

“The Wind Calls Us Beloved”
1st Sunday after the Epiphany
Virtual Liturgy

January 10, 2021

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Iao United Church of Christ

Genesis 1:1-5
Mark 1:4-11

Poem – “Into the Wind” by Kristia S.

*“I the dandelion,
Am I a friend or foe?
Flower or weed?
Does it really matter how I am seen?”*

*At first, I’m a yellowish flower.
Many in number, but none the same.
I tell you,
All of us have a different scene.
But a common root.*

*Most call me a weed.
Very few call me a flower.
Aren’t I rooted like that of a rose?
Don’t I have color like a sunflower?*

*But you still call me a weed...
Hear my dande – lion roar!*

*Then I blossom into something more.
An adventure just waiting.
A vast plant that’s destined for more.
My seeds have appeared.*

*I am ready to soar!
Wanderlust has always been in my roots.
Aching, wishing, and daring to travel!
Oh, my fate is bout' to unravel!*

*Destined to move.
Fated to see.
My fate is sealed!*

*Unlike other flowers.
I scatter into the wind.
Watch my seeds fly.*

*I no longer need to defend.
For I have kissed the sunlit sky.”*

Water is one of the most powerful elements in nature. In our first reading in Genesis – we get an image of God sweeping over the water as God begins the creation story we know in the Bible. Part of this creation is the idea of light and darkness. But I believe that in this part of creation, darkness is different than what we know of as dark evil. This kind of darkness helps us settle in for rest. This darkness gives our human bodies a chance to heal, to recover from the busy-ness of the day, the stress of work we endure during the light. What is good is when we use the light – our light for “good” in our world we live in today.

In the early antiquity period – the early people could not have imagined the roundness or the vastness of earth. They focused more on the environment around them. What they could experience with their senses. From chaos – they experienced a God – like do today – a God that is constantly creating, a God that is constantly changing, and a God that is in motion with nature, with our environment. Our humanness is then in sync with our world and with our environment around us.

I recall when I was in the Army, whenever we left the confines of Fort Drum, New York and arrived at another training area, like Panama or Europe, we had to wait a week in order for our bodies to get climatized with the new environment. We are used to our environment here in Hawaii, but when I visit my Village in New Mexico, it takes a while for my body to get used to going from a humid to a dryer environment.

As “the created” – we then have a purpose. Our task as we grow is to find that purpose. Our purpose may not be like everyone else’s purpose – nor should we expect as such. I have said this many times before, God does not create robots, each one of us is created with a specific purpose, specific spiritual gifts. God calls each one of us “beloved” and created for a unique purpose. Here is

the thing fellow beloveds – like the dandelion in the poem this morning – we may be seen as a flower or a weed, yet we are all rotted like that of a rose. In our United Church of Christ denomination motto – “God is still speaking” – means that just as God spoke into creation the light and darkness, the day and night and the first humans – God is still speaking to us today. God is still creating today. God is still calling out to us as not only beloved, but as “very good.” When we find ourselves in darkness – God calls us to the light of a new day, of newness to do what is “good” for a world in need.”

I’m recalling a story by a Pastor who wrote about he and his wife’s experience at Yosemite Falls at the Yosemite Valley in California where a then, “20-year-old young man had gone beyond the viewing area to a rock platform off to the side and closer to the falls, where for safety’s sake the park rangers would rather people not go. For a long time, this young man sat on that rock platform, being splashed by the cold spray and wind. He stood up, attempting to shield his eyes from the spray, and tried to look up at the water coming down. Then he raised his arms up in a gesture that seemed to be one of celebration and joy. When at last, he had enough drenching he picked his way back over the wet rocks to the

pathway. His soaked clothes clung to him, dripping, and his water-filled shoes made a squishing sound with every step. His face was red and numb with cold, but he was laughing and exuberant. “God, I can’t believe it.” He was almost shouting over the roar of the water, but to no one in particular. “God, what an experience! I’ll never forget this as long as I live! I’ve never felt like this before. Oh, God! It’s so awesome!”

The Pastor continues to write with – his frequent mention of God seemed to be more an expression of emotion and exhilaration than anything religious, but there was clearly some theological implication to what had happened. He went on down the trail waving and smiling at the people who were coming toward him, looking rather surprised as he slogged by them leaving a trail of water behind. It had clearly been an experience more deeply moving and unique than for most of the people who would probably look a couple of minutes and maybe snap a picture or so and then move on. From his excitement it is likely he would never forget that day. Undoubtedly, he would tell of it many times to others who would listen. The Pastor ends his story with – and one might even surmise that in years to come he will tell it all again to yet undreamed-of children and maybe even grandchildren.”

We can look up and try to shield our eyes, but our baptism calls us to open our eyes into a new way of living. Into living out our Christian call to walk with Christ. Walk like Christ. Our task for our world today is how do we be like Christ during a pandemic?

How do people see Jesus in us – through our words and action? The meaning of our baptism unfolds throughout our life. Again, water becomes an important element that is used to not only cleanse the outer body, but the inner soul. Mark reminds us today the call from John to the Jordan River beloveds. You see, it's not like Jesus just suddenly appeared at the Jordan River one day. It was a 30-year journey. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature as part of his preparation before beginning his ministry. In this particular story in Mary, Jesus sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove onto him. Jesus is the one that hears the voice from heaven and claimed as Son, claimed as Beloved – and one in which God is well pleased with. In some of the other Gospels, it is John that gives witness.

Let us close with this beloved. Just like the 20-year-old young man in the story this morning, we are in constant awe and wonder of God's creation and call to a point of shouting "Oh, God! It's so

awesome!” When we remember our baptism or reflect upon it, maybe we feel the excitement of like this young man – dripping, soak and wet as we emerge on the other side of our cleansing baptismal waters. As we, like Christ, continue to grow in wisdom and stature, may we always remember that God continues to create in our world today. That God calls us to be co-creators of ideas, of tasks, of our call for our world today. May the Word in each of us continue to Create and put into practice – our mustard seed ideas, our unique gifts for our world in need of something new through our own baptismal call. God says to us – “For you are my Iao Church, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.