

**“Acknowledging Our Fear and Letting Go”**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**June 21, 2020**

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**Iao United Church of Christ**

**Romans 6:1-11**

**Matthew 10:24-39**

Let us pray: Most loving God of all people, a God beyond labels, a God of all humanity. I pray for the health of all who join us from our House Churches and our virtual brothers and sisters from all over the world. I pray for their families, friends and all their loved ones. May they always know and feel how much they are valued and how priceless they are in your eyes – Amen and Amene.

Both times in becoming a father, it was one of the greatest joys seeing my sons born and holding them in my arms. Each one with their unique features. As they grew older, their demeanor and personalities were different, their attitude towards life became their own. My son Steven is for the most part, calm, up to a point, but my son Cody, poor boy, has his father’s demeanor and personality, but still distinct in his own way. My greatest fear was would I be able to handle such precious gifts

from God? We all know that our children do not come with an “Owner’s Manual” but one thing many do come with – grandparents, parental figures, people that love them unconditionally regardless of blood line. Would I have the necessary gifts to raise these amazing gifts from God to be respectable young men? The greatest fear I had to overcome was – what if I failed? Then what? What is the value of being a father or a father figure, or a parental figure if I fail?

There comes a time in our life when we want to count for something, when we want our lives to have meaning and value. Our problem with our virtual gathering or our House Churches is that it may hinder the idea of “value.” Are we counting for something? Is our purpose in life at this moment counting for something? Are we still “somebody” that makes or is making a difference in our world, in the lives of our children or in our community? If our value really means something – then what if we fail? What happens if we try something new and we fail Church? Fear takes over and consumes us – we may sink into our isolation of our House Churches – then what?

The Greek word for “value” is *diafero*, which also shares a root with another Greek word, *diaferonta*, which translates

“thing that really matters.” It does not matter if my sons didn’t hit the baseball correctly, what really matters is the time spent with them. Beloved church – beloved virtual community – in the eyes of God – we are what really matters – we ALL are what really matters, ALL of our lives matter, we ALL have value. Going back to my message from last Sunday – yes – “ALL lives matter, blue lives matter.” Black lives matter does not devalue any other life – it means that we as a whole – must lift up and support our brothers and sisters who are hurting – who are angry – who need to know that their lives have value – that their lives matter. These are fathers and father figures who are probably wondering if they are making a difference in the lives of their children, if they are valued by the community, they live in for the gifts they contribute to society.

A French guy named Alain de Botton, writes – and I am going to paraphrase here – “you and I have what all yearn to have.” Every adult life is defined by two quests - the quest for sex and the quest for status. These two quests fall under the category of love, and in both cases, they have to do with desire, the desire to be noticed. We yearn to have respect, to be the object of others' concern, to have our views heard, and even to

have our failings indulged.” Beloved community, I believe this is precisely what Jesus is announcing we have when he declares that we have value! “You are of more value than many sparrows.” We ALL matter beloved community. Botton continues with “when people like us experience this kind of attention, we flourish.” When we acknowledge each other’s worth – and give God thanks and praise for one another – for each other’s gifts – we flourish – the church flourishes. When we encourage our children as fathers, as mothers, as parental figures – they flourish. When we acknowledge our fears and learn to let go – and learn to let God – we flourish – even from our House Churches and out there in our virtual world.

As children of God – loved by God – valued as a precious child of God – when we acknowledge that of ALL people – we will flourish. To flourish, the dictionary tells us, is a verb that describes the reality of blossoming, vigorous growth, and thriving. With Jesus’ proclamation of our value, that we all matter to God, you and I are now set free to flourish, we are set free to blossom, and we are set free to thrive. Beloved church, we are set free to make mistakes, fall flat on our faces, help each other up, help each other let go of our fears and get

ourselves ready for the next journey in life. When a whole community flourishes – we value each other’s gifts, each other’s opinions and remember Matthew 7, verse one – “remove the log from your own eye first” type of approach.

Beloved community, beloved church, I believe our self-worth – the value we are given by God is the trust to do this ministry, the trust to give us this call we have talked about for the past few weeks – even if it seems different from what we have been used to. It is not a “burden” from God. If we see ourselves as God sees us – we can handle any virus, we see the value in ourselves when we reach out to those in need in our community who are hungry, who need to talk with someone. The burden we place on ourselves is “fear” or we place it on someone else – misery loves company. We project our fear onto others – while God is trying to value your gifts and theirs to overcome burdens. Our own fear is what keeps us from flourishing. You have heard me say this many times church – in the eyes of God – we are All “somebody.” Let us not fall into the trap – that ALL doesn’t mean ALL for God does not exclude and neither should we. We are all somebody, we are all valued and cherished – all having a purpose. Our Kupuna are not

burdens, our children and youth are not burdens – they are gifts, they are beloveds – they all matter to God so should matter to the church. You have heard me say many times that each of us are gifted with spiritual gifts. How we use those gifts is our free will. We learn from our mistakes and experiences as we move forward in life – so too will our children.

There is a story about a farm boy who wondered what would happen if he twisted the tail of a mule? So, one day he tried it. And now they say about him, he is not as pretty as he used to be, but he's a whole lot wiser. When I was a young man, probably in Junior High School, I wondered what my life would be like if I followed society's and my culture's views of what I should be and do. I took a detour from being my authentic self now years later, I'm a father, grandfather, enjoy flourishing in my second career, like that farm boy, I'm not as pretty as I used to be, but I am a lot wiser. When I allowed God's call to flourish in me – I saw the great value and worth in myself. God's plan for me was to serve this amazing church we call Iao United Church of Christ that is still learning, growing in our faith and flourishing in our call, even when we make mistakes.

So, I would like to close with this story beloveds. It really speaks about our fears. It is a story about “Satan who one day was having a yard sale. He thought he would get rid of some of his old tools that were cluttering up the place. So, there was the tools of gossip, slander, adultery, lying, greed, power-hunger, and more, all laid out on the tables. Interested buyers were crowding the tables, curious, handling the goods. One customer, however, strolled way back in the garage and found on a shelf a well-oiled and cared-for tool. He brought it out to Satan and inquired if it was for sale. “Oh, no!” Satan answered. “That’s my tool. Without it I could not wreck the church! It’s my secret weapon exclaimed Satan.” “But what is it?” the customer inquired.

“It’s the tool of discouragement,” Satan said.

Indeed! The man replied.

Beloved Iao Church – beloved virtual world – let us not get discouraged in not being able to see one another in person or worship together in a Sanctuary. Let us not fear and let us let go of our burdens that keep us from seeing our full potential through our House Churches. We must remain focused – see the value and worth in ourselves and in others. Let our lives flourish

with the gifts we are given for the sake of our ministry and our call. Fathers, father figures, be well and be blessed.

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