

Hi! This is Sunny Ahn, the senior pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. This is Sunday #3 we are having online worship! Still we are in the process of “perfecting all technology stuff by learning and doing at the same time. So, please be patient with us, and be in the spirit of worship beyond our flaws you may see through this online worship we are offering.

I know many of you are missing the worship at our beautiful church. So, today I have another picture of our church as a backdrop. This picture was taken from the lower parking lot of the church at the sunset. On the day of this picture was taken, our church was right under the rainbow. This picture assures that we are under God’s promise—God will never leave us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Nevertheless what’s going on in our lives these days, God promises that God will bring health and healing to us; God will heal us and will let us enjoy abundant peace and security (Jeremiah 33:6). So, keep holding your faith while you are staying home for the safety reason and worshiping online with us meanwhile. I usually start the message by sharing a little story. Here is the story.

[Story] One Palm Sunday, a little boy had a sore throat and had to stay home from church with a sitter. When the rest of the family came home from church, they were carrying palm branches. The little boy asked what they were for. His father told him that people held them over Jesus’ head when he walked by. In a sad, disappointed voice, the little boy said, “Wouldn’t you know it? The one Sunday I miss, Jesus shows up!”

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I pray that Jesus will show up to you while worshiping online with us on this Palm or Passion Sunday, commemorating Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem for offering the gospel of forgiveness. At Kona United Methodist Church on the Big Island of Hawaii, we are continuing our “Forgiveness” Lent Sermon Series today. In this sermon series, we have defined that forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is a journey, not a destination.

The gospel of forgiveness is quite popular because it sounds very simple and easy, explaining the basic requirements for getting our sins forgiven and

gaining entrance into heaven. The gospel of forgiveness tends to equate faith with agreement to a set of religious facts. This decision to agree is typically followed by a prayer or some other protocol, after which a person is proclaimed to be a Christian. It sounds very simple, doesn't it?

But, the gospel of forgiveness does not stop there. If it stops there, the gospel of forgiveness is no longer the gospel of forgiveness. It becomes the gospel of sin management. Surely, the gospel of forgiveness covers the important topics of forgiveness and grace. However, it is more than that. The gospel of forgiveness also concerns about accepting the invitation to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and transform our lives at the light of this gospel.

This gospel of forgiveness is well described in the New Testament of the Bible—Gospel Luke! Luke's gospel is known as the gospel of forgiveness. Only in Luke's gospel, we meet the penitent woman whose many sins were forgiven because of her great love for Jesus (Luke 7:47). In contrast with James and John, who wanted to destroy a Samaritan town by fire (Luke 9:54), Luke shows Jesus exalting the virtues of the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10:33). Jesus also exalted another unforgiven group when he ate with the hated tax collector Zacchaeus and gave him salvation (Luke 19:7ff). Only in Luke's gospel, we also meet the prodigal son, his forgiving father, and unforgiving older brother (Luke 15:11ff). This parable reveals God's way of forgiving. God forgives affectionately, graciously, and mercifully. God embraces sinners by giving them exceptional gifts—the gift of unconditional love, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of welcoming, and many other gifts.

The climax of the gospel of forgiveness occurs when Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In his last hour, Jesus is saying a prayer, a request to God Almighty. It is remarkable, however, that Jesus is not asking for himself! I would be terrified and overwhelmed, trying desperately to retain my composure. My prayer would probably be: "God, help me! Help me, Lord!" if I could utter any sounds at all.

Honestly, I am praying "Help me, Jesus!" prayer every day—"Help me, Jesus! I don't know how to do all technology stuff. I don't know how to do "church" without gathering together in-person, breaking bread and sharing the cup of the new covenant. Forgive me, God, I do not know what I am doing these days, but I am doing whatever I can at my best! Help me, Jesus!

Do you pray the “Help me, Jesus!” Prayer every day these days like I do? If you do, please know that you are not alone. Not only that I am with you, many others are with you also, including our Emmanuel God. We are in this together. Through the online communion, we will remind ourselves that our Emmanuel God in Jesus is with us in this difficult time we are living through these days.

At this moment, I would like to have you bring your own communion elements near you. We will bless each communion element together and partake it. It could be bread & juice OR cracker & water OR whatever you may have. For ONLINE Holy Communion this morning, I invite you to lend Christ your table.

Consecration of the Lord’s Table!