

Happy New Year! I am Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church on the Big Island of Hawaii. I am glad that you worship with us from wherever you are and whatever time zone you are in now. Welcome to Kona United Methodist Church online worship.

A New Year! It always brings a sense of hope, doesn't it? Especially this year 2021, we hope that this year would be better than last year. The year 2020 has been a challenging year for all of us due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, all its problems, disappointments, failures, and sadness is behind us, and a clean slate lies ahead of us. Really? ...sort of...well, that's what we hope for this New Year somewhat 😊

We are on the verge of making decisions for the year 2021! Many of them will be called New Year's Resolutions. Many of them will be business decisions, family decisions and goals, financial decisions, health management decisions, and spiritual decisions.

The most significant power that God has given into the hands of humanity is the power to make decisions. We have the power to: come and go, make friends or enemies, choose good and evil, obey or disobey, change our ways of doing "stuff" or remain the same, handle our finances or ignore them, build or terminate our relationships, live or die, and so on!

We make over 2,500 decisions per day on average. Some are important, and some are not so! We are impacted by decision making, and many of us have developed a fear of making decisions.

Some are so afraid of making mistakes that they believe that if they hide from a decision, it will go away. Many times, no decision is a decision! Decisions are more than what we say they are than what they do.

Decisions are not usually made in a vacuum. They are created by the influences around us such as our culture, our training, our beliefs, our family, and our friends. Regardless of how our surroundings influence us or not, ultimately, we are responsible for our decisions. We have to make decisions, like it or not, and we

have to live with them. Nothing rarely is ever accomplished without clear decisions, even in our faith journey.

In today's scripture, Jesus challenged Nicodemus to decide as to whom he would believe and follow. Jesus was not too popular with the Pharisees—the church leaders. Jesus obeyed the law of God, but He refused to follow the rules and regulations the church leaders had made. But there was one leader, Nicodemus, who was curious about Jesus. He thought that maybe Jesus was who He claimed to be.

So, one night, under cover of darkness, he snuck out to meet with Jesus. Nicodemus, like the other Pharisees, other church leaders, believed that they were going to Heaven because they upheld the church rules so faithfully as the way to obey God, but Jesus set him straight. Only those who have received the grace of God and have been born again will get to be with Jesus in Heaven.

Attending church is a good decision, but this decision will not let us start a new life in Jesus Christ. Participating in church programs is a great decision, but it will not lead us to a new life in Jesus Christ. The decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is the only decision to start us anew in Christ.

Nicodemus had this decision to make. He could keep on trying to earn his salvation, *or* he could trust Jesus and accept Him as his Lord and Savior. He could accept the grace of God and begin a brand-new life or live the way he lived in the past.

We have the same decision to make today—to rely on ourselves or to rely on God. I have made my decision already. How about you? May God grant you wisdom and courage to make the right decision today. Amen.

*Consecration of the Lord's Table!*