

Advancing the Kingdom of God

Presented to Manoa Valley Church

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Good morning! Welcome to Manoa Valley Church and to this worship service. Whether you are on Zoom or here in the breezeway, whether you are a member or friend or visitor, you are most welcome. God loves you, we love you, and we are delighted to connect with you and worship the Lord together, especially during these very difficult times.

Last week, we talked about the kingdom of God, which scholars agree was the central message of Jesus. The kingdom of God is not like the world we live in. It turns our world upside down. There is good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. It is a time for Jubilee. Rulers do not lord it over people, but instead, they have the hearts of servants. The greatest in the kingdom take the lowly position of children. People of low status enter the kingdom before people of high status. The kingdom of heaven is for the poor, not the rich. The kingdom is about radical generosity. The last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

Last week, we talked about how the kingdom of God is now and not yet. It has started but has not yet spread throughout the earth. That is consistent with statements Jesus made in which he described the kingdom as small but growing. At Matthew 13:31-35, Jesus said:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.

When we pray the Lord’s prayer, we pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” I believe that as Christians, as the body of Christ, we are called to do more than pray for the coming of the kingdom. I believe that

we are called to do our part in *advancing* the kingdom. That is why we are here. We are here to be instruments of the Lord in helping the kingdom to grow.

I like the words: “Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not.” We rely upon God, but God wants to rely on us. He wants us to join him in his work. That is how we grow in wisdom and in spirit. That is how we grow toward God. And that is how we advance the kingdom of God.

What we are supposed to do

So, what are we supposed to do? I believe we are supposed to do what Jesus told us to do. He gave us two Great Commandments and the Great Commission. Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart and mind and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He also told us to go and make disciples of all nations.

Let’s talk about loving and serving our neighbors. This is an area in which Jesus gave us lots of guidance. There are three parables that I find very direct and very demanding, even haunting. You know them well. They are about the Good Samaritan, the sheep and the goats, and the beggar Lazarus.

When an expert in the law asked Jesus, who is my neighbor, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, found at Luke 10:30-37. Jesus said:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

The priest and the Levite passed by. It was the Samaritan who stopped and helped. The Samaritan helped an injured man whom we assume was not a member of the Samaritan’s family, village, synagogue, tribe, or region. The Samaritan helped a complete stranger. It is possible that the injured man was a Jew, and we know that Samaritans and Jews had a history of not getting along with each other. The Samaritan may have helped a stranger who normally would have disliked him, and might have even refused to associate with him. But that is the example Jesus gave us. Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

I don’t know how Jesus could have made it more clear than he did in the parable of the sheep and the goats, found at Matthew 25:31-46. Here is the parable:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and

you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

In this parable, Jesus tells us that those who will have eternal life are those who serve others. Whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Christ. When we serve others, we are serving him.

This connection between helping those in need and eternal life or punishment is also found in the story of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man, told at Luke 16:19-26.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

The beggar Lazarus was laid at the gate of a rich man, covered in sores, hungry for crumbs from the rich man's table. The rich man ignored him. Lazarus went to heaven, and the rich man went to Hades, where he was in torment.

Each of us may have different views of heaven, hell, and eternal life. However, I think that these parables make it clear that *Jesus really wants us to help people!* The parables also make it clear that this is about where we will spend eternity. The stakes are not only very high, the stakes are *eternal*.

The parable checklist

Based on these parables and other teachings and actions of Jesus, I believe that Jesus wants us to *do* things. He wants us to do *kingdom* things.

But what should we do? We can pray, and watch, and seek to discern God's will for us, now, in this time and place. If we still aren't sure where to begin, why not begin with the examples that Jesus gave us in the parable of the sheep and the goats? We can use the parable as a checklist. Why not focus on providing food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty; welcoming strangers; providing clothing to those in need; helping the sick; and visiting those in prison?

Let's help the hungry. It is estimated that more than 800 million people do not get enough food to be healthy. On average, one person dies every second as a result of hunger. Even in the United States, one of the richest countries in the world, it was estimated before the pandemic that 49 million Americans—including 16 million children—lacked the means to get enough nutritious food on a regular basis. At the same time, it was estimated that the United States discards more food than any other country in the world—nearly 40 million tons of food every year, which is estimated to be 30 to 40 percent of the entire U.S. food supply. It goes to waste.

Right now, during the pandemic, it is estimated that nearly a quarter of a million Hawaii residents are struggling with hunger. That's 250,000 people right here in our state, including out-of-work parents, isolated *kupuna*, and one fourth of all our children. People are hungry.

Let's help the thirsty. It is estimated that more than a billion people lack access to clean drinking water, and 2.8 billion face water shortages at least one month per year. People are thirsty.

Let's welcome strangers. In many countries, there has been a breakdown in communities, so that millions have become isolated or alienated. People also experience various kinds of prejudice that isolate them. For thousands of years, people have excluded others because of their skin color or ethnicity. People need to be welcomed.

Let's help those who need clothing. Here in the United States, it is estimated that about 48 million children living in low-income and poor families— and their parents— could benefit from donated clothes. People need clothing.

Let's help the sick. Cardiovascular diseases— disorders of the heart and blood— have been the number one cause of death throughout the world, killing more than 17 million people in 2011. In the United States alone, nearly 600,000 people die each year of heart disease. Another 600,000 die each year from cancer. Meanwhile, it is estimated that 40 million people around the world are living with HIV/AIDS. The World Health Organization estimates that in 2010, there were 219 million documented cases of malaria.

Those are only a few of the diseases that were ravaging humankind *before* the pandemic. Now, the pandemic has taken the lives of more than 700,000 Americans, and millions more around the world. Scientists expect that there will be more pandemics, because we are not changing the conditions that cause them. We are still cutting down the habitats of the animals that carry the viruses. Those animals are more likely to come into contact with humans, so it is more likely that the viruses will spill over to human populations. People are sick, and are more likely to become sick in the future.

Let's visit those in prison. It is estimated that there are nine million people in prisons around the world. The United States has 2.3 million people behind bars, far more than any other nation. Here in Hawaii, at any one time there are about 7,000 people in jails and prisons, with double that number cycling through the system each year. Many would appreciate simple human contact with caring individuals. Prisoners need visitors.

And those are just the needs on the parable checklist. There are other needs. In Genesis 2:15, we read that God put man in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. We haven't been taking care of it. Environmental degradation is everywhere, in our polluted land, rivers, oceans, and air. Plant and animal species are becoming extinct. Pollutants have found their way into previously pristine natural habitats. Vast forests are being cut down and not replaced. Climate change

is occurring. Sea levels are rising, and there are more storms and fires. Some regions are flooding, while others are drying up.

In addition to a healthy natural environment, people need educational opportunities, safe living conditions, fair treatment from institutions of justice, and basic personal and political freedoms. Most important, they need to love and be loved. They need opportunities to form communities, to work, to worship, and to develop spiritually. Jesus calls us to act, and the world is full of needs that we can address.

The kingdom community

Of course, we may be called to act as individuals. Any of us could experience a *kairos* moment when the Holy Spirit moves us to accomplish something specific in order to advance the kingdom of God. But we can also be called as a community, a congregation, the body of Christ. What does a kingdom community look like?

Dr. Donald Kraybill, in his book, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, says that the upside-down community of Christ will be a counter-cultural community, “a new band that marches to a different drummer.” It is an alternate sub-culture, not against the world but seeking a better world, the kingdom world, which has a different vision and set of values. Kraybill says that members of the community provide mutual support and care, while offering the world witness to God’s love and grace. Generosity, Jubilee, mercy, and compassion—these are the marks of the kingdom community.

Jesus prayed that his disciples would be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. We are supposed to be different. Our *church* is supposed to be different. We can be businesslike, and do a good job of managing our resources, but we are not a business. We can have rules, and we can obey those rules, but we are not a regulatory government agency. We can provide services, and meet important needs, but we are more than a secular nonprofit organization.

We are something different. We are the body of Christ. We are here to advance the kingdom of God. We are here to love and worship God, to love and serve others, and to spread the Gospel. We are not here to conserve money and maintain facilities. Resources are only a means and not an end. We are not here to *have* resources, we are here to *share* resources. We are here to be fishers of men and women. We are here to change lives. We are here to witness the love of Christ

to others. We are here to testify through our actions. Our love and service should speak for us. As the saying goes: “Preach often. If necessary, use words.”

Poverty and job creation

Brian McLaren, in his book *The Secret Message of Jesus*, said this:

Jesus forms a movement of people who trust him and believe his message. They believe that they don't have to wait for this or that to happen, but rather that they can begin living in a new and better way now, a way of life Jesus conveys by the pregnant phrase *kingdom of God*. Life for them now is about an interactive relationship—reconciled to God, reconciled to one another—and so they see their entire lives as an opportunity to make the beautiful music of God's kingdom so that more and more people will be drawn into it, and so that the world will be changed by their growing influence. Everyone can have a role in this expanding kingdom...

Christians have found many different ways to advance the kingdom. Let me mention just one. Poverty has been a major issue for thousands of years. It is an issue that is mentioned often in the Bible. We can help the poor by providing food, clothing, and shelter. We can also help the poor by creating jobs.

In his book, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, Pastor Tom Nelson argues that we are made to flourish, and to share with others so they can flourish, too. We can give people short-term support, but long-term, we need to help them help themselves. That's why churches are helping with job creation. For example, High Point Church of Christ in Texas offers seed capital for new businesses launched by church members. And Tabernacle Community Church in Grand Rapids sponsors the Youth Entrepreneur Leadership Program.

Not far from here, Christians are helping people to transition to work by giving them jobs and training at the Waioli Kitchen and Bake Shop. Most of us know it as the Waioli Tea Room. It opened in 1922 as a vocational training facility for the orphans house at the Salvation Army Girls Home that was also located there. The orphanage closed in 1970 when the state set up the foster care program. After 40 years as a commercial facility, the new Waioli Kitchen and Bake Shop is once again working with a Salvation Army program. It provides vocational training for graduates of programs that treat substance abuse disorders and individuals recently released from prison. It is a Christian business, led by Christians who are willing to provide transition jobs, training, and mentoring for

those who need a new start in life. It is an inspiring example of kingdom work. And the food is good!

A state government report on “Covid 19 and the Economically Vulnerable Populations in Hawaii” dated June 2020 concluded that 263,000 workers, or half of the private and self-employed workforce in Hawaii, are economically vulnerable because they work in a vulnerable industry. These workers are predominantly the young, the part-time, those with low-wages, and those who are self-employed. Those who are most at risk are in a vulnerable occupation *within* a vulnerable industry. That number was estimated at 166,000 people. Government stimulus checks and unemployment programs have helped a lot during the pandemic, but unfortunately the pandemic is not over.

One concern is that companies in Hawaii may not refill all the positions that they laid off due to the pandemic. This means that even when Covid-19 is finally under control and businesses are back in full operation, a lot of people may not have jobs to return to. Helping to create new jobs will be kingdom work here in Hawaii.

Our kingdom work at Manoa Valley Church

There are many needs, and many ways to do kingdom work. What about us? What kingdom work have we been doing, here at Manoa Valley Church?

Let’s start with our childcare programs— preschool, after school, and summer fun. Over the years, thousands of children and their families have been served by these programs. They are a big part of our work as a church. Before the pandemic, our childcare programs accounted for nearly two-thirds of all church staff members, and nearly half of all church income. In serving children and families, we have the opportunity to share the Gospel in word and deed. This is certainly kingdom work.

Then there is our annual Missions budget, which supports organizations like the St. Pius X Church MISO Food Bank and the River of Life Mission. Church members volunteer and help with Meals-on-Wheels, the Next Step Shelter, and Family Promise. We take up special offerings for Neighbors in Need and One Great Hour of Sharing. We created a Pandemic Relief Fund, and so far, money has been donated to Family Promise, Good News Jail & Prison Ministry, Hawaii Foodbank, Hawaii Meals on Wheels, River of Life Mission, St. Pius X Church

MISO Food Bank, United Church of Christ Transition House, Waikiki Health Center, and Women's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands.

This is all important kingdom work. It not only means a lot to those who receive our help, it means a lot to us as the body of Christ. Fifty-seven members of the church responded to our 2021 Congregational Survey. The survey asked, "what is Manoa Valley Church doing well?" In response, many church members mentioned Family Promise, supporting organizations that serve the homeless, Next Step Shelter meals, feeding the hungry and needy, helping the less fortunate, and ministering to the needs of other members of the community. Kingdom work is important to us.

Not all of the pandemic relief funds authorized by the Council and the congregation in this year's budget have been distributed, so those resources are still available. And now we have even more resources. One of the very sad things about our national economy is that during the past year and a half, while millions of people were laid off, and were short on food, and were getting sick, and hundreds of thousands of people were dying, the stock market went up. The rich got richer. They got *much* richer.

And that includes Manoa Valley Church. The value of our investments went up dramatically. Our wealth did not increase because of donations or our own fundraising efforts. Our wealth increased because people all over America who still had money bid up the stock prices. We can take that windfall, that increase in our wealth, and make good use of it by helping those who are still struggling. We can dedicate that windfall to our kingdom work. In short, we are doing good things, and we have the resources to do much more.

Doing more

I believe we can do much more, not only because we have resources, but because we have a strong church community. We are not perfect, and we aren't all the same. We don't always agree. Sometimes we irritate each other. Even so, we are a strong church community. We love God. We love the church. We love each other. Many of us have known each other for decades, and we share memories that mean a lot to us. Day after day, we pray for each other, and we help each other.

Because we have a strong community, we have a strong base for reaching out and expanding our kingdom work. We can discover new ways to share our resources so that the kingdom of God will grow, right here in Manoa Valley.

In our church newsletter, Pastor Abe shared the story of Yuriko and Larry Warnken, whose children attended our preschool in 2019-21. Yuriko and Larry began a pop-up shop that created Japanese sandwiches or “sandos.” Discussions led to a beneficial partnership, with their company, Guru Guru Kitchen, making fresh, handmade lunches for our preschoolers. Our children are getting healthy food options and we are supporting a new local business. This is kingdom work.

We have a beautiful sanctuary that can be used in many new ways. For example, there are Christian churches that do not have a place to worship. Kalihi Union Church has a large campus, and it is sharing its campus with churches that don’t have their own physical facilities. At last count, they were sharing their facilities with six different churches. We can help in this way also. There may be churches or ministries that are willing to worship on Saturday, or Wednesday night, or whenever our sanctuary is not in use. Our sanctuary could be made available to them.

Actually, our sanctuary could be reconfigured and made available to many people or events. Before the pandemic closed down public performances, our son was a professional ballet dancer in the Boston area. His ballet company practiced in a church in Cambridge. It was a shared-use arrangement that won national awards. During the week, the pews were removed from the sanctuary, creating open space for dance classes and rehearsals. Then on the weekend, the pews were brought back, and the sanctuary was used for church services. The space and expenses were shared.

I have attended services at churches that don’t have pews at all. Instead, they have strong chairs, not flimsy foldable chairs but strong, stackable chairs. They can be lined up in rows like pews and hooked together so they are very firm. They can also be unhooked and moved around in a variety of configurations that can serve a variety of purposes.

At Pacific Rim Christian University, we empowered students to plan their own chapel services. We told them that they could use chairs and tables and whatever else they wanted to use, however they wanted to use them, to create the worship environment that they felt would be most conducive to their prayer and worship. Personally, I liked it when we sat in a circle, so we could see each other, rather than looking at the backs of each other’s heads.

If we have chairs instead of pews, we can open up our sanctuary for other uses during the week. For example, it could be a place for a hula halau to practice. Or it could be a place for a number of community groups to hold meetings, or even small conferences. Or it could be a place for half-day programs for the elderly.

Before she passed away two years ago, my mother-in-law, Mrs. Carlson, participated in a program at Makiki Christian Church called *Nozomi no Kai*, translated roughly as Association of Hope. The program focused on older folks who were Japanese or Americans of Japanese ancestry who spoke Japanese. They gathered twice a week from 9:00 am to 11:30 am for fellowship, music, guest speakers, and a light lunch. Pastor Don Asman, who served our church for many years, visited from time to time to delight the seniors with his magic tricks. While the seniors were enjoying each other's company, my wife Elizabeth was free to run errands and take care of other business. A few hours, twice a week, was enjoyable for my mother-in-law and a big help to Elizabeth. We could make the sanctuary available for a program like that.

Radical hospitality

A whole range and variety of activities could occur in the sanctuary without interrupting the office work, childcare programs, or team sports in the gym. A whole range and variety of activities could draw people to the church and serve the community. These activities could fulfill our commitment to radical hospitality.

Radical hospitality is listed on our church website as one of our characteristics as a church. Radical hospitality is a dimension of our ministry and beliefs that was articulated by the church years ago as part of its vision. Here is what that Manoa Valley Church vision statement says:

Because we are created in God's image and know God's love, as the Body of Christ we are called to offer God's radical hospitality to all people as guided by the Holy Spirit. We believe radical hospitality connects people with the Body of Christ. Using our spiritual gifts, we reach out to discern and meet the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of others through presence in the local community and awareness of the needs of the larger world.

This vision of radical hospitality is a vision of kingdom work, in our local community and beyond.

I believe that when people approach us, we are indeed a welcoming church. I will never forget how welcoming the church was to me and my wife Elizabeth. I first attended the church in 1969, when I was still in college. I spent the summer with the Renard family, and they brought me to the church. Church members made me feel completely at home. I also experienced a sense of joy among church members that I had not experienced anywhere else.

In 1974, after two years in England and two years in Japan, I returned to Hawaii and took up residence in the maid's quarters behind the Walters' house in Nuuanu. A few months after I joined the church, I was asked if I would serve as President, which is what we called the Moderator back then. I think what they said was that everybody else had already been President, so it was my turn. I served from 1974 to 1976.

The church also welcomed Elizabeth, who was born and raised in Japan, and then came to the University of Hawaii. Church members who had never met Elizabeth threw a bridal shower for her, and then helped us plan and conduct our wedding at the church in 1976. We have vivid and happy memories of so many people who helped, like Ben and Gloria Tamashiro, Ken and Alice Chun, Betsy Komatsu, Jean Takaki, Dan and Aiko Fujikawa, and Jane Nakabayashi. I think they were excited that I had actually found somebody who was willing to marry me.

One of our wedding pictures shows us walking down the aisle after our vows. Over to the left side of the photo is Jane Nakabayashi, standing next to the aisle, smiling, a look of relief on her face, as she turned to watch us leaving the sanctuary. That was 45 years ago. Thank you, Jane!

So we are grateful for the way in which we were welcomed into the church so many years ago. And we know that people are still welcomed into the church today. But friends have told us that our church doesn't *look* welcoming when they drive by. When people drive by our church, they see our name, and they see two signs that are about parking. One says you have to pay for parking, and if you don't, your car will be towed. The other says no parking, tow away zone, during certain hours.

I think we need a couple of different signs. I think that the first new sign should say:

WELCOME TO
MANOA VALLEY CHURCH
God loves you and so do we.
We invite you to join us!

Then, in the spirit of Jubilee, we should put up signs to welcome people who need to park for a few minutes to go to Starbucks. We should set aside three stalls, the three closest to Starbucks, and put up a sign on each stall that says:

15-MINUTE GUEST PARKING
If you need to get coffee next door
and can't find anywhere else to park,
you are welcome to park here.
Have a blessed day!
Your friends at
MANOA VALLEY CHURCH

The kingdom is about sharing, about generosity, about making friends. Let's make sure that we are known in the community as a welcoming, generous place, a place of radical hospitality. That should be clear to everyone, even to those who are just driving by. Who knows? Some people might park and come in and say hello. We might make some new friends.

Keeping our side doors open

Last month, I happened to be here in the church during the service. About halfway through Pastor Abe's sermon, I looked out through the side of the church. One sliding glass door near the front was closed, and the others were open. I saw an elderly lady in the distance, slowly walking toward the church. She arrived and pressed her face up against the glass of the sliding glass door that was closed. After looking inside, she came around through the sliding door that was open and sat in a pew just inside the church. She didn't come through the front door, where there were people to welcome her— she came unannounced through the side door during the service.

The lady listened to the rest of Pastor Abe's sermon. Then, when it was time for communion, Ruth Komatsu came to her. Ruthie greeted her and offered her the wafer and grape juice. After the service, the lady talked briefly with Pastor Abe. It was clear that she had listened carefully to the sermon, and the sermon was meaningful to her.

To me, that was not only an important example, it was also a metaphor for what we need to do. We need to attract more people who are curious enough to come and, in their own ways, press their faces against the glass and take a look. We need to be open to them approaching us in different ways— we need to keep our side doors open. And we need to be ready to welcome whoever comes through those side doors, and minister to their needs, just like Ruthie did. That is kingdom work. That is how the kingdom grows.

A community center

Earlier this year, Pastor Abe, Dianne Ishida, Alan Ito, and Roger Au met a number of times with leaders of ten other organizations in Manoa Valley. The group is called the Manoa Stakeholders Group. The first result of the group's work was a community needs assessment that has been completed and is now being reviewed by each organization for possible action. One thing that the ten groups discovered was that they want to continue to work together.

It is clear that our church could contribute by being a community center for Manoa. We have a gym, a sanctuary, and a parking lot. We could use them for occasional community events, filling them with information booths about other Manoa organizations, or activities for parents and children. We could be a staging area for projects that take place elsewhere in the community. We can support community health, through activities such as the flu vaccinations that were given in our breezeway last month. We have facilities, and we can use them to support the larger community.

Our Jubilee year

Manoa Valley Church was organized in 1946, with 17 charter members. As we know, this year is our 75th anniversary. We can celebrate by making this year our Jubilee year. We can celebrate by reaching out, by building new relationships, by connecting with the community in new ways, and by giving generously to those in need in our community.

The kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus. Determining our role in the inbreaking of the kingdom will take prayer, discussion, and discernment. We have a strong church community, and we have resources. Jesus calls us to act. At James 4:17 we are reminded that it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then

not do it. We know what to do, and we are doing good things. Now it is time to do more.

Love, service, generosity, compassion, Jubilee, and joy. Those are words of the kingdom. When we show our love, and we serve, and we are generous and compassionate, and we share the Jubilee, and we demonstrate our joy, people will see it. People will feel it. They may ask why we do what we do. If they ask, we can tell them about the love of Christ. We can spread the Gospel and fulfill the Great Commission. And we can rejoice that God has put us here, in this place, at this time, to advance his kingdom. To God be the glory.

Please join me now in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
And the power and the glory, forever.
Amen.