

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

On Monday, Nanette and I flew to Kauai for the Bishop's pastors retreat with spouses. Most of us stayed at the Kauai Beach Resort just north of the airport on the east coast. We gathered for meals and fellowship at a vacation rental belonging to a retired, long-time pastor that overlooked Nawiliwili Bay. We did our centering and gathering sessions at Lihue' Lutheran Church which began worshipping together in 1881, was chartered in 1883, and the first building erected in 1885. The original building was destroyed by Hurricane "Iwa" in 1982 and a faithful replica now stands on the original site. Most of us participated in a dinner cruise beginning at Port Allen and traveling along the west coast of the island. Some of us also toured a Buddhist Temple and grounds and a Hindu Temple and grounds.

In one of our sessions we talked about the emotions we experience that come from or indicate fear. We also identified corresponding or opposing emotions that come from or indicate love. A little later, we will have my typed version of the Bishop's charts he wrote as we developed thoughts around fear and love. This exercise really caught my attention as I hope you **realize** that I frequently speak on fear and love for us as individuals and for us as the KLC ohana and a part of God's church. When we do get to the charts I want you to look at them through eyes for both your individual self as well as eyes for the KLC ohana.

As I prepare to look at our readings today, I want you to know that many of these thoughts and words are either direct replicas or restatements of thoughts and words by Dianne Loufman in her God Pause devotionals this week, and from Eric Barreto's and David Loses' commentaries. I am not going to even try to differentiate each type and from whom they came.

Do you think that both Jeremiah and the psalmist are kind of whiny today? In fact, is it possible that we might think to some degree that the majority, if not all, of the prophets are kind of whiny most of the time? What about us? Are we whiny? If so, just what are we whining about? Are we whining even more than Jeremiah? Do we have a right to whine more than Jeremiah? I do not know about you but I am pretty sure I whine about God's and people's expectations for me **and when** God and people do not meet **my** expectations for them. Do you experience this as well?

Did you get God's promise in the last half of verse 20 and all of verse 21 to Jeremiah, which is also a promise to us as well when God said: "**but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the LORD. ²¹I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.**" Kind of reminds me of the "Footsteps in the Sand" poem I quoted a few weeks ago. That promise - **they shall not prevail** - is a powerful and all-encompassing promise as far as I can tell. Do you **believe** it?

Last week, did you have the feeling that the disciples got it, **really** got it? Well, maybe at **least** for a moment. But then we have this week's reading and maybe we should rethink that thought. Was their **cross** appearing to be dumber than doornails? But, are we any better? Is this what Martin Luther meant by we are "both sinner and saint?" Are our trials and tribulations our crosses? I know that I have alluded before to my concern for many Christians, **especially** here in the United States, who complain about being persecuted. Really, are you sure? Or are you just offended? Or maybe even something else altogether?

Think about poor Peter. First, Jesus calls him "the rock" and then Jesus calls him a "stumbling block." Talk about a relational shift. The biggest problem for Peter, and probably for **all** the disciples, is they were Israelites, which means that they had messianic preconceptions. For instance, when Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, he probably had in mind a warrior-king like David, one who would drive out the Romans and liberate the Israelites. The problem with Peter's expectation is **not** that it is unreasonable, but rather that it does not **change** anything. Who is in charge may change, but the wheel of force and violence just keeps revolving. What are those same visions and forces in our individual and collective lives? Can we change our expectations? Simple answer – yes. Only it is not simple or easy to actually do. That, my friends, is the challenge in our lives and our faith. And sometimes - we just do not **want** to rise to the occasion. And, lest I forget, that is okay too because God's grace forgives us that as well.

In our Romans reading, Paul does not ask his audience to simply **practice** self-control when provoked. No, Paul says they are to do more than just **refrain** from repaying evil, they are, instead, to **initiate** doing good to opponents. This, my friends, is much harder to do but as I have said before, it is our **goal**.

I offer now a quote by Maya Angelou about love: "*I am grateful to have been loved and to be loved now and to be able to love, because **that** liberates. Love liberates. It doesn't just hold - that's ego. Love liberates. It doesn't bind. Love says, 'I love you. I love you if you're in China. I love you if you're across town. I love you if you're in Harlem. I love you. I would like to be near you. I'd like to have your arms around me. I'd like to hear your voice in my ear. But that's not possible now, so I love you.*" Did you hear that? Love liberates. I suggest to you, my friends, that love liberates not only the one loving, and the one being loved, but **also** all who observe that love in action.

Here are the charts on fear and love. Take a moment to study the first one and think about these lists in terms of your life **and** the life of KLC. Then we will look at the second chart through the same lenses.

Now is a quote from Robert Updegraff that I may have used before but I have the complete quote now: "*Happiness is to be found along the way, not at the end of the road, for then the journey is over and it is too late. Today, this hour, this minute is the day, the hour, the minute for each of us to sense the fact that life **is** good, with all of its trials and troubles, and perhaps more **interesting** because of them.*"

Hear then the good news:

God reminds Jeremiah that the suffering he is experiencing is as advertised. **We** should be mindful of this as well.

Jeremiah, and us, are not to **crumble** in the face of adversity but rather redouble our commitment always calling out to God – Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

Listen to the words of Ephesians 2: 12-18 from The Message translation. **“But don’t take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God’s ways had no idea of any of this, didn’t know the first thing about the way God works, hadn’t the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God’s covenants and promises in Israel, hadn’t a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. Now because of Christ—dying that death, shedding that blood—you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything. The Messiah has made things up between us so that we’re now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. Jesus tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. Jesus repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then Jesus started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, Jesus created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. Christ brought us together through death on the cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. Christ treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through Christ we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to God.”**

This is God’s gift and promise to each and every one of us. We **are** heirs to God’s kingdom now and forever.

Grace and peace to you, my friends, God loves you just the way you are.

Amen