

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday, January 4, 2026
“Inside Regret”
Scriptures: Numbers 20:1-13 & Jeremiah 49:16
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan

Numbers 20:1-13

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

2 Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. **3** They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! **4** Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? **5** Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

6 Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. **7** The LORD said to Moses, **8** “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”

9 So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as he commanded him. **10** He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” **11** Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”

13 These were the waters of Meribah,[a] where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he was proved holy among them.

Jeremiah 49:16

The terror you inspire
and the pride of your heart have deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rocks,
who occupy the heights of the hill.
Though you build your nest as high as the eagle’s,
from there I will bring you down,”
declares the LORD.

[Video footage of Red Sea and Wadi Musa]



A 4-minute video is shown from Pastor Irene's trip to the Holy Land. We traveled the route between the Red Sea where Moses parted the waves, into the desert where the Israelites wandered 40 years, to the Canyon of Kadesh, where Miriam and Aaron died and Moses brought water from a rock in his demonstration of faithfulness to God. The current site names are respectively called "Aqaba" (Red Sea, Moses' crossing point called "Strait of Tiran"), "Wadi Rum" (Wilderness of Zin), and "Petra" (Kadesh/Mt Hor). If you'd like access to the video footage, please call the office and we will find a way to get it to you.

SERMON: INSIDE REGRET

I think we often talk about January as a month full of hope and promise, a time to get off on the “right foot” for a New Year.

Honestly, I have a much more conflicted relationship with January. My feelings are closer to the old hymn *In the Bleak Midwinter*. January feels less like a fresh start and more like a reckoning. We make resolutions largely out of regret for what we didn't do or didn't do well the year before. All of this happens while we are taking down our Christmas lights, packing away the magic, and settling into the quieter, grayer rhythm of the rainy season. Even in Hawai'i, we feel that seasonal chill that slows us down and dampens our usual energy.

Regret is a very human experience. Maybe we regret health decisions, financial decisions, relationship decisions, or simply moments we wish we could redo. We look back at 2025 and think, “It didn't have to happen that way.” And now it's a new year, which means we tell ourselves we can make up for last year's regrets by making better decisions this time around.

Here's the bad news. You are probably going to regret some things again this year. You will make mistakes. Things will not go according to plan. You will have bad days in 2026. If you need a little schadenfreude to cope with that reality, Numbers 20 is an excellent place to start.

By this point in the Israelites' journey out of Egypt, regret has become their primary emotional state. If you look at the map we saw earlier, you'll notice that the Israelites took almost the worst route possible to reach the Promised Land. Along the Mediterranean coast was the Way of Horus, a direct path through fertile land with water, food, and shade. Instead, they crossed the Red Sea straight into one of the most barren wildernesses on earth and then wandered back and forth through it for an entire generation, until the leadership quite literally died off.

Talk about regret.

What began as the miracle of the parted sea ends in bitterness at Kadesh, modern-day Petra, where faith collapses under thirst and hunger. I am fairly confident that whatever you regret from 2025, or will regret in 2026, does not come close to the scale of regret carried by the Israelites in Numbers 20.

As I walked through Kadesh, imagining an old, exhausted Moses dragging a weary people behind him along those same paths, I started thinking about how much history that place holds. Kadesh was a boiling point again and again throughout Scripture. It was conquered repeatedly, mentioned in Isaiah, Kings, Jeremiah, and elsewhere. It raises the question: why? Why fight over a rock city in the middle of one of the harshest deserts on earth, especially when Jerusalem existed with its valleys, water, and defensible hills?

The likely answer is that the original inhabitants, the Edomites, were astonishingly skilled at

surviving there. They mastered irrigation in a place where water should not exist. They carved channels into the rock to collect rainwater and built reservoirs that sustained crops, people, and animals. They turned stone into life. When Jerusalem fell and the Israelites fled, they fled to Kadesh because it was hidden, protected, and alive with water in the wilderness.

Now, none of that life remains. Petra stands as a breathtaking ghost city. The irrigation systems still exist, but they no longer sustain a people. As I stood there, looking at a city nearly 9,000 years old, thinking about Moses striking the rock and Isaiah condemning Edom centuries later, one phrase kept returning to me: "You can't take it with you."

We say that phrase to remind ourselves that wealth, power, and conflict do not last forever. And it's true. The arguments between prophets and nations that felt like life and death at the time are now history lessons. The Israelites' suffering in the wilderness is now a moral story we read, not a reality we witness.

And yet, we keep telling these stories.

Why?

Because even though the people are gone, the stories still matter. They matter because they are not ultimately stories about regret. They are stories about God meeting human beings *inside* their regret. Anger, sorrow, exhaustion, and disappointment still echo in the canyons of the Wilderness of Zin, but so does resilience. So does provision. So does God.

The Israelites did not wander in vain. The desert did not destroy them. God used what already existed, even the ingenuity of the Edomites, even the stubborn rock itself, to sustain God's people. Moses did not create water from nothing. God drew life out of what was already there, shaped by time, failure, and survival.

That is the heart of the story for us, too.

Yes, we should strive to do better every year. Yes, we should learn from our mistakes. But the deeper truth is this: the things we regret are not detours from the story God is telling in us. They are part of it.

We tend to treat regret like something to get over quickly. We promise ourselves we will do better next time, and then we rush forward, hoping the past will stay behind us. But Scripture does not work that way. God does not erase the wilderness years. God does not pretend the wandering never happened. God tells the story honestly, including the failures, the fear, the exhaustion, and the loss of faith along the way.

The desert becomes part of who the people are.

And in the same way, your regrets are not simply evidence of what went wrong. They are

evidence of where you were shaped. They show you what mattered to you. They show you where you were vulnerable, where you were trying, where you were learning how to survive with what you had at the time.

Just like the Edomites learned how to draw water from stone, just like Moses learned how to trust God in a place where nothing should have grown, God is still working with what already exists in you. Even the dry places. Even the decisions you wish you could redo. Even the seasons you would rather forget.

Reflection is not about reliving shame. It is about noticing where God was present when you did not yet have the words for it. It is about seeing that the wandering was not wasted time, but formative time. Time when faith was stretched, endurance was built, and dependence on God became less theoretical and more real.

So as you move into this new year, do not rush past your regrets. Sit with them. Listen to what they reveal. Ask what they have taught you about yourself, about others, and about God. Trust that the story God is building in you includes both the striking of the rock and the water that flowed from it.

Because God does not just meet us at the destination. God meets us in the wandering. And when we look back with honest reflection, we begin to see that even there, even then, God was still creating life.

Amen.