

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday Worship, April 28, 2024**  
**Rev. Irene Willis Hassan**  
**Sermon: “Authentic Love”**  
**Scriptures: John 15:1-8 & 1 Corinthians 13:4-13**

**Scriptures: John 15:1-8**

**15** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. **2** He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> to make it bear more fruit. **3** You have already been cleansed<sup>[b]</sup> by the word that I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. **6** Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become<sup>[c]</sup> my disciples.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-13**

**4** Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; **6** it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. **7** It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**8** Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. **9** For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, **10** but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. **12** For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. **13** And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

**Sermon: Authentic Love**

Recently, I’ve been wrestling a lot with how to do appropriate and effective proselytization (which is a fancy word meaning “inviting others to Jesus”). I talked last week about how scary it is to invite others to church, because proselytization can seem manipulative or open up avenues for rejection. We feel this way because we are aware that there’s plenty of people out in the world that have experienced religious hurt from communities that look and sound like ours. There’s plenty of people in the world who have been followers of Jesus in the past, only to discover when they started asking questions about their faith, no one had good answers or worse, they were penalized for even asking. A lot of that religious hurt people experience in churches comes from being emotionally connected to a group only to end up feeling betrayed by those very same people later on.

As a result, many churches have opted to make proselytization an intellectual strategy rather than an emotional one, because intellect seems less abrasive of a strategy than emotion. You can't hurt anyone with logic. But the problem is that you can't love anyone with logic, either. Love is not a logical thing, no one falls in love "logically". Yet, it's arguable that love is not an emotional thing either, because if we let emotions drive all of our communications with loved ones, well, there would be no one in this church and we would all be divorced from our partners. Emotions driving love leads to hurt, and logic driving love leads to apathy.

So how do we "bear fruit" and make disciples of Jesus, if emotional strategies are manipulative, and logical strategies are passionless? Jesus tells us that He is the vine, and good fruit only comes from abiding in Him – so that it seems like Jesus would be the correct place to start with proselytization. But what does that mean in practical application?

The word that comes to mind when thinking about abiding in Jesus instead of relying on our own understanding is "authenticity." According to the Oxford dictionary, "authentic" means to "have genuine, undisputed origin." By this definition, we are authentic when we reflect the intentions of our Creator, who is our origin. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, and when we reflect the intentions of Him rather than our own, that is when we are authentic.

People often know instinctively when something isn't authentic. Emotional proselytization doesn't feel authentic because it seems to *want* something, like we're a product to be delivered rather than a person to be cherished in the image of God. Logical proselytization doesn't feel authentic because it relies on opinions that can be washed away in time and context, which feels very humanly crafted and not sourced from a genuine origin.

If the Gospels tell us anything about the Creator, it's that He is Love. We know this because Paul tells us that the greatest earthly thing we can know is Love. Therefore, Love must be the source of the authentic.

Yet, unlike authenticity, Love is hard to define. Folks who use emotional strategies to proselytize think they're acting out of love. Folks who use logical strategies to proselytize think they're acting out of love, too. Yet, the people who deconstruct from both emotionally charged and logically charged churches leave those places not feeling very loved. In fact, the word I often hear from those who left the church is that they didn't find the church to be very "authentic".

Yet, we all seem to know what the word "authentic" means and what the word "love" means. We know when we don't see it and when we do. I want you to take a moment in which you remember experiencing Authentic Love.

If you're having trouble recalling a moment of Authentic Love, I'll give you a testimony from my own life – just this week, actually. Aisha decided that she wanted to set up a lemonade stand in front of our house. So we said ok, and while Hamza was busy setting up a tent and making a little stand out of his work shelves, I took her to the store to get lemons and sugar. After we set everything up, Aisha stood on the side of busy Kaneohe Bay Drive,

listening to her favorite music and hopping around with a homemade sign “HASSAN FAMLEY LEMONAD \$1”, while I sat next to her, reading a book.

To my great surprise, people stopped in droves – we even had small lines coming to buy Aisha’s lemonade. The new Hawaiian Restaurant staff that moved in next door came out and gave her a huge tip for a single cup of juice, saying local woman-run businesses should support other local woman-run businesses. Aisha was elated and told us it was “the best day of her life.”

Aisha counted out the small roll of money that she earned from her stand and took out part of it to give to me. “I want to help our family,” Aisha said. I laughed and told her the money was hers and Hamza and I make money doing our own work. We had a big family group hug. It was a nice day.

Hamza and I helped Aisha set up that lemonade because we love her and we want to see her thrive. Aisha wanted to give us some of the money she made because she loves us and wants to see us thrive, too – but what she gave us instead was pride in our tenacious, spunky little girl.

Authentic Love is an exchange or mutual investment that brings greater life into the other person. Aisha helped me be joyful that afternoon, and in exchange, I helped her be more confident. Authentic love happens with our kids when they challenge us to be more patient and selfless, and in exchange we instill in them curiosity and vibrance. Authentic love happens in our marriages when we mutually challenge each other to be more flexible and patient. Authentic love happens in our churches when we insist on caring for each other through both celebration and sorrow. Authentic love happens when our investment in each other blossoms new fruit from the vine of our origin of Love.

If we all invested in mutual exchanges that brought more life both to ourselves and those we connect with, the Authentic Love of the creator would shine through. Authentic Love happens when we use Him to bring out the most beautiful parts of both ourselves and those around us. Jesus is at work in my relationship with my daughter because we mutually agreed to blossom in each other what was encouraging and beautiful in ourselves. If authenticity reflects origin, and our origin is Love, then the beautiful things that we lift up in each other are the fulfillment of the fruit of His vine.

This church is valuable because it reflects the authenticity of lifting up beauty in the others around us, through all seasons of life. You all demonstrate Authentic Love in all your actions to and with each other. Jesus is reflected in how we act as Christians, and if we act with Authentic Love, that will shine through to others. To me, this is healthy proselytization that grows the fruit of Jesus’ vine – the authenticity to love instead of manipulate emotionally or detach logically.

We proselytize by reflecting the original, authentic love of our Creator. So, when you invite others to the church, or when you greet visitors at our new upcoming programs, remember to

do it in the spirit of Authentic Love. Invest in the mutual exchange of uplifting, encouraging, and growing. In our intentionally Authentic Love, may Jesus guide us to make new disciples in His name and sustain them with that Authentic Love until His Kingdom Come. Amen.