

**“The Future Awaits”**

**125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Theme**  
**“Reflecting Our Past That Leads to Our Future”**

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**1st Peter 1:17-23**  
**Luke 24:13-35**

Three years ago – when we began our journey together, we never could have imagined that we would be celebrating virtual worships together. We never could have imagined celebrating our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary virtually. But no matter the style or the place – we are connected spiritually by the Holy Spirit of God and as I mentioned last Sunday – as a church that is on deployment – we are still called to be the living Church of God. As the pastor of this amazing church we call Iao United Church of Christ, I hear everything and get things firsthand. What I have learned is that our church that is on deployment has handed out face masks, toilet paper, paper towels, postage stamps. Some of you have sewed face masks to those in need, have shared your fruits and vegetables from your gardens with those in need. Beloved Iao, this is the epidemy of House Churches. This is what it means to “be the living church” out in our communities in a time such as this. Praise God and Amen for you Iao UCC. What better way to celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary than to hear you continue to be the church in words and actions. I love you Iao UCC!

Three years ago, I also remember asking each of you to “not be afraid” and to “dream big!” I also asked each of you to “not quash each other’s dreams” each one of us have for our beloved Iao UCC Church.

As we virtually celebrate this 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our church – I am still encouraging each of us to “dream big” and not allow fear to be our guide – but to allow the “yes we can” attitude to come into fruition and allowing that same Spirit of God that guided the founders in 1895 to lead us today and into the future. **The Spirit of God is not bound by doctrines or traditions – but enables the dreams of each generation to come alive. Our church has a history that we should celebrate, and we do on this day, but we are not bound by it either – only encouraged by the many changes it has endured for the sake of the Gospels.**

I am thinking about Cleopas in today’s Gospel reading and his friend on that road to Emmaus thinking that all was lost. How many times did the early church leaders of Wailuku Japanese Christian Church have to overcome hardships? How many times did this faithful community have to overcome hardships? The accidental drowning of one of our former pastors? The arrest of another pastor who was then put into an internment camp. Yes, Iao UCC – we have a history – both good and bad but through it all – the Holy Spirit of 1895 continues to be with us now in 2020. You see church, the Holy Spirit has always had a virtual quality to it – we just need to be reminded that no matter where we worship or how we worship – Christ walks with us on this Emmaus journey, even today.

I truly believe that God put not motion in 1895 and gave birth to this church for a reason. From the very beginning – from Wailuku Japanese Christian Church, to Iao Congregational Church, to Iao United Church of Christ – diversity of our community has become the prominent part of our call. Imagine with me all the changes that has occurred from 1895 to today. Imagine through our dreams, the changes God has instore for us for the future. While the Holy Spirit remains the same – again, not bound by doctrine or traditions – we the living body of Christ – the alive church of

today, the alive church of the Gospels, has gone through many changes. A once Japanese only speaking church, to an English speaking church, that now includes Spanish, Hawaiian, the many languages of Micronesia, and most recently, we have welcomed into our church family, The Free Church of Tonga. This is what it means to live out – “We are a people of God.” – Amen and praise God!

Beloved Iao Church – as we move toward 150 years of mission and ministry – we cannot hold on to a sedentary religion, we must acknowledge a religion that appreciates our past, but one that does not cling to it. We cannot hold on to a religion that clings to a building or to dead wood we sit on every Sunday. If there is one thing we should be learning from these past few Sundays in quarantine – is that the church is where we stand – and where we stand is Holy ground my beloveds. Where we stand is the church and it is Holy. As free people of God – let us bring all of our hopes and dreams to God table and pray and discern how we make those dreams come alive for our generation and the next. There are many ways in which churches of today have had to transition and become nimble. Another lesson we should be learning in our world today. Rong and I have learned about how sound and video are heard and seen from your perspective and how we are nimble enough to make necessary adjustments at a moments notice. How far our virtual worship has gone around the world has amazed us – not only to the mainland, but to places in Africa, Venezuela, Brazil, Guatemala, just to name a few. Our family has grown because of our virtual world reality of today. So we cannot tie ourselves to ideas and buildings and furniture that are permanent and immovable. We must be nimble enough to change that is mission and vision focused.

As many of you know, we have begun to put together a 3, 5- and 10-year strategic plan. That plan is still working its way through the process and those who

were at the Congregational meeting in January received a small glimpse of the process. The Pastor's Vision I put together for the Strategic Planning Committee has already been implemented in many ways because of the support of not only the local church, but from help of many supporters – a new sound system, the projection capabilities in the sanctuary, air conditioners in Kanda Hall, new fans in Kanda Hall, new water heater in Kanda Hall and now the ability to do virtual worship on social media outlets. These are many dreams that some of you have suggested – like a certified kitchen, air conditioning in the sanctuary, storage space in Kanda Hall, etc. These are big dreams and visions that mean a lot to members of our church family. We don't have to get them done tomorrow, but we need to pray and discern in the process of “yes we can” type of attitude. How do we continue to support our Youth, the next generation and keep them engaged as a living and vital part of our church family?

As we travel together on this our Emmaus road, let us not get trapped by doubt and fear and on the nay-sayers – but to remain focused on mission and vision where God is calling us to be in 2050. Let us not hold on to religion of the past but move toward a future we can shape. As the song that Pastor Jack Belsom wrote begins with – “We can shape the future. It's God's way” which was the theme of this church in 1995 for the Church's Centennial Celebration.

Not only do we celebrate Iao's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of being a faithful church all these years – but we also celebrate that moment in which the Gospels became alive in us – and moved us into oneness with each other and with the Divine. As Pastor Jack stated so eloquently this morning – (quote) “remembering and celebrating is not enough – we must add new chapters to the history of Iao UCC as we move toward the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.” (end quote) This is an invitation in putting words into action

as this church has and continues to do for many years to come. New Chapters do not get written unless we create a new story for them. New stories do not happen unless we have a vision and dream for them.

So, let us close with this. Let us go forth and create these new stories for the next chapters of our history. Let us continue to be people of God that move with such boldness and purpose without fear and doubt. We do not need to accomplish our dreams by tomorrow – we only need to move forward, one step at a time, one day at a time in faith – knowing that Christ walks with us on this our Emmaus journey.

**Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho and Alleluia.**