

**Kalaupapa Sunday
Hawai'i Conference – United Church of Christ (USA)**

The following sermon was shared by Takayuki Harada, a member of Keawala' Congregational Church, on Sunday, August 12, 2012. The sermon was based on the reading from John 9:1-7.

Siloama

On October 21st, Mother Marianne Cope, will be canonized a Saint in Rome. She will join Saint Damien, also from Kalaupapa, as a Saint in the Catholic Church. Much of what we know today about Kalaupapa came from the work of these two amazing servants of God. The publicity of their incredible work among the leprosy or Hansen's Disease brought attention to Kalaupapa. But his morning, I thought I would share with you another incredible story of a group of people in Kalaupapa who overcame overwhelming odds and found hope in the God that was shared with them by missionaries from New England.

In April, 1875, a ship was anchored off shore outside Mākena Landing. This was a place where *pipi*, or cattle, were shipped off island. A man named Kauihiahiwa was also to be placed on this ship. Like my brother Paul, diagnosed with leprosy and separated from family, friends, and community; destined to join others in a life of separation in Kalawao.

In 1941, my brother Paul, like Kauihiahiwa, was shipped to Kalaupapa where the settlement has been relocated. Paul was not allowed to return to Kaua'i until 1954. This was his first visit since being sent to Kalaupapa as a 15 year old leprosy patient. This was my first time to meet him.

I later visited Kalaupapa in 1963. I have since visited him many, many times by myself and with family and friends. Living on Maui, I would fly over Moloka'i and see this little piece of land jutting out into the deep waters of the Pacific. I made it my mission to have as many people visit this historic place as possible. I wanted people to experience firsthand what this place represented for my brother and his wife, Winifred.

My brother and his wife are part of a sad and difficult history when leprosy or Hansen's disease was discovered in these Hawaiian Islands. In 1865, the King of Hawai'i and the legislature passed a law to separate those with leprosy and to ship them to Kalawao, Moloka'i. It was a perfect location in the Islands to separate those infected by the disease. Formed by lava flows by Kauhako Crater, it was a naturally isolated location.

Kauhako erupted along the high sea cliffs, forming this tiny land mass which eventually became a prison place for leprosy patients. The deep, rough ocean was a barrier for the eastern, northern, and western shores. The huge waves that began in the northern Pacific crashed onto these shores. The southern boundary was at the foot of the highest sea cliffs in the world.

This decision was made by the agents of the Board of Health whose mission it was to choose a location for these patients. Kalawao was chosen because settlement was close to fresh water. Kalawao which translated means “the mountain area”, is next to the Waileia Valley which empties out along the Kalawao shoreline.

But this location is in an area with some of the most treacherous beaches in the islands. No landing facilities were built for the patients to reach the shoreline. Ships were anchored off shore and the passengers were transferred to row boats which landed on the shoreline when it was calm. During the rough seasons, they had to swim to shore because the boats were not able to land on the rocky shore. Their supplies were likewise tossed overboard with these unfortunate patients hoping they would make landfall.

On January, 1866, the first boat load of patients were dropped off on the rocky shoreline between Waikolu Valley and Kalawao. This windswept and cold land became a forced home for these first leprosy patients from Kaka‘ako, O‘ahu. There were no facilities or personnel to greet these first passengers. They were left with minimal supplies and clothing. They probably had only what they wore on the overnight trip from the holding station in Kaka‘ako, O‘ahu.

Since that first boat load, there were more than 8000 men, women, and children left in this lonely and isolated place that today we call Kalaupapa. Ninety five percent of the people sent there were of Hawaiian ancestry. They were immediately separated from family, friends, and community. Initially, they were left to fend for themselves with little provisions given them to survive the elements and physical illness.

Jesus, in the narrative in this morning’s reading, is confronted by a man blind from birth. Jesus is questioned by his disciples about whose sin was responsible for this man blindness.

He answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned”. His blindness had nothing to do with his sins or his parents’ sins.”

He continues, “He was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light for the world”.

After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with his saliva; he rubbed the mud on the man’s eyes and told him, “Go, and wash in the Pool of Siloam”. So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

This morning’s readings had an impact on the leprosy patients left in Kalawao. Like the blind man, the same questions were asked about those afflicted by leprosy. In Hawaii, the Congregational Missionaries from New England as well as many in society at that time thought leprosy was the result of one’s sin. As in Biblical times, stigma and fear were pervasive in society at that time.

Today, Kalaupapa is often considered synonymous to Saint Damien and soon to be canonized, Mother Marianne. Much of the publicity about Kalaupapa came from their incredible faith and their work among the patients in Kalawao and Kalaupapa.

When we talk about Kalawao and Kalaupapa, a little explanation should be given. This leaf of land, formed by Kauhako Crater, is divided into three *ahu pua'a*. Kalawao is on the eastern shoreline. Makanalua is in the middle. Kalaupapa is on the western shoreline. The summit of Kauhako crater eventually collapsed and today there is a lake at the bottom of the crater. This lake was used as a burial place. Because burial in the crater was practiced, this promontory is called Makanalua or the "given grave".

If you were to visit Kalawao, you will see the St. Philomena Church, or Damien's Church standing proudly. But as you approach St. Philomena Church, there is another tiny church that also stands proudly. The *Siloama* Church stands today as a legacy of the faith, hope, and perseverance of a small group of patients who formed this church in separate and desolate circumstances. Similar to the Saint Damien and soon to be Saint Marianne story, the beginnings of this church are an example of the passion and power of their faith in God.

Many of the native Hawaiian men and women who were among the founders of *Siloama* Church were left abandoned on the windblown, rocky shoreline at Kalawao on a cold January day in 1866. As they gathered themselves, they came to the realization that their only hope was to turn to God for help. These were the new converts that New England Missionaries came to the islands to work with in 1819.

As converts to this newfound faith in Christianity, their faith was now put to an ultimate test as they were stripped of their humanity and left as outcasts from society. Their only possession was their incredible faith in God. They immediately formed their own community.

Within a year, thirty five men and women gathered together and formed their church. They included not only those who were sent to Kalawao but those who were already living on the peninsula. In the desolation of Kalawao, they found the "spring of Siloam". The *Siloama* Church was formed in December of 1866.

The story of *Siloama* Church is story of faith, tested by terrible physical difficulties and trials. It would be natural to ask the question, "Why Me?" But, rather than giving in to the overwhelming circumstances, they gathered together as community to find comfort and hope in one another and in their faith. Stripped of their humanity and cast aside by society, they turned to faith in God.

Their story is truly an eternal testament to what a living, vibrant faith can mean even though one is "cast aside and left on the lonely, cold, rocky shores of Kalawao. They found immense comfort in the Biblical story of the blind man cured at the pool of Siloam. They were encouraged by Jesus' words that their faith is a testament to God.

It is important to share this knowledge so their story of incredible faith in God will not be lost. We need to tell this story to every subsequent generation in Hawai'i so they too can find strength and power in their faith when faced with adversity.

The people of Kalawao glorified God in their actions. "Crying aloud and seeking God as they gazed upon the mighty cliffs of Moloka'i and the rough seas that surrounded them", God heard their cries. He gave them comfort and the will to live. Like the blind man from birth, by faith accepted the words of Jesus and found healing, hope and comfort in his words. Can we find this same inspiration and hope as we contemplate the most difficult challenges that can come into our lives?

In the front wall of the *Siloama* Church sanctuary is a plaque that describes this first group of leprosy patients who turned to God for help. It reads:

THRUST OUT BY MANKIND
TWELVE WOMEN AND TWENTY THREE MEN
CRYING ALOUD TO GOD
THEIR ONLY REFUGE
FORMED A CHURCH
THE FIRST IN THE DESOLATION
THAT WAS KALAWAO

The *Siloama* Church is a modern day story of thirty five Christians who, clothed with their faith, turned to God when the world abandoned them and cast them aside. They immediately formed their own community and within a year formed a church community. Their story is a testament to a living faith despite being "cast aside and left alone on the lonely and rocky shores of Kalawao. As Jesus said, "He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him".

God's power was and continues to be manifested in these thirty five men and women. And their faith was a shining beacon for the 8,000 sent after them. May we always remember their sacrifice and faith of these patients who are now in their final resting place in Kalawao, Makanalua, and Kalaupapa. Amen!