

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2025**  
**SERMON: RELEVANT**  
**SERMON SERIES PART 1: WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?**  
**SCRIPTURE: JOHN 5:1-15**  
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**John 5:1-15**

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] [b] 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

**Sermon: Relevant**

The lectionary gave me my favorite Jesus story today, so I jumped at the opportunity to preach on it. This is a message I’ve shared before with another community, and it remains one of my most cherished reflections—so I’m grateful to bring it to you today. This message is called “Relevant.” It is part 1 of 3 of an approaching Pentecost series on Discipleship, and what it means to be a disciple.

The reason we're concentrating on discipleship in the next few weeks is to give you your "why" about making time for our weekly discipleship groups and Alpha programs this summer. Our exploration begins with the topic of relevancy – *the ultimate "why" question – why do we do any of this church stuff together at all? Is it relevant?*

I don't think it's any secret among us that the church struggles with relevancy. We feel it in our weekly attendance. We feel it in our greying congregations. We feel it in repetitively volunteering for committees we've served on for years, perhaps at this point just because no one else will do it. We begin to feel weary of our years of service that seem to not result in the fruits that we want, and ask ourselves if our involvement in church is relevant.

In my early career, when I was in the Middle East assisting projects to build schools for refugee kids, I met some really extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. I met Syrian rebel soldiers taking up arms to fight against their dictatorship, professors leading classes on international law and conflict resolution, skilled UN workers, doctors without borders – all sorts of people with all sorts of tools to navigate and alleviate crisis. And I felt like I had walked into the situation with my flimsy MDiv and nothing but a willingness to learn and be present. Why are you here? I heard myself thinking. You have nothing to offer that is relevant.

When I came back to the US, I worked in a refugee resettlement office managing the employment program. Finally I felt relevant, in this secular organization with a job that had defined goals and outcomes! I had to place 6 people a week into jobs. Defined. Useful. Relevant.

But the problem was that the people I was placing into jobs had opinions, histories, families, a whole intricacy of self that railed against the narrative of "welcome to America, here's your packaging job for Amazon." And that's when the relevancy of the church made sense finally. While we were trying to fit people into boxes of employment, visa adjustment, english proficiency, and whatever else, the people themselves were trying desperately to retain the fullness of their own identities that had been ripped apart. I would go to someone's house to pick them up for an interview, and they didn't want to go to the interview, they wanted to cook me homemade injera on the floor of their apartment and talk about my earrings. Above all else, people yearn for connection and love. *Above all else, people yearn for connection and love, even and especially in places of threatened basic survival.* And in that moment, sitting on the floor of a subpar apartment surrounded by women sewing, cooking, and gossiping, I realized I was in church.

In being fully present with what gave those women life and joy, I was in church. In seeing them beyond the measurable numbers that the government contracts defined them by, I was in church. In letting go of my own agenda and saying what do you want to show me, what makes you come alive, I was in church. And I was in church in those moments because I have all of you, singing the same song and holding the same weight of vulnerable strength and compassionate love together. We are the church. We are relevant.

I carried this realization with me to my job at IHS. I came prepared knowing that I would be the only chaplain, surrounded by sharp and knowledgeable social workers, case managers, medical experts, and people of other incredible talents. I understood I would be carrying the weight of “why are you relevant” into this amazing organization that did great work with or without me.

I walked into my job at IHS holding the weight of the church’s sadness in feeling isolated, irrelevant, shrinking, tired.

But see, Jesus didn’t bring any medical equipment, questionnaires, or measurement tools with him when he healed the man at the pool. He didn’t bring with him incentives for the man to “try harder” or even provide any assistance or guidance for getting into the pool. Instead, all he asked was “Do you want to be made well?”

Now, the man at the pool was a grumbler. We get a lot of grumblers in social services and, frankly, in our churches. I can’t get in the pool, no one’s helping me, I’m in a lot of pain, et cetera. People like this are often why churches are hesitant to work with vulnerable populations like refugees or homeless folks, or “deal” with that grumbly congregant who seems to just want to complain, because the grumbling is a lot and we *don’t have the relevant tools to help*. We don’t have the medical or psychosocial tools to fix it. We just have a 5,000 year old book and some candles, maybe an occasional luncheon, sorry.

And then Jesus walks in, and asks the mentally ill gentleman covered in excrement who is sitting on the sidewalk, “Do you want to be made well?” Jesus asks the refugee who is frustrated that his hard earned work credentials from home don’t work in his new environment: “Do you want to be made well?” Jesus asks the 80 year old widow who comes to church every week and insults everyone that crosses her, “Do you want to be made well?”

Jesus didn't slam the brokenness with his opinions on how to fix it. Instead, he asks the brokenness what it wants. He asked the person behind the brokenness what they needed to come alive.

I carried John 5 with me into the door when I started at IHS. I knew that it was someone else's job at IHS to carry that man to the pool, to medicate his ailments, to document and file his progress. My job was to be vulnerable, to be present, to come without an agenda, and ask what the person grumbling at the poolside really, truly wanted. My job as a pastor is the massive honor and responsibility of inviting people into coming alive.

By the time I got to IHS, I had seen without a doubt that the folks there longed for an invitation to get up and walk. Like the folks in refugee camps, folks with chronic or degrading ailments, folks in our kupuna care homes, and the caretakers of all these types of vulnerable people – they live a life of constant examination: be this, do that, take these. And why? For what purpose? Unfortunately, we saw pretty consistently in these settings people would commit suicide when they found that their lives were just a repetitive function of filling out paperwork, taking medication, going to appointments, getting yelled at and discriminated against, repeat.

No one asked them if they wanted to be made well – it was demanded of them. Get your act together or else! Let me repeat that: no one asked them if they wanted to be made well. It was described to them how to do it, threatened to them, but rarely did someone look at them and simply ask, "Do you want to be made well? What makes you come alive?"

Get up and walk, your faith has made you well. I look back at the memories of my ministry over the years and see Jesus standing in those moments, commanding this to everyone around me while I wallowed in my own sense of irrelevancy.

I see Jesus sitting in the beige UNHCR tent in Southern Turkey with the Syrian widow who feels like she's paralyzed, and telling her, get up and walk. This is not the end of your journey. Come alive. This is the work of the church.

I see Jesus sitting on the lanai of the men's shelter at IHS with the schizophrenic meth addict, spiraling into his own delusional and anxious thoughts, and saying, get up and walk, you are not useless or unloved. There is more for you out there. Come alive. This is the work of the church.

I see Jesus calling those of us caring for very sick loved ones, those of us battling estrangement or addiction, those of us feeling tired, weak, and stuck in a repetitive cycle

of “what needs to be done,” and asking us what we need to truly get up and walk, to truly live beyond the confines of our brokenness.

I see Jesus standing in the pain, the trauma, the discomfort of all of us in the world, and not rushing to fix it. Not rushing to medicate it, or distract it, or hide from it. Instead he asks “Do you want to be made well? Are you ready to come alive?” This is the work of the church.

We are the church. We don’t always have the tools to fix, distract, or medicate. We’re not just a series of logistical meetings after a standard service that we do every week. Instead, we carry the call of something infinitely deeper—the invitation to get up and walk, to be made well. That’s one of the most meaningful parts of ministry here at Kailua Christian Church. We have lots of committee meetings about “nuts and bolts” things like building maintenance, volunteer capacity, and resource allocation. And those things matter. But at the heart of it, we do these “nuts and bolts” things not for their own sake, but because we care about each other and we care about God.

The most transformative work we do here isn’t just logistical—it’s spiritual. It’s when our church community leans into the deeper questions about who we are, who God is, and how we’re called to be in relationship and grow into the people standing up and walking into the wholeness He seeks for us. The best work happens when we create space to ask not just what people need, but what will make them whole.

I hope for each of us here that we find the courage to get up and walk ourselves. That we find the courage to enter the vulnerability of feeling irrelevant, having nothing to offer, or feeling incompetent, and get up and walk anyway. It’s in those uncomfortable spaces of having nothing to offer but love and hope that God’s magic happens.

Our upcoming discipleship and Alpha groups after church are an opportunity to do something besides the “nuts and bolts,” and instead to walk together purposefully into what makes each other get up and walk in faith and come alive in the Spirit. These groups are a chance to engage more deeply with the Spirit and with one another—not just organizing the practical parts of church life, but growing in our spiritual vitality and in the call that wakes us each morning. This is the heart of discipleship—not a job description or a list of church duties, but the calling to be present in love, to ask soul-healing questions, and to walk with others into the fullness of life God dreams for them. I invite you to join us, to take part in this journey of awakening and belonging, so that together we can live into what makes us come alive.

So I leave you with this question, beloved community – in whatever is holding your heart today, whatever you're desperately trying to fix, in your life, in your relationships, in our church, have you asked yourself if you want to be made well? Stop asking what makes you relevant and start asking what will make you come alive. Because, in the words of Howard Thurman: Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Amen.