, he likely couldn't recognize God standing in front of him, saying "whom are you looking for?" as if the things of the past no longer mattered – because they still mattered very, very much to Matt.

As humans, we've all had this grieving experience of loss and bargaining to have our losses given back to us in their preserved packaging just as they were before. But the thing is that God never restores us to look like the things of the past. Israel and Gaza will never be the same coming out of this conflict. There will be no return to "business as

usual” for either of those nations. Lahaina is never going to have the same historic buildings lining its streets. Waiola Church’s building will never celebrate its 201st birthday. Jesus was not returned to Mary still dead and wrapped in the shroud like Mary had pleaded for. God never restores things to look the same as they did before.

After Matt’s devastating loss of the army, he found First Prez. He was specifically looking to win over Pie Pie and perhaps didn’t take the church thing itself too seriously at first, but God had bigger plans for Matt. The worship leaders at First Prez instilled in Matt a courage to take up guitar and become a leader, and suddenly Matt blossomed into a sensational musician and courageous youth leader seemingly over night. Giving himself over to the wind of the Spirit transformed Matt into an entirely new person. Now Matt is not only the music leader for our church, he’s also writing original songs with a band, facilitating administrative contracts for top musicians in Hawaii, helping lead the youth group from First Prez, and graduating next month with a degree in Music Business and Production from Hawaii’s most renowned music school, MELE.

I’m sure if the current 28 year old Matt told the younger 21 year old Matt that this is what he would be doing in less than a decade, the younger version of himself would be flabbergasted. The conventional wisdom for this phenomenon is often coined in the phrase “when one door closes, another opens”; however, this colloquial phrase severely undermines the intensity of the transformation that Jesus performs in us when we experience it. The phrase “when one door closes, another door opens” suggests that a loss of something translates into the gain of something else that’s equal in value. But those of us, like Matt, who have seen the risen Christ know that this isn’t the case at all.

Through the loss of the army, Matt gained a wife, a new career, and two church families that entrust him with leadership and encourage him to grow. Through his Easter experience, Matt gained a tenacity and confidence that is only possible through the transformation that Jesus places in us through His resurrection. If you can believe it, it’s only been two years since Matt gave his heart to Christ, and in that two years he accomplished more than most of us accomplish in a lifetime: learning a new skill to the level of leadership proficiency, gaining a spouse that was a perfect match for him, passing on that transformational empowerment to a whole generation of teenagers that look to Matt for guidance, and renewing vigor and confidence through his music for an aging church seeking hope. Through the Easter that God designated on Matt’s heart, he didn’t just open a new door. When the army door closed, God built in Matt a whole new city full of doors that not only changed Matt, but every person that he touches with his music and leadership.

When a door closes, God builds a new city full of doors to new houses. In John, Mary was simply asking to have Jesus’ body returned to her as it was. Instead, what she got was the risen Christ transformed before her and the beginning of a journey in which millions of disciples would transform their single closed door into thriving cities for generations to come. This is the Easter story the first day that Jesus rose, and this

remains the Easter story, through every heart that is won to Christ in our own congregation and beyond.

If you have even faith the size of a mustard seed in the risen Christ, He can and will grow a city beyond whatever door that was shut for you in your life. While the door is still shut for Israel and Palestine, or Lahaina, we continue to pray for the transformation beyond imagination that we know God can provide through the risen Christ for those places. Easter is the insistence of hope even and especially in the darkest moments. Easter is the insistence of possibility for all things to be not only restored, but made infinitely greater by His power. Easter is the insistence that God can and will make a city of doors to new houses out of whatever single door we find shut in our lives, if we only turn to Him for our redemption.

God can create in you something so powerful and beautiful that you wouldn't even recognize it if you saw it. We pray for the shut doors in our own lives and our world to transform into the Easter cities that God creates for us. May the Easter cities we create through His resurrection bring wholeness, joy, and hope to the world that will reign forever and ever.

Amen.