

“Diversity Before the Throne”
22nd Sunday after Pentecost
All Saints’ Day & Sacred Duty Week
Communion Sunday Virtual Liturgy
November 1, 2020
Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
Iao United Church of Christ

Revelation 7:9-17
Matthew 5:1-12

Poem “*The Vote*” by John Lewis

“The vote is precious. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democratic society, and we must use it.”

This week I was thinking about some of your stories Iao Church. How some of you look at others in what they do through their actions and see them as “saint-like” people of God and how each of you are inspired by what these saints do. I was also remembering many of the saint-like actions of many people that I have come to admire in my last 3.5 years as your Pastor. Doing things not for the sake of earning a path to heaven – since we cannot earn our way into heaven, but by the grace of God – but doing things because it is in each of your nature as people of God and as family members of this beloved church we call Iao UCC. Thank you saints – thank each of you for all you have done and

continue to do as you bring forth from within, the DNA of who Iao UCC is in our community. Saints are not saints because they were or are perfect – but how they allow God to work through their imperfections to bless those around them. We know these beloved saints in our families, friends, community and church. Beloved Iao Church, beloved brothers and sisters in our virtual world – if we silence all the noise around us and see the time, talents and treasures brought to bear by everyone around us, we might literally see and experience the diverse throne of God before us. People who are blessing other people by living and doing the Gospel in their daily lives. Are we perfect – no! Do we know what God has in store for us – probably not! Do we fall on our face at times when trying something new – most likely! But do we get ourselves up, help others get themselves up – dust ourselves off – yes! And most importantly, we do not walk alone – we walk alongside each other offering a helping hand and a shoulder to lean on – because that too is in our Iao UCC DNA. As your Pastor, I see it often, and I praise God for each of you, our friends and supporters of Iao Church. This really speaks to our first reading beloveds – “...and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing

before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.” You see beloved community – as Easter People we are still welcoming God into our lives, even from our House Churches and as deployed people of God. We are still welcoming and living out the Christ in us to a world in need, especially at a time such as this and this coming week. We must still be in “parade” mode with palm branches at the ready to welcome those who would join us in our virtual world today, just as much as we have always been ready to receive new visitors in our Sanctuary. You may not see the multitude join us on Sunday when we are on, but they do join us at a later time as they view our Virtual Worship Services at different times and different parts of the world. Let us throw a parade for those who are seeking a place to belong, a church that loves them, a church that will bless them as much as we are ready to be blessed by them. Iao Church knows all about diversity – Amen! We know what a great and diverse multitude looks like at the throne of God because that too is in our DNA as a church – where ALL are welcomed, even from our deployed House Churches.

So, who is this multitude beloved church – beloved brothers and sisters in our virtual world? How does this multitude of God’s

people look like? There is a diverse group of people who are poor in spirit. Maybe they have been spiritually beaten down because of COVID19 – lost a loved one, suffered from the virus. Maybe there is family turmoil because of illness, or maybe political disagreements. Maybe some are still unemployed and worried about where their next meal is coming from for their family. Their spirit is in need great of a good dose of hope. The hope they can rely on is that they, along with many – are inheritors of a great estate known as heaven. The kingdom of heaven awaits them.

There is a diverse group of people who are in need of comfort. Loss of job, loss of a loved one, locked up in cages like animals – these are God’s children that mourn for things to get better, mourn for a better life other than a war-torn country or locked cages. Mourn to have their children returned to them. Or mourn that their children will have a better life in a country that once believed in this premise:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

Beloveds, the this is what diversity looks like before the throne of God. Can we be God's Holy Throne to a world in need church?

Then we have the diverse, quiet, gentle souls amongst us. Many of these beloveds are peaceful, yet stern in their resolve for a just society. God's children that believe in taking care of our earthly home. We have those who believe in doing what is right and good and just. This diverse group believes in morality and decency in how we treat one another. Christ tells us they will be filled. They will be filled with justices.

When we as a diverse community are filled with mercy, when we seek peace within ourselves and our community – as God's children, we act justly and mercifully. When we as a church and diverse community do this and more – people not only see God at work in and through us. They experience God in their own lives because of the blessings that emerge from the very heart of the church – the very heart of God. Even if we are persecuted for being a diverse people of God that welcomes ALL people without excuse and without apology – we are blessed beloveds – we are blessed! Amen and praise God! We must be ready to tell our own story and not allow others to define who we are as God's people. Rejoice Iao

Church – rejoice people of God – for we are in great company of saints who are amongst us.

The people who Jesus considered as blessed were the outsiders – the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the “othered” of society. Those who persecuted the prophets – persecuted the saints in Jesus’ time may seem as if they are still with us today. How then Church are we blessed? Look at the blessings and gifts that everyone brings with them. Thank goodness we are not robots where we all look the same, act the same, have the same gifts, think the same. Thank goodness for our diversity – that is the biggest blessing that is described in our first reading. If we are to truly live out our mission statement – we must heed the words familiar to many of us. “Make me a blessing to someone today. Out of my life may Jesus shine.”

Let us close with this beloved Iao church and brothers and sisters in our virtual world. I see how much each of you are a blessing toward one another. The better angels in each of us brings forth hope to a desperate world and country in need. As we go forth this week to do our sacred duty as citizens of this country – let our lives reflect our diversity and strength. Let us be God’s Holy Throne on earth. Let us be blessed to be peacemakers,

merciful, mourn for the loss of loved ones, be gentle people, yet resolved for justice and do what is right. Let us be people of “pono.” Let us be pure in our hearts and when we do all this my beloved saints – We shall see the face of God!

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