

“Is It I Lord? Speak!”
2nd Sunday after the Epiphany
Virtual Liturgy
January 17, 2021
Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
Iao United Church of Christ

1st Samuel 3:1-10
John 1:43-51

Poem – “God Is Speaking” by George C. Clements

*“Can you hear God speaking?
God’s talking to you now.
If you don’t it’s because you’re not listening
Or you don’t understand how.
The whisper of the wind,
The rustle of the breeze blown leaves,
The patter of the rain,
God’s voice is all of these.
The smile of a stranger,
The sunshine in the morn,
It’s the twinkle of the stars above
As another babe is born.
The Lord’s language is simplicity,
Not made of nouns and verbs.
It’s in the blooming of rose,
It’s in the growing of the herbs.
God’s words are in this beauty,
Seen only by the wise.
It’s what we take the time to view,
And what we will recognize.*

*Our Creator gave us everything,
We need not ask for more.
Give God thanks for what we have,
Give God thanks for what's in store.”*

Hannah was an Israelite barren woman who had no children. Yet she was faithful to God and in her beliefs. She prayed:

“O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt look on the affliction of thy maidservant...but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.”

Later on, Hannah gave birth to a son and she named him Samuel. Samuel served God and was taught by the chief priest of the temple at Shiloh. He later began to serve under the supervision of Eli.

When I began this journey – first ordained as a Deacon, and then as a Pastor, I was astounded that scripture or any religious literature or reading had decreased in many households throughout his nation. An already low number, one would think that with many people having to stay home or social distance that the number would go up-but instead it has dropped even further. “And the word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no frequent vision.”

One of the areas I have studied has been in the youth population. Amongst this population, the numbers of scripture reading or any theological study are even lower. Yet, beloveds, even at a low number, the Bible is still among the most read in the adult population for those who do continue to study scripture. It is still the most relied upon when it comes to influencing humanities way of life. Yet, it is one that is also misused, misquoted, and misinterpreted by many. Youth have been the most skeptics when it comes to not only the Bible, but also the Koran, the Torah, and the Book of Mormon. In my findings, many of the Youth that I have engaged with had never read the Bible at home. Most of what they know has been snippets from TV, parents, grandparents or the occasional Sunday worship visit. When I visit churches, I always look around and ask myself – “where are the youth?”

When I first arrived here at Iao Church, I was glad to see that this church was engaging the youth. We can do more, and I hope to do that once we are able to gather again. The church must take on the role of Eli and keep our youth engaged in scripture – through words and actions.

Here is the key, church – we cannot approach our youth with “we have all the answers you’ll need.” We cannot approach the

youth of today with “I have work for you to do” without some sense of appreciation. We must be like “partners” with our youth. We must be willing teachers as well as willing learners to and from them. If we use Scripture as a guide – our youth will not see nor experience a silent God.

Why is engaging our youth so important Iao Church? Eli’s two sons had violated God's Torah and had done evil in God’s sight. There are times when we believe God is punishing us for some reason, hence God’s silence. Some might believe that God uses a plague as punishment. We must be careful beloveds not to fall prey to the idea of retribution theology. We sin, they sin – therefore God punishes. That type of an angry – vengeful – idea of God is what has caused many to leave the church entirely. We must examine our whole life as to why things happen. We drink, we smoke, we drive unsafe, we do not wear a mask, we do not social distance, we participate in large gatherings – those are repercussions that has nothing to do with God – but everything to do with our behavior. There are consequences for our actions and for our behavior.

I honestly believe that our youth must be kept engaged so that they learn that good and bad behavior has consequences. If we do

not walk in Christ – with Christ in our lives and in the life of the whole church – there will be someone else teaching our children. Like those who broke into the Capitol where some have made the claim that they did so in the name of Christianity. A photo I saw was someone leaning on a cross. I say the cross was as empty as the presence of Christ on that day. Christ would not seek to destroy human life for the sake of falsehoods or one man who has clearly demonstrated – gluttony, greed, wrath, lust, laziness, envy and pride. Surely, we would not want our youth to think that one man is a great example of Christian living. Surely, we do not want our youth to think that those who invaded the US Capitol are great examples to live by. As I was watching with sadness and with a sense of horror as the events of the day unfolded and remember the events the last four years, I was recalling the words in the book of Proverbs 6:16-19.

“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes (meaning blatantly and disdainfully proud), a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.”

Beloveds, this pretty much summarizes the last four years for me. We have prayed, we have waited with hopefulness and we will continue to pray. But we cannot sit by and allow our youth to think that “these events” of the past few weeks are the “Christian” example to follow because there is nothing Christ-like in harming and killing of innocent lives. There is nothing Christ-like in hating others that disagree with our own viewpoints to a point in which we would cause harm to them. There is nothing Christ-like in replacing Christ himself with someone who has clearly demonstrated the seven deadly sins.

So, we close with this beloveds. Let us continue to be the church that leads our youth by Christ’s example: be kind to one another even if we disagree, feed each other in times of great need, take care of each other. Check in on our Kupuna and those who are feeling lonely. Check in on our Youth and make sure they are doing well. And most of all Iao Church, let us be imitators of God as beloved children of God and walk-in-love. Let us engage our youth in all we do so that they will walk in the path of Christ. If we do not take the time to do that, they may walk in someone else’s path and example.

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