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**“Wholly Community”  
Sermon for Earth Day Sunday,  
Church of the Crossroads UCC, Honolulu**

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

I Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

I have a friend back home from high-school. Art. Art keeps emailing me depressing emails about climate change, the brink we're on, the latest academic proof it's nearly irreversible, and that the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012 is the same year beyond which, if we don't change our habits, it *will* be irreversible, and that is proof that that soon there's no turning back.

I don't doubt, in many senses, that Art is right. But I also can't help but smile at his urgency. See, Art's an environmental lawyer: blue button-down oxford cloth shirt, khakis, glasses, the right last name in that blue-blooded town--but I remember him best from the crazy shenanigans he--sometimes we--played in high school and for which he mostly managed not to get caught or arrested.

Now Art's running the state climate action campaign, and me? I'm in your pulpit! Good morning!

All this is to say 2 things:

- 1) Despite our pasts, and maybe because of our pasts, we can all be good messengers, though at times unwelcome truth-tellers, and that clearly, there is a place in God's house for us all. (Also, parents of delinquent children, take hope!)
- 2) Depressing messages are rarely inspirational motivators for change, so here I will do my very best to temper any depressing messages with ways forward through hope, all based on the biblical texts!

So, here we go:

Friends, it is true. Drastic measures must be taken to stem global climate change. This requires paradigm shift way beyond the changing of some lightbulbs. It takes policy change and massive reductions in our consumption patterns.

Face it: we are messing up this planet. Big time. We are profiting at the expense of the many, and damage is being done because of our consumption patterns.

The actions we in our community take every day: filling our gas tanks, choosing to drive, buying food shipped across oceans, buying products produced in foreign countries with lesser environmental and labor standards based on free

trade agreements that contribute to poverty and injustice: We create pollution and degradation every moment while the rest of the world pays in sea level rise, air quality reduction, poisoned rivers, and more.

Locally, our high food costs incorporate the ever higher fuel costs of shipping the food here. The poor cannot afford to eat or live, and they grow in number every day. The rush to biofuels in corn and soybeans is only raising the global price of food.

A whole treatise could ensue on energy, but not at this time, because for most of you, this is not new information. It just serves as an overwhelming reminder.

So let's take it personal. What are the solutions here, now?

Buy local? Grow local?

What does "local" mean?

Certainly not me.

Transplant.

What can I do to contribute?

Learn culture, learn land, listen.

Put my ear to the ground.  
Listen to carrion."

Here: iwi kapuna.

Respect that which was here before without patronizing or appropriating.  
Support without re-inventing. Acknowledge.

Here, community is built of living stones. Dry stack stones. Paths.

The cloud of witnesses who have gone before, and those who have yet to go, would have us understand what they would have us do to take care of this place.

As I think about what it means to be here, I asked myself the other night, "Where else do you get this much sky and moonlight?"

I was reminded of a time I felt at home on top of a mountain, reminded of moonbows above Baguio City in Ucab, in the Philippines, on a New Years' Eve night, sent by the UCC to learn about the loss of indigenous land there sold by the Filipino government to multi-national gold mining corporations, causing mercury and cyanide to flow in the drinking water, in order to pay debts created by corrupt previous governments—all these environmental injustices, all these tears, all connected.

Hawai'i has her own story.

Yet, that night, we were resurrected with gin and guitars and gongs and hands around a fire. Found voices we didn't know we had. Community in spite of it all. Because of it all. Sound familiar, Crossroads?

Chickens, dancers mocking dancing lovers, tongues wrapped 'round syllables old and foreign, isolated by time and place, Joy despite the U.S. and its military watch and textbooks and greed on the outskirts of that fire circle.

What has happened there in the 11 years since?

I cannot say.

I didn't keep up with the villagers.

The bonds broke. Sometimes God's household is full of broken bonds, promises half-kept in mind and heart, but not in deed.

Sometimes the guilt is too much. Sometimes the knowledge is too much. In order to mesh with this society—and granted, that goal is questionable, but sometimes necessary—we often have to step off the soapbox because we've worn out the ears of those around us—or we can choose not hush-up, but then we risk surrounding ourselves only with like-minded people singing the same songs.

In the same moment that we can own our brokenness and acknowledge our imperfections, God steps in and offers chances to form community again. The promises I made to those villagers were yes, to try to keep in touch, but moreso, to keep telling their stories to those who could help change the policies of the foreign governments and companies investing in the Philippines. So, here I am.

The challenge is to balance prophetic witness with the stories and realities of those sitting next to us in our pews and in our hearts and with the total stranger outside of our eyes' reach.

Can we be gentle messengers? In our story from Acts today, Stephen has just finished giving a speech to the high priest and the council and the body of the elders of Israel. He has gone through a whole treatise on how they have persecuted and/ or doubted all of their prophets, from Joseph to Moses. Well, the truth smarts, or maybe it wasn't delivered in a way they could hear it and acknowledge the dark side of their history, so our story finds them stoning Stephen and ends with him asking God to forgive them anyway.

Tough stuff!

There are times when God calls us, like Stephen, to speak out in righteous anger to the councils and governments in charge. Be truth-tellers. The challenge in our daily lives, though, is to be in dialogue and to keep the bonds

from breaking. To refrain from condemning and feeling self-righteous. To love those with whom we disagree. To try to understand those who think differently and let them not fit into our politically correct boxes, because in God's household—we own them all.

We own ourselves.

Our very souls hurt for real community. Real connection. How many times have we made superficial connections without even trying to know what lies deeper? Made connection based upon convictions as opposed to story? To find the true meanings of the handshakes, the hugs, the look in the others' eyes, and to go so far beyond the words "the other" that that person's hurts and fears and dreams are held in tandem with our own: this is the call. And then? How the messages can be received!

For example, I have been taken in by strangers in this town whom I now consider family. The Itos, the Fujitas, the Burrows. I *could not be here* if it were not for their grace. They found reason and resource to take me in when I needed it most. I am *so blessed*. But the other thing that's happened through these relationships is that I've been roped into volunteering in places I normally would have said I didn't have time, not because I didn't want to, but because the stress life—errands, pressures—is generally overwhelming. Sound familiar? They called me out.

Friends, I met all these people through the UCC. Time and again, in every city I've moved to, whether it be for work or school, I have found that the church is what's there for you so much more than co-workers or classmates. Casseroles, real care, that pat on the back every week—we look through the facades and try to make good on our covenants to be together, one body, one household, one in the spirit.

We create our households in God's image. Our jobs are to challenge each other and to bring each other along to the places where we can be whole again—drag each other outside of our routines. Part of the covenant of Church of the Crossroads reads, "We believe it is the divine purpose to establish upon the earth a universal society of the children of God devoted to a life of mutual respect and good will. We are united in striving to know the will of God and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us." Well, Amen to that.

So, what I'm asking today of you goes beyond writing checks, purchasing and investing responsibly, or driving less, or speaking truth to power and demanding policy changes-- though all those actions are important, and I trust many of you already doing them.

I'm asking you—us—to look at how we form community, to expand our understanding of community way beyond these walls to include connection to the earth and seas and each other, to understand our place in the local and global ecosystem, and to act with respect accordingly. To be gentle, loving, challenging messengers *in community* with those with whom we struggle. *This*

paradigm shift will be what carries us to the change we want to see on this planet.

As we think today about how best to do this, time turns back. We consider our depths, the way life ought to be, what is right, how to make “pono,” what we should do for the earth and each other and ourselves—

And perhaps it seems too heavy?

Yet, it may be simpler than we think.

I had a conversation the other night with a friend who's back in Hawai'i for 5 months on sabbatical from Madagascar. I asked him what it was like to be back, if re-enmeshing in this culture made it difficult to have to leave again.

He said, “No,” because there, the relationships are true. Sure, it might take 5 years to process a car accident, but then you just try to work it out amongst yourselves, and you learn to let go.

Let go. God's hands.

In this society, we barely know what that means, try to get there through controlling our lives in a myriad of ways—

Imagine if every year you planted your future with the seasons' cycles and hoped for the best—come rain, sun, pestilence, freakish weather, and God. Like Mark Hamamoto does, but moreso, like subsistence farmers worldwide.

This is not to romanticize poverty. This is just to point out the places our sinews and tendons and dreams have separated from the 'aina, the land, the sea, and each other. To ask for reconnection in the name of all that is holy, Wholly, ours.

Divine connections.

I am preaching responsibility the best way I know how, yes, maybe to you, but inherently also to myself.

So many of us are so wounded, we forget that we not only need to heal ourselves, but each other and the world around us. We're journeying out of Golgotha. Remember those “pasts” I was talking about?

When I moved here, actually, before I moved here, I met Neal at a meeting about the future of a camp on the windward side: Lani Kamaha'o. Chuck was there, too.

What dreams we as a group had for that place: a center for peace and justice for the whole Pacific, a place to make connections across borders, seek peace, build community, build connectedness to land and culture for the people of Hawai'i. Make that living household a reality. There are wounds there that

may prevent that dream from becoming a reality. We will see with time, and we will pray on it.

But what Neal taught in that circle was something I desperately needed to hear:

The healing of self takes place simultaneously with the healing of society and creation.

Creation and society cannot wait for us to heal before we act to make pono what is right with the earth and the sea.

We must act together. We must find the time to heal ourselves as we heal our creation—built and wilderness, fractured and whole.

For in the reading from the Book of John today, we are reminded: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In God’s house, there are many dwelling places....And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Philip wants to see God before he’s satisfied that following Jesus is the way to God. Have you noticed this theme in our texts the past weeks? Those who want proof that this really exists? God is real? Notice how proof is never offered, but that the powerful message of Jesus as the messiah and the way is reiterated in such a way that it brings the doubters to belief?

Perhaps our climate messengers are like that. Our food security folks, our righteous angry and our tired soldiers in the trenches of poverty and grief, reminding us, “EH! There’s work to be done here! There’s a truth in this work, and we’re all implicated in the injustice until it is righted!”

The word “oikos” – the New Testament Greek word for God’s household from I Peter today—root of “ecumenical, economical, ecological,” oikumene. “And like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The very basis for that UCC project that had me in the Philippines 11 years ago was this text. (I did not choose it to preach on today—it just happened to be part of the lectionary reading, thanks be to God!) It means each of us is a living stone, moldable by sand, water, wind, and time, and at the same time, directing currents of oceans, rivers, sediments, and air.

We have the power to make real that living household. We have the responsibility.

We mark the places of our ancestors’ paths. Cornerstones. Foundations. Pebbles tumbling. Rock canyons, cairns, and waterfalls.

Everlasting, Neverlasting, traveling, and still.

Living stones.

Water stones.

Fresh air. Sand seas.

Newly created lava. Pāhoehoe, 'A'ā, abyss, sunshine.

Alike, one, we make God's creation, built up by time and hands, slowly crumble to growing medium, eroded mountains, alluvial plains, rubble, relief.

A readable topography of time and place—that to which we ascribe human meaning—place of birth. Place of resurrection. Place of love. Place of loss. Landscape of affection. mourning. silence. wonder. God.

The scriptures tell us: we are in God's hands. Time is not our own. Shame is the sin we must put aside to start acting this day to form relationships with each other. To mend the broken relationships we have the power to fix—some are out of our control. In God's house, there is a place for the broken, the healing, the wounded, the joyful, the soulful, and the shout-out-loud righteous faithful. There is a place for us all. There is a way forward through Jesus, for one. Even though we humans are prone to covering our ears to the right messages and are even guilty of frenzied stonings of the messengers—physically or metaphorically—there is a place for us and we shall not be condemned,

However we Come.

But as we come, we must be living stones. Not dead, not dragging, but *Dynamic!*

Shaping.

Do your part. Find that way to poke your head through the curtain of your routine and do, be, form relationship beyond your comfort zones with the earth and each other. Shoo! Bring a friend with you! Put your hands in the earth. Marvel at its wonder. Volunteer to malama Kawainui Marsh and the hei'au with Chuck, and let him teach you how to live better on this earth in the process. Let the marsh's cool breezes soothe your soul as you sweat under that hot sun.

Go dig and plant and harvest and weed with Mark and understand what ministry of the earth and food can be. Let the silver light glancing off the faces of the hills above remind you of who you are in relation to this place. Remember who is hungry, who is fed, and be the one who bridges the two.

Find that one thing that connects you to the 'aina, and commit.

Today. This time next year, arrive not with a litany of sorrows and woes and broken bonds and unfinished dreams, but with stories of connection and relationships and repeated dirty sweaty work. Live in that light.

Believe in God's fullness, for God says, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will do greater works." Offer that spiritual sacrifice and *Watch Out*, because you just might be fed and healed in the process.


Certainly, may it be so.  
Amen.


## Volunteer Opportunities


### *Kawainui Marsh Projects with Chuck Burrows*

For more information, see [www.ahahui.net](http://www.ahahui.net)

#### Service Project Sites

 **ULUPŌ HEIAU** (Night Growth) one of the first sacred temples to have been built as a "māpele" (agricultural heiau) by the first people or menehune and dedicated to Kāneulupō. Later in the reign of high chief Kualī'i, the temple may have been reconstructed as a luakini or war temple heiau. The Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club and 'Ahahui Mālama I ka Lōkahi are the co-curators at this State Park heiau complex and conduct service projects every second Saturday of the month to restore the ethnobotanical and cultural features. **2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the Month**

 **NĀ PŌHAKU O HAUWAHINE** (The rock formation of the Hawaiian Mo'ō goddess and guardian of Kawainui Marsh) is located on the right-hand side of Kapa'a Quarry road at the Y-intersection before entering the Kapa'a Landfill Transfer Station. It offers a panoramic view into the "piko" of Kawainui Marsh where one can observe in tranquility the wetland birds and marsh vegetation. 'Ahahui Mālama i ka Lōkahi is the curator for this newly designated State Park. We are planting the 12 acres with native plants to recreate a dryland forest ecosystem. Brush removal and trail construction has revealed ancient Hawaiian terraces that align the massive rock outcrops. We are also working in the marsh, to form a wetland bird habitat. Service projects are held the third Saturday of each month. **3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the Month**

 **KAWAINUI ESTUARY WETLAND BIRD ISLET and KAHA NATIVE LANDSCAPE RESTORATION** - As part of the 'Ahahui Mālama i ka Lōkahi restoration program in Kawainui Marsh, an islet located at the Kaha Park side of the Kawainui estuary has been cleared of alien vegetation and landscaped as a wetland bird habitat. 'Ahahui has joined with the Kailua Bay Advisory Council to maintain a Hawaiian plant landscape at Kaha (Kawainui Neighborhood Park). Service projects are dependent upon school groups. **4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the Month**

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**Meeting time for all service projects will be at 8:30 am and completed by 12:30 pm. Meeting places for Ulupō Heiau will be at the heiau parking area next to the Windward YMCA. For Nā Pōhaku o Hauwahine it will be on the right side of Kapa'a Quarry Rd. about one mile from the intersection of Kapa'a Quarry Rd. and Kalaniana'ole Hwy. For the Kaha Landscape maintenance we meet at the Kawainui Neighborhood Park.**

(Dates of projects may be subject to change depending on weather or other circumstances. Check for updates at the AML blog: <http://www.ahahui.wordpress.com> )

BRING: Backpack, lunch, water, rain gear, mosquito repellent, gloves.

TOOLS: Sickles, pruners, handsaws, machete, hand cultivators.

CALL: Hanaloa or Malia Helelā for more information and to sign-up: Phone: 808 593-0112 or email: [email@ahahui.net](mailto:email@ahahui.net)

**Here are the upcoming opportunities in 2008 to participate in Saturday service projects that care for our vital cultural and natural heritage around Kawainui Marsh.**

**Sat Apr 26 -- Kaha Park  
Sat May 10 -- Ulupō  
Sat May 17 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat May 24 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Jun 14 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat July 12 -- Ulupō  
Sat July 19 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat July 26 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Aug 8 -- Ulupō  
Sat Aug 16 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat Aug 23 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Sept 13 -- Ulupō  
Sat Sept 20 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat Sept 27 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Oct 11 -- Ulupō  
Sat Oct 18 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat Oct 25 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Nov 8 -- Ulupō  
Sat Nov 15 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat Nov 22 -- Kaha Park  
Sat Dec 13 -- Ulupō  
Sat Dec 20 -- Nā Pōhaku  
Sat Dec 27 -- Kaha Park**