

Church of the Crossroads  
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
September 10, 2006  
Neal MacPherson

A CHURCH IN THE MAKING

Isaiah 51:1-3  
Psalm 46  
Romans 12:1-8  
Matthew 5:13-16

The prophet Isaiah declares to a people in exile,

*Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,  
you that seek the Sovereign God.  
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.  
Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but when I called him,  
and I blessed him and made him many.*

- Isaiah 51:1-2

This is what we are doing today. As we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Adelaide Kimura, our sole remaining charter member, we look to the rock from which we were hewn and the quarry from which we were dug. We look to Adelaide and her brothers and sisters who were called by God and who bore us in the community of this church, not only those of us who were part of Church of the Crossroads back then, but all who have entered this community throughout the years.

Hear the testimony of Kikue Takagi, who said, not too long ago,

*When we review the history of Crossroads, I believe it is important to take a close look at the people who founded this church. The fellowship was very young, mostly intermediate and high school students and then some people - it was then the Evangelical Association – who had this idea of creating a church from a group of young*

*people. Can you imagine that happening today? The hopes, the dreams, the inspiration that went into the founding of this church, to me, all these make for an important legacy, and sometimes we lose sight of that.*

Let's also hear the testimony of Mark Hamamoto, another Crossroader, much younger, who in a sermon two years ago, said,

*It's an honor for me to be here – amongst the living – in this community that is Crossroads. It's an honor to be here amongst friends and teachers who are so down-to-earth and also so engaged in the good fight in this world. It's an honor to be part of this historic church in Hawai'i – which has been such a vital gathering place for people and such a strong witness for justice and peace in these islands and our larger community. I'm honored to be amongst the kapuna in our midst – it was Adelaide Kimura and her young peers who first came together over 80 years ago to create this new church and invest it with its identity. And as we know, they chose the coolest name – Church of the Crossroads. This church has pretty much lived up to its name in these islands. Crossroads has been a place where people of all different backgrounds and experiences are welcomed, can find common ground and share a common sense of purpose and calling. Crossroads has been a place where the weary and those with heavy burdens can lay them down, find healing and support, and be renewed to move a little more lightly through life. Crossroads has been a place with its doors open to the fresh winds of many struggles and movements through the years, giving Crossroads the character to persevere and keep being relevant to our present age.*

Mark Hamamoto, from a sermon "To Galilee" preached April 24, 2005

From humble yet remarkable beginnings a church was given birth, a church that grew and matured, a church that can now claim a rich history and heritage. Church of the Crossroads throughout the years has been everything that Mark Hamamoto has said it has been.

I can only add that the history of Crossroads has reflected the major trends and themes present in the course of liberal Protestantism in the North American context during much of the last century. It has, on the one hand, enjoyed the privilege and status given to liberal Protestant churches in what was called *the Christian century*. During the 1950's, it enjoyed the kind of numerical growth evidenced in mainline churches throughout the nation. I am told that during the 1950's the church school numbered in the hundreds and this led to the building of the educational wing now utilized by the Early School.

On the other hand, the history of our church has included a number of departures from the trends and themes of liberal Protestantism. These departures involved a measure of risk-taking and actions that went against the American cultural and religious stream.

First, there was the intentional decision to organize the congregation as an inter-racial, inter-cultural Christian community. This was accomplished in a time when churches were being organized along racial lines. In Hawai'i, there were *haoli* churches and Japanese churches and Chinese churches and Hawaiian churches, but in 1923 there was no inter-racial, inter-cultural church. Crossroads, in this respect, was a great experiment and it took no small measure of boldness to think that such a thing could be done.

Then, in the late 1930's this congregation, at the urging of its first pastor, Galen Weaver, took the bold action of standing in solidarity with Japanese and Filipino plantation workers who were engaged in a struggle to form a labor union with the help of Jack Hall and the ILWU. The stand of our congregation ran up against the power structure of the islands, and in a way bit the hand that had fed it, for it was the wives of the heads of the Big Five who had provided financial support for Church of the Crossroads during the early years of its formation.

Then, in the 1940's, Church of the Crossroads reached out to persons of Japanese ancestry who suffered great uncertainty and discrimination during the days prior to and following the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor. The church reached out not only to the Japanese who resided in the Moili'ili neighborhood but also to those who were sent to the concentration camp established here on O'ahu.

Still later, the event that perhaps most shaped Church of the Crossroads took place. This was the time in 1969 when the church provided sanctuary for thirty-five servicemen who were AWOL because of their refusal to fight in the Vietnam War.

As a result of that event, during the 1970's our congregation entered into dark and difficult days. Many members of the congregation left. Many felt betrayed. Most felt the absence of love and care within the church community. During those years, it was a real question as to whether or not Church of the Crossroads would survive.

But survive it did, thanks to those who refused to give in to the despair and uncertainty of those days. This, after all, was their church. Many of those we honor this day, those who are eighty years and older, were among those who were steadfast in their commitment to our church.

It was largely through the faith and determination of those we honor today that the congregation came to experience renewal as Tony Robinson began his ministry among us in the early 1980's.

In our own time, our church has continued to depart from the ways of conventional American church life. I think especially of the year 1992 when we became the first Protestant congregation in Hawai'i to become an Open and Affirming congregation, welcoming all to become part of our life and ministry.

From the decision of Adelaide Kimura and her peers to organize themselves into a church, a remarkable church has evolved. It's interesting that when I ask those who are older to recall the history of the church, they will barely mention the halcyon days of the 1950's. Instead, they will recall the times when this church took the risk of being different out of a commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They will also recall the dark and desperate days of the 1970's. Kikue Takagi recalls the time she found

herself describing those difficult years to a visiting denominational staff person. After listening to her, he said something like this: “Never forget the difficult times in the life of the church because they are the times when the possibilities for change and new understandings can emerge.”

We cannot forget. We must not forget. In the midst of it all, we say with the psalmist, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble . . . God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.”*

Our church has been most faithful when, in the words of Paul’s letter to the Romans, it has not been conformed to this world, but has been transformed but by the renewing of its mind, for it is then that it has discerned what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

The events and stances in the history of our church that placed it on the edge of society reveal a congregation that has been unwilling at times to simply mirror the conventional and acceptable forms of church life that have characterized the American liberal Protestant church. And I truly believe that those dissonant events and risk-filled stances in our congregation’s past encourage us still and set us free to live in the present with faith and courage, and also with a measure of authenticity as we moves towards an even more faithful future, as we seek to be that salt of the earth that has not lost its taste, and that little light set on a hill, giving light to all. My friends, we have been a church in the making, and we still are. And so today, as we celebrate Adelaide Kimura’s birthday and the life and history of Crossroads, with Dag Hammarskjöld, we can say with faith, with hope, and with confidence:

For all that has been – thanks!

For all that shall be – Yes!