

*“Judgement Comes”*

**25<sup>th</sup> & Last Sunday after Pentecost for Year A – 2020**

**Reign of Christ/Christ the King Sunday**

**Thanksgiving & Communion Sunday**

**Stewardship Sunday Offering**

**Virtual Worship**

**November 22, 2020**

**Rev. Floren “Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor**

**Iao United Church of Christ**

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

**Matthew 25:31-46**

**Poem “Judgement” by Abhimanyu Kumar**

*“Where we are  
Do you dare to speak  
Are you natural in here  
Where is your so called identity  
We are feeling the feelings  
Of others not ours  
We speak for others  
Not for ourselves*

*Where is our naturalness  
We are just imitators  
Imitation, imitation  
Silence!  
I hear the court is in session  
Cant’ you smell ‘His’ way  
Yes, yes  
We are experiencing it.”*

As we come to the end of our Pentecost season and into our week of “thankfulness,” I want to continue on this morning with this from an unknown author. “I am thankful,” says the unknown author, “for the alarm that goes off in the early morning

hours, because it means that I am alive . . .” Then he adds, “And for the person behind me in church who sings off-key because it means that I can hear.”

As we approach Thanksgiving Day this Thursday, a day in which we give thanks and praise to the Creator for the many blessings in our lives – our family, our children, grandchildren, food on the table, a job or those fortunate enough to still have a job – we must remember that there are many of our beloveds out in our communities who do not feel the blessings we may feel this season. Those who have lost a loved one because of covid19, those who might be finding it a bit difficult to breathe. Loss of a job, struggling to put food on the table. As we give thanks – let us also keep in mind those who have lost so much this year. As followers of Jesus – we give thanks, but we also focus on making sure that the needs of others are also met. Yet, as a society that falls short many times, and I have said this before – Thursday we give thanks to God for what we have and the blessings bestowed upon us – only to wake up on Friday morning to shop for more stuff – more worldly goods.

The problem we face as a church today is getting people to see and feel in their hearts how serious of a church we really are – Amen? For far too long, church attendance has been coming down because for many, the church has forgotten how to be authentic and credible. People have heard church pastors, leaders, church people say and preach one thing, but do the opposite. Households are not reading the Bible at home as much any longer. For example – I am a Christian, but God hates homosexuality, God hates prostitutes, God hates so and so. This statement is a good example on one preaching to be a “Christian” – one that should be filled with the love and compassion of Christ – only to end up being the opposite of the teachings of Christ by hating. When we disagree – we disagree on the issue, not hating the person because of differences. Credibility of the church has become the focus of watching what we, as Iao Church. This is why I have pushed all these 3.5 years as your pastor to not only memorize our

mission statement but to make it come alive in our hearts and in the hearts of those who see our authenticity. “We are a people of God, living and sharing the love of Christ and reflecting that love in words and actions” – this statement, Iao Church, is useless if it is not lived out in our lives, if we do not put these words into action – Amen? To be credible and authentic people of God – we must bring to bear all of our time, talents and treasure to bear so that our ministry is seen and is alive – that is what brings value, authenticity, credibility to our Iao Church. Our Iao Story must be told and must be seen and must be felt in our hearts and in the hearts of our community and church – be authentic people of God – Amen?

Many of you know that one of my favorite scriptures – and I have many – to preach on is Matthew 5 – The Sermon on the Mount – “blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for Jesus’ sake, blessed are the insulted – REJOICE! REJOICE IAO CHURCH – REJOICE! For ours is the kingdom of heaven!

There is something about being blessed or considered being blessed is that there is some kind of action that is happening – we must mourn with those who are mourning, seek justice, be peacemakers, be willing to be insulted for doing what is right – even from our House Churches. We must be willing to put words into action to be a credible church of Christ’s body. We are entrusted, as I mentioned last week, we are entrusted with our time, talents, treasures – this is how mission happens, this is how our mission statement grows feet of faith beloved church. Let us not give up hope beloved Iao Church, in the midst of this pandemic, our community, our people need us to raise up to the occasion as we have all this time since March and be able to answer the question for today – “When was it Jesus?” What a great question to have to answer in closing out our season of Pentecost and right before Thanksgiving. For me it really is the same question

that has two different possible scenarios. “When was it Jesus that we...” or “When was it Jesus that we did not...” When was it Jesus that we could have and did or when was it Jesus that we could have and did not?”

A couple of Sundays ago you heard me say that time, talents, and treasurers are really answered from the heart. Each one of us knows deep in our hearts the stewardship of these three “t’s.” When was it that I could have or when was it that I could have but did not? As a church we are God’s representatives out in our neighborhoods, communities, families – everywhere we go, no matter what we do, we are God’s chosen people to represent Iao Church, entrusted by God in all we do in our lives. Everywhere we go brings new possibilities in making our mission statement come alive in the hearts of people.

In 1982, New York City was facing a budget crisis. Winter was approaching, and the city's social service agencies were unable to care for all the houseless citizens who needed help. Mayor Ed Koch called upon Manhattan's religious institutions to help care for 36,000 homeless men and women who would “all through the cracks” that winter. If every one of the city's 3500 churches and synagogues would help 10 houseless people, the problem would be solved. According to an investigative piece in The New York Times, the churches and synagogues did not exactly jump at the idea. The article quoted one Protestant minister who said, “The mayor never mentioned this to me. Nobody in his office apprized me of this.” The Catholic spokesman sidestepped the question, and a leading Jewish rabbi said, “We haven't money to heat the building for this extra service.” – credibility Iao Church!

As your pastor, I see the many ways in which God is working through Iao Church. I have seen the many ways in which each of you contribute in your own way and how some of you could use a little boost or inspiration. I have seen many miracles unfold that makes me in “awe” of God’s greatness in how God works through Iao Church. And I

have also seen, and I must admit to this, that there are times when I sit in my office and say to myself “hah – what on earth are we thinking – what is going on Iao Church?” I’m sure that some of you might say the same about the pastor – “what are you thinking pastor?”

Living our authentic and credible selves Iao Church requires us to keep answering this important and vital question – “When was it Jesus that we – and – when was it Jesus that we did not?” If we are going to get people back to the church, we must be able to answer this question. Even before March of this year – I have seen firsthand the generosity, the compassion, the welcoming, the love Iao Church displays for our community and for God’s people. I take that story, those authentic and credible stories, and virtues out into the community as your representative. When people come to me and say – “I have seen pictures on your Facebook page, in your Iao Pepa Newsletter, in your website of the great work Iao Church is doing” – that helps us answer the question of “when was it Jesus.” We do not do our ministry for the sake of pride, but for the sake of the Gospel – Amen and praise be to God. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” It is not our job to ask those whom we feed if they are members of Jesus’ family – our job is to feed without any litmus test. Our job is to be compassionate, caring, and loving people of God – living and sharing the love of Christ and reflecting that love in words and actions.

I would like to close with this story about a man named Michael Christensen who spent some time with Mother Teresa in the slums of Calcutta. In his book *City Streets, City People*, he tells of the incredible burden of suffering that Mother Teresa witnessed each day. He reports that one day Mother Teresa rescued an abandoned baby from the gutters. The child's hand and feet had been gnawed away by rats. At the end of that day, Mother Teresa asked Christensen if he had seen Jesus. Christensen, still focused on the horror around them, admitted that he did not see Jesus anywhere. Mother Teresa

explained Jesus' teachings from Matthew 25 about taking care of the poor, the hungry, the weak. And then she said quite simply, “You did it to them.” “You did it to me.” Mother Teresa saw Jesus all around her every day.

Beloved Iao Church, as we close out our season of Pentecost on this time of great pandemic – let us hold on to hope – let us hold on to one another – let us continue to be an authentic and credible church. Let us continue to be able to answer this question with such authenticity and credibility – “when was it Jesus that we...” – with such humility and grace. Let people who see and experience our authenticity and credibility as a church say about us – “they truly are people of God – they truly are living and sharing the love of Christ through their words and actions. May that be what we are judged upon as an authentic and credible church.

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