

ACTS OF HEAVEN

ACTS OF HEAVEN: BIG CHURCH VS. BIG PEOPLE

Welcome back to our Acts of Heaven series. Last weekend, if you missed it, we had a fire in our sanctuary. And it wasn't just because our A/C needed some repairs. Our fiery messenger, Pastor Theresa, spoke about the only way we're going to change this world for Jesus and his values and his ways is by being connected to the power of the source of radical change. And who is that, Da Good An Spesho Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who without his power, our best efforts to bring heaven on earth in our families, workplaces, and even in our own lives would be unsuccessful, wasted energy, poho at best. Two weeks ago, Pastor Mark introduced this series by giving us the meaning of the word for Church that Jesus used. Remember the Greek word? It's the "Ekklesia", not just a safe spiritual gathering, but a world changing, radical institution, ever-growing force, as he shared, to "Heaven-ize" the world.

This week we learn that "Heaven-izing" the world is not just the job of the paid few, but of everybody! And if you said Yes to Jesus, he calls you and me to be Agents of Aloha, Agents of Jesus Christ Aloha to our world, bringing the good news of our King Jesus and his ways, in other words, heaven-izing the world around us. Are you ready to hear and respond to Jesus' call on your life to reach out through the power of Da Good An Spesho Spirit to change the places God has put you in? If so, say, "I'm in, Pearl".

I'd like you to leave our gathering today with these two challenges. The first: "To continue". And the second, and dis one local kine expression: "Stay Tight With Him Erytime".

For this series, we are tracking how the 1st church GREW Strong after Jesus left the earth, in the book of Acts, and how the good news went out in force. And when we read the about 1st century Ekklesia, it's hard to see how we get the way church is defined today. When we say church, people think church buildings, church programs, church worship services. What kine church you go? Yeah, get men and women ministry, sports, outreach, small groups, etc. People don't naturally think of the kind of People making up the gathering. We think Programs.

So if someone asks you, what is the church, your answer should be "We are the church".

What's the mission of this Ekklesia again? To heaven-ize the world, to bring heaven and heaven's values on earth, by sharing the good news of Jesus to others, and making more followers of Jesus, as Jesus commands us to do, make disciples of all nations. And that's the mission for all who follow Jesus today!

How many of you are followers of Jesus? Raise you hands. That's your call! Tell the person next to you, You're an Agent of Aloha!

How did the mission of the 1st Century Church expand from these early followers. How did those early followers experience growth?

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Was it easy for 1st Ekklesia to live out their new faith in Jesus to heaven-ize their world? Actually we hear that the apostles, those closest followers of Jesus were arrested and put in jail. Some of the early followers were killed, even stoned to death. Let's read the account of the challenges of growth the early church faced.

"Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went (Acts 8:1 - 4 NLT).

Those who called themselves the people of the Way, the Christians were targeted! Yet, the church, and who is the church? We are! Just checking! There was massive church growth. The church was scattered, but as people went out in the power of the Holy Spirit, many more encountered the fo real kine spirit of Jesus, all because of the pressure of persecution and the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me ask you this question, Where's the biggest church growth happening in the world today? Is it in America?

Watch this video (2 mins) : It wasn't about their bldgs., their programs that the church grew stronger. There was pressure, tension, difficulties.

For da Ekklesia in the 1st century, they were persecuted and they got stronger! The challenge for us Western Christians, we get choke religious freedoms and instead of that causing us to be stronger, we become weak, flabby followers. We've been given these spiritual muscles fo do kingdom building work and to grow stronger, but many of us not using um. Why cuz no mo pressure fo do so.

Many of us have had amazing encounters with Jesus where God showed up in your life and started changing you. But he's changing you for a purpose beyond just fixing you. It's living out of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in your life to heaven to others.

It's such a disconnect if you experience such an amazing encounter with God and we do nothing.

Look at the disciples. They experienced the resurrected Jesus and he says to go out and make other followers. Jesus is calling them to be big people for the mission of heaven-izing this world. It's not only about you now! It's about helping others encountering Jesus jalike you did. How many of you have encountered Jesus firsthand? Dass good! So we gotta ask ourselves, what am I doing to become bigger people for Jesus!

Personal Reflection & OG Discussion Q1: What would you say caused you to grow the most in your Christian life until now?

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PRESSURE TO GROW

Pressure is not a bad thing. It actually causes growth! It gives motivation to grow!

Those in sports know this. The harder and smarter you train, the better you get. Those in music know this. You gotta practice. And the key is hang out with others who are better than you are and let them teach you stuff. Those in work situations know this. You gotta be stretched to grow! The more tension on you, you'll grow! That's a spiritual principle too.

What has been your the best situation you have experienced the most growth in your life? Sports, School, Skill, Work. I'm sure it wasn't because everything was so easy, and given to you, but when something was way above your head! And you had some tension to stretch out to grow. Was it easy? Probably not, but you grew.

Who wrote most of the letters to the churches the NT? It's Paul. But in his former self, he was the guy Saul, killing Christians until Jesus encountered him. He goes out and becomes the greatest missionary for the Ekklesia. He establishes these house churches in different cities around the Mediterranean. In present day Turkey, Greece, Italy,

So continue, Paul says to the Colossae Ekklesia, the people there, in his letter to them. Do you want to grow? Do you wanna see your life making an eternal difference, affecting others for eternity? He says this to them this,

"And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness,"

(Colossians 2:6 - 7 NLT).

Again, how many of you have accepted Christ? Okay, so if Paul were to speak to you today, what he asking you to do? Continue! Continue to do what? Follow him. Paul's picture is this, let your life grow strong roots into him. Let your lives be built on him. Grow strong in the truth you were taught.

Everyone is at a different place in your growth, right? Some of you are veterans and some just said yes to Jesus from Easter time. Some of you just encountered being baptized in the power of Jesus last week. And now what?

Some may say, I've been a Christian for years now! That's good! But sadly, many are repeating church kindergarten year after year. Growing for some is about feed me pastor, I'm hungry and you leaving full, only to get hungry again. No, it's about having you leave here, hungry, for more of the presence and power of Jesus to continue heaven-izing your world as an Agent of Aloha. I'll share with you some steps to grow at NHCO later.

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But what are you and I doing today to continue to grow. I come church regularly! That's a great start! Brah, but if that's it, I'm not convinced you are growing. Don't stop there. Are you connected to serving? Don't stop there. Are you actively heaven-izing your world, ah, dass your job, pastor. Don't stop there? Are you helping someone else follow Jesus?

No, dass your job pastor. No it's all of our jobs. Dass it? I wanna be the head cheerleader cheering all us on for that mission!

Don't you wanna hear from our master, the one in charge, about what he has to day about being a Strong people, about growing. You ready fo hear his teaching. Let me give you some context to this.

It's Jesus last week on earth in Jerusalem before being hung on the cross, and right after he promises his close followers about the Holy Spirit that would come. Jesus gives his best teaching on becoming Strong people for him and he teaches through a picture, a story, an allegory, a parable. So we go learn from the master about being a Strong people fo God,

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. . . 16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other."
(John 15:1 - 8;16-17 NLT).

Remain, abide, DGASB tell, lidis. In verse 4

"Go stay tight wit me, jalike I stay tight wit you guys. Da branch no can make fruit if no stay tight wit da vine. Same ting, you guys no can do notting if you guys no stay tight wit me."

(Remember what I said I want to leave you with: Continue & Stay tight with Him erytime)

It's from staying tight with our source of growth, being strong, according to this story, being fruitful! You wanna be strong, grow, and be fruitful in your lives for Jesus? Being fruitful entails many things. A fruitful character and allowing your life to affect others to be Jesus followers!

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And you have models all around us of those fruitful followers today! I like be like Mycah! He play the keyboards so good! I like be like Zack Montayre he so good at the guitar! You think they started that way! Stephen Curry, how you think he's the best 3 pt shooter of all time. (When no one is looking)

Earl you must have grown up in one Christian family! No! Some of my HS classmates here neva share the news with me. How did each pastor become a pastor, we just were doing God's business. It wasn't like we wanted to become pastors. Me a pastor? I was an English teacher!

Every Wed morning for years, and then in those last years from 2000s, Friday morning I'd meet with this expert in Hebrew and Greek, and he and his wife heard God's call to come to Hawaii to reach more locals for Jesus, but they were haole, and they worked wit locals fo translate the bible. That's my story!

How you become good fisherman? Watch videos? Spend time good fishermen, dass how!

I actually have long term covid and it's so hard to hold my breath to dive 50' anymore. I'm sad, so I got into kayak fishing. And I wasn't a fisherman. Didn't know how fo tie hooks, what kine gear to get, how fo fish fo fish good. Do you think I just read books about kayak fishing? Just watch videos? I did some of that, but I hang out with other good kayak fishers! You like see how good I've gotten and see what I wen hook up on Thursday?

So how you can come solid kine with Jesus? Find others! This is key: Start now, but start small and you watch and see what God will do. Don't wait till too late! Some don't even start!

We came away from our Pastor's retreat, actually we call um now Pastor's advance, going forward, imua, so we imua ed as pastors this weekend. Mahalo for your prayers.

And we got clearer and united on the Next Steps we'd like to help all of us take in our growth to become Big People for Jesus. Get the A, B, C, and Ds for our Next Step Growth plan! You ready fo hear um:

(Accept Jesus)

(Be Baptized)

(Commit to go to a BASICS class) (Sign up, Summertime going schedule one)

(& Connect to one OG, TA class, or Ministry Group) Jesus best growth plan was through relationships! Jesus invested his life with his tight group of men and a few Wahine (you watched the CHOSEN!)

(Do Daily Devotions

(& Disciple others to do the same)

I want to challenge you to take one or two step of discipleship beyond our weekend services, towards becoming a big person for God.

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Personal Reflection & OG Discussion Q2: Evaluate yourself or ask someone to give you input on what your next steps of growth should be. And start now!

I like show you a picture. (KEYNOTE of the pictures of the grapevine)

Now, in the story of Jesus, let's review again. Who is Jesus? Who is the gardener, the vine dresser?

And what is the gardener's job? To prune. Why does he do this? So the branches can be more fruitful or get dead branches that no bear fruit no moa!

Who are we? We are the branches. And what's our role? To stay tight with the source of power, source of growth.

And what is the result of growth, for the branches to be fruitful, to bear much grapes.

So what is this present day fruit. Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit! And that's a character that shows more to be like Jesus. Some of us know them, Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

But it's not just this, fruitfulness, in our lives to see others become more fruit as well.

What was Jesus call to his disciples after he came back alive from mahke? Go make more followers, more disciples of all nations. So a fruitful follower is growing in Christ like character and growing in helping others become fruitful followers, helping others to heavenize their world. And it's not just the Christian workers job! It's all our jobs!

So Jesus doesn't introduce this part of the story as I think it was understood. Do grapes branches grow well on the ground? No! Why not? Gotta make room for the grapes. So what do grape vines with their branches and hopefully strong kine grapes grow on, what you can that? Trellis.

You see the Trellis is the man made structure that hold up the vine and the grapes. We need both! So what's the trellis of today? It's our church services, it's our programs, our ministries to support the vine work. And if we are not careful, we can focus so much on trellis work that we forget that the trellis is just the support. Nice to have buildings and let me tell you I wanna have building in Mauka! We as a staff and Board praying hard fo figure how this can happen. But that can't be all our focus. We gotta be focused on vine-work! Helping people stay tight with the vine, dass who, Jesus! And urging people to stay tight with Jesus, and urge the pruning process to happen! Why so we call can become more fruitful!

Let me be so bold to share, I think our Father God, wants to do some pruning so that we can be more fruitful! He's prompting many of us, to cut off some dead stuff from our lives so that you can be more fruitful.

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If we had more time, I'd have people share their stories of how they've become fruitful in their lives from being buss up to now building up others. Next time, get time.

Take the next steps. Principle: start now and start small. Don't wait until too late. Building spiritual muscles takes time and commitment and there is a cost. If you wanna get strong in anything there is a cost. If you want to be a good worker, gotta study/work hard, how about a great athlete (you watch videos of those who are the best in their game (Stephen Curry, watch some of his practice/warm up routines) (commitment comes with a cost)

Jesus says this about the cost of following him.

"Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?" (Luke 9:23 - 25 NLT).

This doesn't mean you go buy one cross to fo wear around you neck. Or think Jesus is saying, the cross is a difficult situation, unfortunate illness, strained relationship. Actually everyone knew at that time that the Cross was a symbol of death. The Romans made you carry that to be hung on! So Jesus what was Jesus saying, are your willing to surrender your own life for the things of God to really follow him? What is he prompting, nudging you to do, maybe even screaming for you to die to to follow him to be a stronger follower of his.

Let's stand and respond. I wanna lead you in a time to respond, but remember something of great value a commitment comes with a cost. Are you willing? And it's so worth. Why? Look at the cost of God to save you from eternal separation from him. He had his son killed for you!

Jesus ends that passage on John 15:16 by saying this.

"You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name," (John 15:16 NLT).

Personal Reflection & OG Discussion Q3: What is God, our master gardener pruner, trying to prune off from you life so that you can be more fruitful? From Jesus' perspective, what is the Holy Spirit saying to you that you must die to, be in total surrender, to follow Jesus and become a Big Person for God?