

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, JUNE 15, 2025
SERMON: Justified by Faith, Transformed by Love
SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 5:1-5
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN

Romans 5:1-5

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Sermon: Justified by Faith, Transformed by Love

There's been a lot of argument over the history of Christianity about the statement here: "Justified by faith." I won't bore you with all the details of that longstanding theological beef among scholars and revolutionaries, but the basics are that Martin Luther, the man credited with beginning the Protestant revolution, added the word "alone," to Paul's phrasing from Romans.

History, politics, wars, and theological dissection of Paul's phrase from Romans 5:1 aside, the question begged here is – do we have to *do* anything to be faithful Christians, aside from simply *believe*?

Paul writes that since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. But then he goes on. He doesn't stop with belief. He says we *boast* in our sufferings. Why? Because suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope reveals God's love to us, which is the most important thing in the world.

The way Paul describes faith isn't passive, but instead, as a starting point that blossoms into endurance, character, and hope. Faith permeates us so deeply when we experience it that we can't help but be moved by it. Belief in Christ cracks something open—like a seed breaking through soil—and that seed grows. Faith may be what justifies us, but it never leaves us where we started. It changes what we do and how we do it. It begins in our hearts, but always bears fruit in the world.

This summer, our interns are meeting a series of Hawaiian Kahus, visiting Hawaiian landmarks like Iolani Palace and the Bishop Museum, and reading *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, learning about Queen Lili'uokalani's deep Christian faith. Queen Lili'uokalani is an excellent example of a person whose faith provided seeds that produced fruitful impact that echoes throughout the generations.

Now here was a woman whose world was crumbling—who had every reason to respond with bitterness or retaliation. But instead, she leaned more deeply into her belief in Jesus. Her faith didn't take her out of history—it drove her *into* it, with dignity, wisdom, and grace.

Lili'uokalani could have incited violent uprisings or organized a coup, which would have been reasonable reactions to the situation she found herself in. However, statistically (because you know I love statistics), we see that very often violent uprising doesn't work to achieve the goal of overthrowing oppression. The book "Why Civil Resistance Works"* outlines a widely researched study that only 26% of violent campaigns resulted successfully, in stark contrast to 53% of nonviolent resistance campaigns.

Most of these nonviolent resistance campaigns that freed the oppressed were led by people of faith, primarily followers of Jesus. Martin Luther King Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, and Oscar Romero accompany Queen Lili'uokalani as leaders who used Jesus' example of leading by faith as a foundational point of reference to accomplish huge and important transformations for their people through unfathomable circumstances.

Jesus himself was criticized and even killed for telling people to follow Him in peace, perseverance, and hope instead of violently uprising against the impending threat of Roman destruction. Yet His way—the way of the cross—became the most powerful revolution in history, not by wielding weapons, but by transforming hearts. The legacy of these faith-led leaders shows us that true strength lies not in domination but in endurance, not in vengeance but in justice grounded in compassion. Their lives echo the truth that following Jesus is not about escaping hardship, but entering into it with courage, dignity, and the kind of hope that refuses to be extinguished—even in the darkest of times.

Queen Liliuo'kalani *believed*, and that belief shaped through this how she held the Hawaiian people through one of the most traumatic seasons of their story. She translated the Psalms into 'ōlelo Hawai'i. She composed hymns in prison. She refused to renounce her faith or her people. Her belief bore fruit—through resistance, through love, and through the preservation of a people's soul.

And what we learn from her life is what Paul was saying: true belief is never idle. Justification by faith isn't a free pass to do nothing—it's a catalyst for everything. It gives

us the kind of peace that can face down injustice without becoming injustice. The kind of hope that doesn't wither in hardship. The kind of endurance that turns suffering into sacred strength.

So yes, we are justified by faith. But faith is not still. It's not silent. It grows. It acts. It transforms.

And that's what we pray for ourselves, and for our interns this summer—not just that we would believe, but that our belief would deepen with every experience, grow through every challenge, and echo out through every word and action we take. We pray that our faith would be more than something held in private or performed once on Sunday morning and then left idle throughout the week, but something that radiates in public with every breath we take. We pray that our faith shapes how we listen, how we serve, how we lead, and how we love. We pray that we, like Queen Liliuo'kalani and other leaders of faith before us, would become people whose lives bear witness to the kind of faith that plants seeds of peace in a world of conflict, lifts up the dignity of others in a time of division, and carries the enduring hope of Christ into every space we enter.

Amen.

*Chenoweth, E., & Stephan, M. J. (2011). *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict*. Columbia University Press.