

The Present Faith

God is good. *All the time.*
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When we talk about church, we often look back to what has been. People share their favorite story from the 50s or talk about 'that one outstanding worship' and can get caught up for hours in stories about the history of the building. As a church we live in the richness in our history and in the depth of our traditions. All of the past builds who we are today and grants us the opportunity to learn from what has been. It gives us a foundation and an explanation for where we are today.

What looking back may not do is allow us to live in the present.

Christianity is changing. This change isn't necessarily good or bad; it is a reflection of our changing world. As we moved from oral tradition to written words, the church changed. As we introduced new instruments into worship, our music changed. As we see more screens and videos in sanctuaries we explore more ways to encounter the divine. Just as John the Apostle saw Christianity change from his perch in Patmos, we see the church moving towards new exciting possibilities. Even Jeremiah witnessed change. As a prophet of more than occasional doom, Jeremiah had to rise up out of his timid self and become a courageous prophet for change.

In an article about young people in the church, Josh Loveless talks about how millennials (people born after 1980), often act as "lookouts" on the mast of the church ship. Surrounded by new technology, pop culture, and increasingly aware of major contemporary issues, the "plugged in" millennials often get information before others. From their lookout, they can often see what's coming, what will be popular, before others even know it's a possibility. They can see what the future can hold, and millennials are often frustrated when they church ship below can't seem to catch up to the possibilities that they see. Loveless explains that this is why young people leave the church. When you know what is possible, and the church can't seem to make it happen, you can quickly become disenchanted and unmotivated.

But it doesn't have to happen this way. Churches can be more than relevant. Churches, faith communities, can set the path for the entire world. They can actually represent possibilities for life that the rest of the world has no awareness of. The church, can be the prophet that the global "lookouts" see in the distance.

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Are we ready?

In the scripture we hear of God "forming" Jeremiah and appointing him a prophet. God held Jeremiah, commissioning him for a ministry that was filled with both doom and restoration. As a prophet Jeremiah struggled with the task before him, and sometimes did not believe he could fulfill his role. Jeremiah struggled to live in a world that was not always peaceful, and he was challenged to bring difficult words to the people. Jeremiah knew the history, and respected the past, and also lived in a distinctly present faith, knowing that God supported him. He was commissioned by God as a disciple of now, just as we are commissioned by God as disciples of this present world.

We are not alone. We hear story after story about walking the path with God. We hear that God will not abandon us, that God will walk with us just as she sent Jesus to walk with us. As hard as it may be for us to sometimes believe, we are not alone. Let go and let God. Let go and let God. Let go and let God. God walks with you. Don't let a fear of isolation or desperation hold you back from the work at hand. We have companions on this journey. We are lucky to be a church, to be a part of a wider community in Christ where we understand that this life is about more than just us. This life is about the wellbeing of each person, whether they are across the globe or in our own backyard. We are not alone as disciples because we stand with humanity to address the basic needs of people.

As disciples we are challenged to live a present faith. We are daily challenged to live out what we have heard preached, and to act on what our scriptures unfold to us. We are called to live a StillSpeaking life in Christ. In a fast-paced, consumer driven world, one of the hardest things we can do is live a life with Jesus on those Monday through Saturday days when we are

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Meredith Jackson

not in celebration with this community. On those days when we are challenged by poverty, recession, war and held up by new births, unfolding creation, and the growing body of Christ. To challenge us to take the messages of Jesus and not sit passively by, but live the life. That is the challenge of our present faith.

We see that challenge when we're faced with people in our own community struggling to feed themselves while we throw away untouched food. We're challenged when a state denies rights to some because of where they live, who they love, or what borders they crossed to find a better life. We're challenged when we have to live out radical hospitality opening our doors to those who may be considered dangerous, unclean, or sinful.

We are constantly challenged to live a present faith because it's scary. It's unknown. Present faith can be a little bit radical.

And it's much easier to sit passively by and doubt ourselves.

We may not always believe that we can live a present faith. Even Jeremiah said, "I do not know how to speak, I am only a child." But God still stood by him. Even when we say, "I do not know how to speak, I am just one person." or "I do not know how to speak, I am only a woman, I am only a man, I am only an engineer, a doctor, a teacher. We do not know how to speak we are only one church." None of these should stand between our God and us. None of this should stand between us and our present faith.

Kyle Lovett is an amazing woman of present faith. She believes in people and supports them beyond just words and actually into action. She holds steadfast to who she is and what she's passionate about even in the face of adversity. She engages situations, instead of sitting back passively. She will push you to live your own present faith, even when you want to strangle her.

Leaders must do more than just dictate. They must model. Jesus did not live as God's sidekick, to hold the secrets of the world and taunt the people with what they did not know. Jesus lived and shared it all with us. Jesus modeled present faith.

In this same way, Kyle models present faith. She will not just demand that you rise above, but she will rise above herself. She will step out on that edge with you, and if you walk the path together you will both hold each other up.

If the church does not step out and live out present faith, it is not fulfilling the mission of Jesus. If a church is unable to practice what they preach, then where is their relevance? What is their place in the world? If Jeremiah had not spoken out, would he be a prophet of God?

This church, this community, is beginning a new exciting journey. With a foundation firmly rooted in the history of Hawai'i, this church is ready to be a leader in the changing Christianity. This community, walking with Kyle, will step out with present faith modeling to others not just what we are, but what we can be, and what we will be. This is the new model of Christianity, and this is the community that will be its prophets.

Being the church of today, being a church at all, means sometimes stepping out of your comfort zone and living the faith. It can be scary, it can be intimidating. But that's why we're community. That is why God has commissioned each of us. That's why we are the *United* Church of Christ because we stand together on this journey so that all people will know they have a home. As God spoke to Jeremiah, "I am with you and I will rescue you." We stand together with the promise of God's continuing presence, in the blessed, sometimes struggling journey of a present faith.