

## KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

SUNDAY, JULY 20, 2025

SERMON: WHY AM I HERE?

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:34-40

LANCE SARQUILLA

### SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:34-40

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'<sup>a</sup> 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>b</sup> 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

### SERMON: Why Am I here?

I want to begin with a story.

Four weeks ago, I met a man in Kahili recovering from an automobile accident. At the time, he was staying in a house run by IHS. Most of you know what IHS is, but if you don't, IHS is a private nonprofit organization providing tailored care for those in crisis. One of their services includes temporarily housing people who are unhoused after medical procedures. As part of my internship here at Kailua Christian, I volunteer at IHS as a chaplain. To keep this individual anonymous, I'll call him Uncle Brad.

When you first meet Uncle Brad, you notice he's a bit taller than your usual local, older too, which is why we call him *Uncle*. Bandages covered his legs, likely from the accident. But what stood out most was his sweet smile. It was one of those smiles that scrunches the eyes and wrinkles the whole face. There was something joyful about him that made me instantly drawn to him. I had heard from a nurse earlier that Uncle Brad liked to smoke. So, conveniently, I pulled out a pack of cigarettes I brought with me just in case someone wanted one and offered him a cigarette. That's how our kinship began.

We talked story. I sat an arm's length away, both of us leaning in slightly. I asked him simple questions: "Where are you from?" "What's your story?" And with the space I offered, Uncle Brad took it. What started as a normal conversation quickly became unfamiliar. He jumped constantly between stories, first about his accident, then about being President of the United States, and even ending the Cold War. At first, I laughed along, thinking he was joking. But then came more stories, visiting other planets, absurd amounts of money stolen from him. And as I stared into his eyes, never breaking eye contact, it hit me, Uncle Brad might be schizophrenic. I didn't know what else to do except listen. After about 15 more minutes of following his grandeur stories, Uncle Brad paused and said, "I know I'm schizophrenic... but this is real to me."

I can't explain the "puzzledness" I felt. How could these stories be real? But as he continued, I simply looked back at him and began to pray, silently. I prayed that Uncle Brad would feel seen, heard, and loved in that moment. And when I finished praying for him in my mind, I began to listen more intentionally again and I saw that sweet, sweet smile again, this time as he told me about a Lamborghini he used to own. I left IHS that day asking, "Why am I here?" As a chaplain, I felt like a failure. I didn't talk about Jesus. I didn't pray out loud. I didn't offer a "solution." All I did was listen. And I was convinced I had failed. That I had no business being a chaplain. My question "Why am I here?" began to shift into something more cynical, "You shouldn't be here."

Even something more personal, this confronted me with the limits of my own assumptions about what ministry should even look like. It forced me to ask whether presence without explanation, without solution, is still obedience to God's call.

That same day, I processed my time with Uncle with Pastor Irene. I told her how much I struggled with Uncle Brad's grandiose stories. I felt stuck. I didn't want to lie and pretend I believed them, but I also didn't want to shut him down. In response, Pastor Irene offered some insight that gave me both understanding and empathy. She explained that for individuals living with schizophrenia, hallucinations and disorganized thinking can be frightening and overwhelming. Grandiose delusions, like those Uncle Brad expressed, can actually serve as a kind of coping mechanism, providing a sense of agency, safety, and even dignity. Believing oneself to be important or powerful might be the very thing that helps them boost their self-image. This reframed the way I understood Uncle Brad's stories, and the purpose of my role as chaplain. I began praying differently. I asked God to help me meet Uncle Brad again not with skepticism, but with deeper compassion.

Let's pause here and read from Matthew 22:36–40:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

So, the next week, I return to IHS. I step out of my car, and guess who I see almost instantly. Uncle Brad. Same big smile. Same request for a cigarette. I hand him one, and we start talking. That day, he had good news, “My case manager found me housing!” He was moving in that same day at 2 PM. We shared in his excitement, and I offered again what I could, a ministry of presence. Of listening. Before Uncle Brad left that day we shared one last conversation. He turned to me and said, “Thank you so much for listening to me. You have blessed me. And I believe in this next generation of young people because of you. God is working through you. Can I give you a blessing?” We prayed together, and I haven't seen him since.

So, I return to the question: Why are we here? Why am I at IHS? Why are you at Kailua Christian? Why are you working the job you're working? Why aren't you somewhere else? Whatever your version of the “why” is, I believe this passage from Matthew gives us a foundation, a direction, when we feel lost, uncertain, or unqualified. Let's sit with our passage a little longer. In context, the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus, testing Him to name one commandment as more important than the rest. Interestingly, it's a lawyer who asks the question. And if anyone knows how to turn a technicality into a charge, it's probably a lawyer. Yet Jesus understands the heart of the law too well for that. Instead of choosing one command over another, Jesus emphasizes the root of it all. He says: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.* And this is the foundation, the principle of the Law. And if you truly read this closely, it's not dismissive of the old law but expressive of the fruit and action of the law, which is to move us toward wholeness. Toward a loving relationship with God and one another.

Now, loving God with all that we are (heart, soul, mind), it's a clear call, even if we'll never do it perfectly. But this second part can be confusing: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* This doesn't mean you have to fully love yourself before you can love others. I don't think it's about waiting until you've arrived to become the person you've always wanted to be. I think what Jesus is getting at is something simpler, maybe even more practical. Just like you naturally care for your own needs, like eating when you're hungry, protecting yourself from harm, or even giving yourself grace, we are invited to extend that same kind of attention and care to someone else. Loving thy neighbor may look like compassion or empathy. And when we live rooted in this type of love, when we allow that love to lead us, it helps us respond to God's call, even when we don't know “why” we're being called. I had no

clue how to interact with Uncle Brad! Was I supposed to ask follow up questions to try to find a cohesive story? Was I supposed to challenge his marvelous stories? I didn't know what to do!

And some of you today may not know why you're here right now or what comes next. And that's okay.

But I'll stand as a witness to Christ and say this: You are where you are because you have been called to receive God's love. And from that abundance, you are called to love the people right in front of you. And most of the time, that is enough. That day at IHS, I had nothing to offer Uncle Brad but my ears and that was enough. How many of us are just longing to be listened to? How many of us need love in the form of someone's presence? And whatever gifts God has given you, words, listening, art, music, cooking, organizing, start with loving God first. Not because you can't love without God, but because **with** God, your love is steadfast, merciful, and gentle. And the people you interact with will remember you so clearly by the way you loved them. And there going to say, "there's something different about them...something different about their love."

One of the readings Pastor Irene has recommended to us interns is *Images of Pastoral Care*, by Robert C. Dykstra. The author shares several metaphors and images of what it can look like to care and love for others. Funny enough, the image of pastoral care I resonated with was called the "Circus Clown". I know right... What good can come from a circus clown?

The Circus Clown: "The clown is one who cannot feel at home among those who are so successful; they make him feel powerless, weak... He lives, as it were, on a different wavelength; he is one who, despite all his outward clumsiness and failure, nevertheless comes across to us as a man who comes close to what life is really about. He knows the meaning of love, of sorrow, of solidarity... We find him pathetic and laughable, but he represents something in ourselves."

I believe God has given you a creative way to embody this greatest commandment of love, and part of it is rooted in your story, your own wounds, and your own joy. A practical way you can find your story in God's bigger and greater story is asking yourself these three questions. And I'm going to challenge you to answer these this week.

1. Who is Christ to me? 2. Who am I? 3. Why am I here?

Answer these in your heart. Share them with a friend, a loved one, a co-worker. Don't look for the "right" answer, just be real. And let the Spirit meet you in your honesty. When I answered these questions recently, here's what I said:

1. Christ to me is a mystery, a hope, a teacher, and an adventure.
2. I am Wasak Bahay (my childhood nickname, *House Destroyer*), laughing, hard to work with, and enough.
3. I am here to laugh and smile with others, to adventure with people, to be remembered by my love in Christ... and to go surfing.
- 4.

If I had two more hours with you, I could tell you about how each of these has led me to a greater understanding of who God is. But practices like these can be helpful to remind us that we are actively part of God's story. Asking ourselves these questions with the Holy Spirit in mind will lead us not just to a point of recollection, but revelation. This kind of reflective questioning isn't just a spiritual exercise, you can also find it in the scriptures. Think back to Genesis. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit and hide in shame, God calls out in Genesis 3:9, "Where are you?" I'm not convinced God was asking because He didn't know their location. I think that question was for them. God knew exactly where they were, but Adam and Eve no longer did. They had lost a sense of themselves in their disobedience, and God's question was an invitation to return them to awareness. Or Matthew 16, when Jesus turns to His disciples and asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Some answered with the crowd's opinion calling Him a prophet, Elijah, or John the Baptist. But Simon Peter, through that

moment of reflection, responds with a personal conviction, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." It was through the question that Peter arrived at a "come to Christ moment", through reflection, comes revelation.

So, try these three questions out today! And if you can, do it with other people and share with one another what came up. As we close, I want us to remember that God has called us beautifully to be followers of Jesus, which is not about having everything figured out. But is everything about the invitation to love and to be loved. To begin again. To wake up every morning and say, "I may not fully know why I'm here, Lord, but help me love You. Help me love whoever is in front of me today." This is the very heart of *the greatest commandment*. And when we let that love shape us, even in our uncertainty, even in our questions, we are walking in alignment with Christ. Jesus tells us in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." In James 1:22, we're reminded: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers."

Amen.