

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 17, 2025
SERMON: WHAT NOW?
SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 8:18-30
REV. IRENE WILLIS HASSAN**

Romans 8:18-30

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **19** For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. **20** For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? **25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. **30** And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Sermon: Now What?

Today we release our 2025 interns from service. Like last year, this moment brings up the question, both for the church and for the interns departing back home: *Now what?*

Last year after the interns left, we spent time together reflecting on the experience. To follow up, we held a church retreat to learn more about our spiritual gifts, communal mission, and how we wanted to manifest those things into the next internship cycle fruitfully.

We reflected not only on ourselves, but the gifts that each of our interns left behind. Before they left both last year and this year, we asked them for recommendations based on their experiences with us and what they've seen work in their home contexts. Often, their ideas exceeded what our small—but mighty—community could realistically handle, but we appreciated the ideas and we carefully prioritized what to focus on.

So let's take a moment to talk about what they've collectively recommended. I think our interns have fallen into two main groups. First, those who grew up in the church but experienced a faith crisis that led them to seminary, seeking new ways to understand their religious identity as adults. Second, those who came to faith later—like Avery and Lance—converted through strong high school evangelism programs and were subsequently motivated to serve the Lord.

Avery and Lance encouraged us to create meaningful community spaces beyond traditional Sunday services, which can feel intimidating or distant to new believers or curious outsiders. Avery was brought to Christ by a young adults retreat she was invited to; Lance came to Christ through an invitation into Young Life. Neither of them just wandered into a Sunday church service and decided to change their lives from that experience, which I think is worth emphasizing. In response to the feedback from stories like these, we launched the Keiki Drama Camp, designed as a safe, welcoming way for unchurched families to engage with the Gospel without the usual “churchy” feel.

The other six interns raised in the church pursued seminary or theology educations to rethink the faith they were taught as children. Many found their earlier experiences inadequate during personal crises or simply wanted to explore different expressions of church (two of the eight interns so far have been PKs “Pastor’s Kids”— Safiyah and Eliana, and wanted to see something other than Dad’s church!). Their feedback pushed us to step outside familiar routines—embracing tools like Instagram and QR codes, and experimenting with new worship elements like poetry workshops, even when these changes challenged our understanding of a spiritual community.

We adopted many of their suggestions with integrity because we deeply care about nurturing the next generation’s faith. At the same time, we stay true to who we are and discern which changes fit our context. Throughout it all, we have leaned into the Spirit’s guidance, stayed faithful to the gifts God has given us, kept Christ at the center, and worked tirelessly for His mission.

Yet, we haven’t seen the growth that we hoped would happen in the way that we wanted it to happen. While we were blessed to welcome 14 new members in 2024-2025, it would appear that our 2025-2026 season will not be bringing any additional faces into our congregation to worship and serve alongside us so that our mission in Jesus’ name continues to grow.

So, then – *now what?*

The question applies to our departing interns as well. They are walking away from what was likely an intense experience with us this summer. We didn't ask them to do simple things like just plug into already existing ministries, but rather, asked them to creatively develop and imagine new ones that involve super difficult to work with populations like homeless people, children, and a church conference that is imploding on itself over its overtly colonist history (albeit not at the same time ... usually). While we gave them a skeleton framework on how to do any of those types of ministry, much of their realtime experience with these complex situations instead opened huge chasms for discomfort and now at the end we are giving them a lei and a hug as they hop back on planes with perhaps more questions than answers.

So, then – *now what?*

In Romans 8, we're brought into a similar world of anxiety over the vast complexity of ministry as the Apostle Paul faces a major turning point in his own story. By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, he'd been traveling across the Middle East and Asia Minor for over 20 years, spreading the Gospel and planting churches. Paul seems aware at this point that his mission may be shortly coming to an end. While his work was important and wonderful, he was aware that he'd made a lot of enemies along the way and his life was in danger. Paul handed the letter of Romans we read today to the disciple Phoebe, who delivered it to the churches in Rome, and then shortly after, Paul was arrested by Roman authorities and executed by them a few short years later.

We see the tone and message of Romans 8 as having the same anxious undercurrent of what we might be experiencing today: whether it's anxiety over the church, anxiety over transitioning back home and wondering what that crazy summer in Hawaii was really all about, or anxiety about what is happening in our individual lives—because nothing is ever really as we expect, is it?

2,000 years ago, Paul saw the writing on the wall that his evangelism days were coming to an end before he was ready. He had a vision of expanding the Gospel into Spain, which never ended up happening because he was arrested and killed instead. At the point of this writing, he probably knew that those dreams were being cut short and he might have to accept a different direction, and he may have been thinking – *now what?*

Paul says in Romans 8 that creation itself is groaning – longing for freedom, waiting for the children of God to be fully revealed. We carry a restless hope, an eager longing for redemption, for something greater than what we can see or touch now. But, we all know that things don't always go as planned. Sometimes our experiences leave us with more questions than answers. Sometimes the great “why” of life is never fully satisfied.

So we wait for those answers, and the waiting is hard. Waiting asks us to be present with how God is using us “now” while also not answering the “not yet.” And yet, Paul reminds us that this waiting is not

without purpose. The Spirit is with us, helping us in our weakness, interceding on our behalf even when we don't have the words to pray. God is working in all things for the good of those who love Him.

So, now what? What do we do when the future feels unclear? When the fruit of our labor isn't yet visible? When the interns leave, and the momentum feels uncertain? When the church feels small and the mission feels overwhelming?

Over the past two years, we've taken the lessons our interns have given us to heart. We rejoice with those like Lance and Avery, whose powerful coming-to-Christ stories inspire us to create safe, para-church spaces where others might encounter the Gospel and have that same "aha" moment. And we walk alongside people like Jacob, Marina, Safiyah, Abigail, Darby, and Eliana—those whose early experiences with institutions like ours left them hurt—as they navigate the "now what" season of their faith journey. In all of it, we've sought to pass on the Gospel as faithfully as we can, trusting that God will carry it further and use it to transform lives, just as He has in ours.

But we also know, like Paul, that none of us get to write the end of the story. And maybe, like Paul, the story ends with some kind of temporary death (literally for Paul; figuratively for us). Yet, Paul's writing in that letter to the Romans lives on, inspiring generation after generation in hope and courage.

We hold on to that hope. We remember that we are being shaped and formed—"conformed to the image of His Son." Our work, our struggles, our groans, our prayers are not in vain. They are part of a bigger story, a divine purpose unfolding in time.

Our Book of Romans at Kailua Christian Church is a letter to these 8 interns, and all the young pastors we've nurtured across the decades before them, and all the children of the drama camp and all the people who have walked through these doors seeking comfort and grace for nearly a century, telling those people that what happened to them here mattered profoundly even if we don't see the full picture right now. The Spirit leads us step by step, often through discomfort, through waiting, and through growth. Our task is to stay faithful, to lean into the Spirit's guidance, trusting that He knows where our words may fail and leads us anyway.

So, to the interns going out from here: take this hope with you. Carry it into your next steps. Remember that your time here was part of God's greater work in you and through you.

And to our church family: continue to pray, to dream, and to serve with patience and faithfulness. Our future is in God's hands, and His glory will be revealed in us—more than we can imagine or hope for.

Now what? We wait with hope. We live with faith. And we trust that God, who began a good work in us, will carry it to completion in His time. Amen.