

“House Churches Feed the Hungry”

9th Sunday after Pentecost

August 2, 2020

Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor

Iao United Church of Christ

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:13-21

Poem: *“LET US FEED THE POOR”* by MATLOOB BOKHARI

My love
I am in unbearable pain
Mix not water
Pour today the pure wine to the brim
Play sweet winged music
Sing healing song of love
Lay your white arm as a soft pillow
So the dreamer of dreams may sleep calmly
In the deep darkness of dead night
And may not see the suffering of unjust world
Where murderous poverty has opened its jaw
Where sick and pale babes are without food
Where purists are shedding the innocent blood
Where widows are moaning from sunrise to sunset
Where beautiful maidens are raped and left to sorrows
Where orphans are weeping in the cold roaring wind
Where poor babes are wandering without loaf of bread
Where artistically cruel rich are suppressing the slaves
My love!
You are the only lamp in the darkness
Let us say farewell to lying hypocrites
Let us feed starving poor!
Let us feel the bliss

“And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.” If we put this passage into context – Matthew wants to point out here that the five

thousand number is not a complete number. It is missing other key components to that number, a count that is more probable than five thousand men that were fed – like maybe five thousand+ women and five thousand+ children which adds up to fifteen thousand+ guests at Jesus’ big outdoor dinner party. Beloved Church – that’s a big dinner party. I take out of this particular part of the passage this morning from Matthew is, as a church, we need to make sure that everyone is counted and fed, there are no favorites here, ALL of God’s children matter to Jesus. The great multitude should remind us how many people are in need in our own communities today. How many are being neglected or about to perish in our communities today? Where do our priorities lie when it comes to battling COVID19? Last stimulus package that was passed included millions for the upper 1% of our country – where is the compassion priorities of this nation?

“His compassion fails not” – Jesus’ compassion towards God’s beloved children failed not Iao Church and neither should ours...Amen? Here is something to consider this week from this Gospel reading this morning – Jesus emulates the need to have pity for God’s people – that turns into compassion for them – that then turns into action. Iao Church – beloved virtual community – let us not do what his disciples requested – “send the crowd away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” That is what usually happens in our society today, many have become dismissive when it comes to the needs of others. “I am only responsible for myself, my family, for my household.” Just as Jesus ordered his disciples to feed the multitude – we too are given that same command – “they need to go away; you give them something to eat.” – pity to compassion into action. **Those who have the Church – have enough – because the Church has Christ – that moves us from pity into compassion into action.**

This is just a small example – just this past Wednesday, we received 30 boxes of produce because of Iao’s partnership with the Lili‘uokalani Trust. Many of the families had informed us that one box was too much for them to use. What does our distribution team do? – like the loaves and fishes in our Gospel reading this morning – we were able to make 30 boxes feed 57 families – Praise be to God! With this pandemic amongst us, there is nothing more than the need to satisfy an empty belly. Not only did Jesus and his disciples feed the fifteen thousand+ people with physical food, they received a spiritual feeding as well.

Before this scene – Jesus was mourning and grieving the loss of his cousin, John the Baptist. Many of us can relate to this, we need some alone time when we are grieving the loss of a loved one. Jesus needed some time to pray and rest, but the crowds just kept following them. Who doesn’t get exhausted when there is so much going on in our lives? Just like Jesus, especially if one is a parent, a switch gets flipped when people around us are in need. We go into that parental mode – pity into compassion into action. Somehow we find the inner strength to satisfy physical hunger as well as spiritual hunger of others.

This makes me wonder Iao Church? Where do our priorities lie as a church, as a county, as a state and especially as a nation? At a time when our GDP hit a minus 32 percent, people are still un or under employed – where do our priorities lie? At a time when COVID19 case numbers are going back up and the number of casualties is moving up as well – where do the priorities of a society, of a nation that has so much lie? Who is not being counted? In the new proposed stimulus proposal package, some are proposing a reduction of the current \$600 a week unemployment benefit to \$200 – then to 70% of the last wages after September. Proposing no new funding for states and cities that are trying to keep the COVID19 numbers down or reduced. The schools that are being forced to open have inadequate funding to keep our teachers

and children safe from the virus. And yet, beloved community, somehow, there is 1.75 billion for a new FBI building or 377 million for renovations. Somehow, there is enough funding for increased military spending. Where are our priorities? This is like sending those in need of assistance to the local villages to fend for themselves. Let us ask this question. How can a belly who hungers for food, get that hunger satisfied with a shining new war plane? How can a child in school, be protected or remain safe from an invisible virus with a brand new, beautiful new war tank?

Jesus does not send anyone away hungry as the disciples had recommended him to do. Jesus doesn't say – “give them a brand-new war plane or brand new war tank – that will satisfy their physical and spiritual hunger.” No – Church, Jesus commands his disciples thusly – “You! – You Disciples – You give them something to eat!” Jesus did what the compassion of God in him compelled him to do – feed the hungry mouths with physical food and feed their souls with spiritual food.

Beloved Iao Church – beloved virtual community – with a GDP hitting a -32% - in my mind, a shiny new war plane or tank is not going to satisfy a hungry belly. In my mind, there are people, families, children who are in need in our communities. Here is what we are called to do Church – pity, into compassion, into action. Together, Iao Church, together community partners, together supporters from our virtual world – that is exactly what we have done and will continue to do as we are commanded by Jesus today.

July 1st – 68 families received a bag of groceries from our new Food Distribution Ministry program. July 15th – because of our partnership with the Lili‘uokalani Trust and Maui Food Bank and becoming a certified USDA distributor, 50 families received produce and groceries. July 22nd – 72 8lb. hams were distributed to 61 families (yes church, some households have more than one family living under one roof) because of the Lili‘uokalani Trust and the Ham Produce & Seafood

Company from Oahu. July 29th – just this past week, 57 families shared in the 30 boxes of produce brought again by the trust. Our distribution team has come mainly from our Micronesian families who have relationships out in our community of Maui. If you are in need or know someone in need, please call our office at 244-7353 and we will deliver food to you or them. If you wish to support our Food Distribution Ministry, you can go to iaoucc.org to donate and specify “food” if that is where you want your donation to go.

Let us close with this. This Church – this is only small sample, but one that has had a huge impact on how our House Churches, our community partners, our virtual world supporters are making a difference in our community. This Church – is how our House Churches are feeding and satisfying hungry bellies on Maui. This Iao Church – is the command from Jesus – “You! You Iao Church, You Community Partners, You virtual world supporters of Iao Church – You! You give them something to eat! This is how we have and will continue to expand the loaves and fishes we receive to feed the multitude. Let us also remember to make sure the everyone is counted (2020 census.gov) – men, women, children – ALL of God’s children must be counted and fed. Have we checked in on our Kupuna, our Elders Church? Have we checked in on our neighbors? Pity, into compassion, into action. Iao Church – You! – You give them something to eat!

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