

Hi! This is Sunny Ahn, the senior pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I welcome you once again to this online worship. For those of us who miss the worship at our beautiful church with amazing Hawaii open scenarios, I have placed our church picture as my background on the screen. Just know that you will be back to this beautiful church sooner or later because all things what we are going through with the current coronavirus health crisis shall pass sooner or later. Our God is still in control. So, keep holding your faith while you are staying home for the safety reason and worshipping online meanwhile. I usually start the message by sharing a little story. Here is the story.

[Story] There was once a young man who, in his youth, professed his desire to become a great writer. When asked to define “great” he said, “I want to write stuff that the whole world will read, stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level. Stuff that will make them scream, cry, and howl in pain and anger!” He now works for Microsoft, writing error messages.

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Oh well, so far I have been having several emotional weeks with all kinds of error messages I had to deal with for offering online worship. I am very ill-equipped to do online worship, and yet I had no choice. I’ve been trying to learn, try, receive error messages, then learn, try again until I get it right. After all these learnings, trying, now... DA-TA!! We are here like it or not. Having all things together or not, we are here. The ministry platform has been changed, somewhat forcefully and uncomfortably. But, we are here together to worship our awesome God no matter what. So, may the force be with us all and be kind to each other.

As we are beginning the topic for the day, I would encourage us to start with the practice of forgiveness first. The sound and image might not be your satisfaction for now, but be patient with us. We will improve as we get better with all tech stuff we are dealing with these days.

The concept of forgiveness can be summarized in one Chinese pictograph for **Forgive** (용서 서, *Shu*, 恕). It consists of two components: **Same** (같은 여, *Yeo*, 如), and **Heart or Mind** (마음 심, *Shim*, 心). It teaches that true forgiveness begins when all

involved parties, both offenders and those being offended, have the same heart or mind. Regardless we are the offenders or the offended, placing ourselves in the shoes of others is the beginning of forgiveness.

As we have been reflecting our lives at the light of “Forgiveness” during this Holy Lenten Season, we have clearly defined that forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is not covering up our hurts or wrongs we have done. Forgiveness is not pretending that everything is ok because we forgive others who hurt us, and we are forgiven by others whom we hurt. NO, it is not.

Forgiving, we are talking about here at Kona for this holy season, is a journey. It is a daily journey. For some, it is an hourly journey. If I may use a theological term of The United Methodist Church, forgiveness is a sanctification process. It is the “perfecting” process of our relationship with God, oneself, and others—the Great Commandment: love God, love oneself, and love others (Matthew 22:36-40).

In a sense, the practice of forgiveness is a practice of spiritual formation. It is a process of becoming more Christ-like, holistic deepening of our love for God, love oneself, and love others, expressed in mission and service. It is a step-by-step process to transform us, our old self, and make us anew in Christ Jesus. The practice of forgiveness has everything to do with all doings in our lives. In today’s passage, Paul deals with the implications of what it means to be a new person in Christ.

Today’s scripture, Ephesians 4:22-32, tells us to ‘put off the old self and put on the new self.’ Today’s YOU & I must be different from yesterday’s YOU & I, if we are serious about our faith in Christ Jesus. If we “sinned” 10 times yesterday, then today we should sin less than 10. Having the mind of Christ little more than yesterday is the practice of forgiveness which is the spiritual formation. Our hearts and minds need to be tuned to the heart/mind of Christ more and more each and every day.

Being a Christian or a follower of Jesus Christ is not easy. It is a work. Apostle Paul says, “Don’t lie, but tell the truth!” (vs. 25). As we all know, the truth will reveal itself sooner or later. Another word for lying is pretending. Don’t pretend. Be true to yourself always. Pretending always eats up our energy and time.

On the first day of our honeymoon, my hubby Sung tried to be accommodating my eating desire. For me, eating is not that important as long as I have one decent meal

per day...but, my hubby is different. While walking around town, he was asking me about my thoughts on eating here and there. I told him that I am not interested in eating and I am not hungry. We went to bed on that day and next morning came. At the breakfast table, he confessed that he went out in the middle of night for having a midnight snack because he was so hungry all day yesterday. I did not know he was hungry and had the miserable first day of honeymoon. I told him not to pretend to be someone else with me. He took that advice serious from that day on, and nowadays during this “Stay-At-Home” circumstance, he cooks every day. I will have no comment on it 😊

With lying or pretending, we cannot have authentic relationship. The first step in the practice of forgiveness is to tell the truth and be true to ourselves. The second step deals with our anger. The verse 26 states that “If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day.” The scripture does not say that we should NOT angry. It is ok to be angry, but don’t stay angry all day.

Honestly, I was angry at the mandate to “close” the church due to the coronavirus health crisis. I couldn’t believe that I was told to “close” the church. Out of anger, I vented out and said, “Not in my life, I will close the church under my leadership!” “Due to the health concern, I will do ‘church’ differently...but not close the church.” Church belongs to God. I am just a manger of His church. This means I have no power to close or open the church. Therefore, I’ve decided not to let the coronavirus “kill” the church, but stir up the church to innovate its ministry by adopting the digital technology, and utilizing the new platform to worship and be “church” together. The leadership team of Kona United Methodist Church and I have agreed on this and now we are here online worship. It is new for all of us. The learning curve has been so steep for me and probably for many of you also. And yet, adopting new venue or platform for ministry is still doable with your understanding and support. Thank you so much for being patient with me and others, and continue your support for Kona United Methodist Church. It truly tells that we are the church regardless, and nevertheless.

The third step in the practice of forgiveness is about not robbing (vs. 28). The implication of “not robbing” is earning an honest living and helping the poor. We are encouraged to work, producing what is good with our own hands (through our own efforts). The goal of which is not only to provide for our own needs, but to be generous towards others in need too. The caring team under the leadership of Gloria Juan is aggressively reaching out to the members of our congregation and

their friends these days more for responding to their needs. Let us be generous to each other more for such a time as this.

The fourth step of the forgiving practice is controlling our speech (vs. 29). Say the words to encourage others, not discourage others. Let's use our words to give hope and life. These days, everyone is under stress, and yet all of us are trying our best. So, let us be gentle and be kind more.

The fifth step is connecting to the fourth step. The verse 30 starts with "AND do not make God's Holy Spirit sad..." The word "and" connects the verse 30 to the previous one, showing us that the Holy Spirit is grieved specifically by corrupt speech. Also, the fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved and is therefore capable of emotion shows that the Holy Spirit is a "person" and not merely God's active force as taught by cults that do not believe in the Trinity.

The sixth step is to get rid of stuff we carry in life such as bitterness, passion, anger, shouting, insulting, hateful feelings (vs. 31). Until now, the practice of forgiveness does not deal with how we feel. Regardless how we feel about others or situation, we are not to lie, not hold our anger over the night, not to rob others, not to bad mouth about others, and not to grieve the Holy Spirit with our words. Oftentimes, we thought of our feelings first for practicing forgiveness, but the scripture does not tell to start the forgiving practice from how we feel. The sixth step says let go of our ill-feelings.

Now, here is the last step of forgiving practice in verse 32. This step requires of us developing God's characters (vs. 32). God desires us to be kind to each other, tenderhearted, and forgiving. The forgiveness we extend to others is to be according to the pattern of how Christ Himself forgave us—free and complete. In comparing our forgiving others with how God forgave us, Paul highlights the fact that forgiving others is a truly divine quality. This ties in with the fact that Jesus encouraged us to be like our God (Matthew 5:48).

We forgive because God has forgiven us first. We give because God has given us all we have. Having this in mind, let us prepare our offering to the Lord and give as we sing the closing hymn "We are marching in the light of God." Let us sing.