

The Risen Life

May 3, 2026

“Making Room for More”

Introduction

Aloha everyone! I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to service. We've been in a season of celebrating the risen-life community that Jesus began through His life, death and resurrection. We learned that while coming to Christ is deeply personal, it was never meant to be private. The Christian experience was always intended to be lived within community.

But the stories of how people enter into this community are as unique and wonderful as the people within it. Every single part of the Body of Christ represents a miraculous story of becoming and belonging. For some it was a story of daring rescue as Jesus — Heaven's Champion stepped into the midst of your chaos, delivered you from darkness and pulled you into His glorious light. For others it was a story of unconditional love and grace as you ran home into the Father's arms after wandering far from Him. Still for others, your story is that God has walked with you and been near to you for as long as you can remember. Perhaps you grew up in the family of Christ and have grown into a member of His Body. These stories don't always get as much attention or “airtime” as others but they are no less valid and carry just as much weight. Because we all love a harrowing rescue story or a homecoming reunion we sometimes downplay the stories of long steadfast love. But how many of us know, whether you came to God from far away or have been steadily walking with Him over a lifetime, it is the same God at work? It is the same grace that rescues, restores, redeems, and refines. Every story points to our inability to save ourselves, God's faithfulness to save, and His desire to bring us into His Ohana — the faith community.

As I think about all of the babies being born in Church or even my own children who are being raised in the Church, is it our desire that they would all become prodigals who will need to discover God's love through pain, regret and misery? Isn't it rather that they would experience the undeniable, unconditional, love of their Heavenly Father within community and that they would choose Him over the empty promises of this world? Will there be times when they doubt, or question, and need Jesus to rescue them from this life and their own choices? Absolutely. Every single one of us has a choice to make when it comes to belonging to the people of God. Will we choose to find our belonging in God and the life that He promises or in the world and that life that it promises?

For the one who grows up outside of the community of God they will have to choose to forsake a life apart from God and choose to live for God and belong to His people. For those raised within the community of God they will have to choose to remain within the people of God and find their belonging in Him. So whether you were raised in Christian community, are returning, still investigating, or just beginning, all stories are equally valid, equally important, and equally speak of the love of our God.

The Beauty of Religion

I was born into a Christian home. Both of my parents became Christians in their early adult years so by the time I was born they were already planted in Christian community. My earliest memories of Church were at Honolulu First Church of the Nazarene off Judd Street. I can still picture Oahu Mortuary across the street thinking that would be the place where I was buried. I was 5. It was a traditional conservative Church. We sat in pews and sang from hymnals. I went to Sunday School, memorized scripture, and sang in the kid's choir. You could say I grew up 'religious' but I don't say that with any of the negative baggage that word carries today. I have only fond memories of growing up in that Church and I remember having very warm thoughts about God. So often today you'll hear, “It's not about religion, it's about relationship.”

On the one hand I completely agree. Religion *alone* is no substitute for a personal relationship with God. Sadly, many people rely entirely on religious observance, tradition, and beliefs for salvation. They believe that it is their observance of religious obligations that will save them. But the Bible clearly says otherwise. Let's read this passage out loud together,

⁸ *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* ⁹ *not by works, so that no one can boast," (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).*

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5 NIV).

So ultimately we need to have a personal relationship with Jesus through faith in His finished work on the cross for our sins. But I don't believe religion and relationship need to be in opposition of one another. Religion is simply a set of practices, rhythms, and a way of life that orients us toward God. At its worst religion is empty, dead, and mechanical but at its best it serves as a trellis upon which the fruit of faith grows.

In the words of Dallas Willard, *"Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning."*

So that being said, I am extremely grateful for my religious upbringing because it lay a foundation for my relationship with Jesus today. I learned Scripture, I learned about the character of God, and I learned about the beauty and importance of Church community.

Religion can never become an end in and of itself. If it does, it becomes an idol and a hindrance. But when it serves as a guide, it is supreme (To paraphrase Simone Weil).

A Guide to Whom?

So the entire religious experience, from coming to Church, to prayer, to studying scripture, to singing praise is all meant to point to a greater end. This is important because if there's one thing Christians have excelled at throughout human history, it is in missing the point.

⁴² *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved," (Acts 2:42-47).*

Because of our many gifts, and backgrounds, and personalities, it can be tempting to try to form Church into our image instead of allowing it to form us into His. You see this in individual Churches but also in denominations. We tend to gravitate toward and emphasize our part of the elephant. "Church is about solid Bible Teaching! We need to preach the Word! Or we need more miracles, there need to be signs and wonders! Or we need to give more, meet more needs in the community." Yes! These are all parts of the greater whole but let us not become so fixated on our one part that we miss the elephant! All of these expressions of Church are the fruit — the byproduct of being connected to the source of life. And who is the source of life? Jesus. So we don't chase the fruit of a healthy Church, we stay connected to the vine and He grows the fruit. We don't chase the gifts, we chase the gift-giver. We don't try to craft catchy inspiring messages that echo the culture. We abide in God's Word and allow Him to speak.

Yes we want sound teaching, yes we want signs and wonders, yes we want to be generous, and to fellowship with one another but most of all we just want Jesus! We want to be a place where God shows us because when Jesus is in the room, everything else follows!

As Christian Community, this is our highest value. We want to be a people where God shows up, not just on Sunday, not just in service, but in our homes, our families, our work, our school, our neighborhoods, to see it on earth and in Hawaii as it is in Heaven. This is why the Church exists. Everything else we do, gathering together, fellowship, breaking bread, praise, teaching, prayer, giving, is all to experience God's Presence with us in a greater way.

Cruise Line vs Battleship

When talking about the mission of the Church we often use the ship illustration. If you've ever been on a cruise line it's a small ragged crew running around to cater to the needs of the passengers aboard. Their mission is to keep them comfortable, happy, and entertained. Sadly there are many Churches that operate this way. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride. Our team will take care of you and see to all your needs. But there's a different type of ship, I'm talking about a Battleship or an Aircraft Carrier. Any Navy in the house? On an Aircraft Carrier, it's all hands on deck. Each member of the crew knows their assignment and fulfills their role because they understand the greater mission. Sometimes you ask yourself, "What kind of Church are we?" This past Easter answered that question in my mind.

[Volunteer Huddle]

This is such a beautiful picture of the Church. All hands on deck, everyone using their God-given gifts to contend for God's Presence. And God showed up and showed off in a powerful way. Lives were touched, people were saved, and God was glorified.

Conclusion

This is the purpose of Community. God wants to be one with His people and we want to be a people where God shows up. He is our highest value and as we lift Him up, He will draw all people's to Himself. Thank you for the part you play. If you are new to this community we want to invite you to go on a journey with us to discover your place in the Body of Christ.

Our next series may be one of the most radical, counter-cultural teachings we've ever done. You're not going to want to miss it. But don't just come to learn something for yourself, find community to walk this out with.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What is one thing that the Holy Spirit spoke to you about today?
2. What is Church for you? A place to learn? A place to grow? A place to make good connections? A place to help? Or is it a place to be with Jesus and help other be with Him?
3. In what ways am I meaningfully connected to Christian Community and fulfilling my part of the mission?