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Ulu From Heaven Series

I want to begin with two important affirmations today. The first is the affirmation that the presence of God is in all of in all things in all of life. Are you with me? If this is true then Hoike is about revealing the presence of God, Hoike is about, unveiling the presence of God, uncovering the loving presence of God, the goodnews of God who is in all of life, to be seen in every aspect of life. Amen!

Now if this is true then the second affirmation is this, that the presence of God was present in all of life, even in the days of old. What I am saying today is that the presence of God was present in all of life even before the gospel came to these islands, God was with our people. So now Hoike becomes the unveiling, the revealing, the discovering of the presence of God in the days of old. This is what we are doing with the Kanaka Maoli Gospel revealing the presence of god in the days of old.

When we study the history and the culture, and the stories, and traditions, the language of Na Kanaka Maoli, and the people themselves, we can affirm that the presence of God can be found in many things.

A few months ago I was invited to speak at the Olaa Church Hoike, on the island of Hawaii, they have a wonderful Hoike. It was there that members of Olaa had written a strong litany of affirmation that God was with our people of old. God was not absent but was present in the life of the people and in the life of the land. Just as God walked with Moses, God walked with our people, just as God was on the mountain with Jesus, God was on the mountain with our

people, and they had a whole litany of this. Now this is just a sample of the direction we must take in the days ahead. That God was with our people in the days of old.

Now, what we have done in Waianae, this year, is to identify just one cultural kipuka and this has come to be the 'Ulu Tree. Yes I know it doesn't sound that exciting but let me share with you some of what we have learned and how we are developing and bringing life out of this 'Ulu kipuka.

We have developed a four module series on the 'Ulu tree and it's designed for children and can be modified for older youth or adults. The modules are set up in storytelling format. There are instructions on what to do before the story, and then there is the story, then what to do after the story, then a follow-up and main activity. Let me go over the four modules briefly just to give you a sense on how this works.

First Module

In this 'Ulu series the first module revolves around the story documented by Pekoe, of Ku-kailimoku, a God who comes from heaven and meets a beautiful mortal women, (sounds like the Da Vinci Code), gets married, raises a beautiful family, but one day, there is a famine in the land, people become very hungry, there is no food to eat, so Ku-kailimoku sacrifices himself and becomes the first ulu tree, and now there is more than enough food to eat, and the family and the people of the land live. Ku-kailimoku sacrificed his life because of his love for his family, and now the 'Ulu tree becomes a symbol and the reality of the highest form of love.

Now, this is a story told in Polynesia before the coming of the gospel and yet it already is about a God who comes to earth and demonstrates the greatest love of all. This story is goods news to the people. Imagine looking at an ulu tree and remembering your kupuna telling you the story of God's

love, and having a great sense of gratitude and thanksgiving for that love and the food from the `ulu tree.

Do you remember now when Jesus said... greater love has no man than this that one should lay down his life for another.

If I were to take some liberties to re-write John 3:16 it might say that God so loved the world, because the world had become so self-destructive and hungry and emptiness filled the land. So God sent the Son, to restore, Hooponopono, Hookeikahi, pupukahi, the physical and spiritual well being of the people, to feed the people, and eventually to become the best food for the people.

Remember when Jesus feed the five thousand, and then latter when the crowds followed wanting to see more miracles..... Jesus said, I am the bread of life, the bread from heaven, if you eat my flesh you will live forever.

Then at the last supper, on the eve of his betrayal, as Jesus was about to lay down his life, Jesus lifted the bread up and offered pule, broke the bread, and said to his disciples, "This is my body which is broken for you, as often as you eat this remember me."

Remembrance is also in the Ulu story. We have a story of sacrificial love, the greatest love of all, and if God is love, then God was present with the people of old, how else would they be able to tell the story that is told about the God who came from heaven and became food for the people.

Some of the learning objectives in addition to God's love, and the love we ought to have for each other, include talking about the causes of famine, natural disasters, wars, sickness, and the need to help others in times of need. Helping others is a sign that we are God's people.

Aloha Ke Akua and Aloha Kekahi i Kekahi takes on a whole new meaning in this first module of the 'Ulu series.

Second Module

In the second module we tell the story of the first missionaries to Hawaii, how they came with many gifts and talents, and we affirm how all people are people of the same God who gives to each very special gifts and talents.

In this story that is told, we identify the special knowledge that the New England missionary women had in the making of quilts. They made beautiful intricate quilts, and when they taught the Hawaiian women how to make the quilt, the very first quilt pattern was the 'ulu leaf pattern. One story of how they traced the pattern was that they would sit under the 'ulu tree and let the sun cast the shadows of the large ulu leaves and fruit onto the cloth material to be traced. Then they would cut out the pattern and the 'ulu pattern became the first pattern.

The 'Ulu tree was a very special tree to have become the first Hawaiian quilt pattern. Today you can see the 'ulu tree pattern everywhere, it continues to be the most popular quilt pattern, it is used on shirts, dresses, table clothes, wrapping paper, napkins, jewelry, ministerial stoles, it's just about everywhere.

And now children can be reminded that every time we see the 'ulu pattern or the 'ulu tree we can be reminded of God's great love for us in the days of old, and in the good news we have in Jesus Christ, he who sacrificed his life so that we would be able to live forever. Jesus is the 'ulu from heaven who becomes the 'ulu of life.

The 'ulu pattern is the pattern of Christ-like love. This would be one of the learning objectives of module two. To attach new symbols and metaphors that have cultural relevance to

the essential teachings of the good news we have in Jesus Christ.

Other learning objectives would include the idea of a quilt being made up of many pieces of cloth. The pieces of cloth are the many different people of the world, lost but now found. When we are sewn together with no one left out, we become a beautiful quilt. This is like the world in that we are all many different people but in Christ we are made one.

Another objective for adults related to the missionaries would be to discuss the role of the missionaries in Hawaii and the UCC Apology and to reaffirm the Oneness and sacrificial love we have in Christ.

Module Three

In module three we have a story of three young boys who plan a trip to the beach to go fishing. On the way to the beach at Moloaa Bay on Kauai, they stop off at one of the farms where peanuts are grown in mounds of sand. The uala are also grown in the mounds of sand. But the boys like the peanuts so they dig up a couple of handful of peanuts and bring it with them. Along the way they come to an `ulu tree, and they climb the `ulu tree and pick three of the biggest ulu they could pick, and they bring these with them. When they get to the beach, they dig a little hole in the sand and build a fire in the hole. They put the `ulu on top of the fire and they bury the peanuts in the sand next to the fire, and they go to the beach to do some spear fishing. At the end of the day, they are so tired and hungry, but they had a great day. They sit down around the fire, which has died down, and they share the food that has come from the land and the sea, the cooked `ulu, the roasted peanuts and the fresh fish. They had more than enough to eat with lots left over, and they were very thankful to God for life.

In this module there is a comparison of this story with the story of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand. In the

story there are many people to feed, and only a young boy with two fish and five loaves of bread. Jesus prays and people share the food with each other. In the end everyone has something to eat and there are many baskets leftover.

This module teaches the Hawaiian values of being prepared, and how important it is to share and care, but also how resourceful you can be and how food is a gift from the land and a gift from God. It teaches how important it is to malama aina take care of the land and the ocean, and to not be greedy. It teach us that Jesus has given his life so that no one should be hungry in this world and that we all have kuleana to reach out and share what we have with others.

Fourth Module

In the fourth module we are moving to completion of the series, and we begin with a series of old testament affirmations of the aina, the wai, the kai, the laau, the kahawai, the pu'u, mountains, trees, seas, all telling of the glory of God and praising God, taking on anthropomorphic characteristics. Listen:

Psalms 148 says... let all creation praise God.

Isaiah 55 speaks of mountains and hills singing and trees clapping their hands.

Similar amazing images are used to describe other aspects of the natural world – or mother earth, praising God. For examples, fields being jubilant and trees singing for joy (Ps 96 v12) and, rivers clapping their hands and mountains singing (Ps 98 v8), and the sea resounding with praise (Ps 98 v7).

The question becomes can the Ulu tree praise God?

The story told is about a Kupuna Annie Kanahale of Kaumakapili Church who taught children that if you look at the 'ulu tree you will see that the branches look like arms

raised to the heavens and the big leaves attached to these branches look like big hands lifted up in praise to God. Let me quote from the lesson:

Look at the branches they look like arms stretching up into the skies. Look at the leaves the leaves on the branches they look like hands reaching for the heavens. What do you see she would say, do you see the Ulu tree praising God? Yes the Ulu tree is praising God by lifting its branches and leaves to the heavens. And the Ulu tree does this every day and all day and all night long, it is praising God for all the blessings in life.

After the Story there are three learning objectives:

1. The Ulu tree reminds us to praise God in everything.
2. How can we praise God all the time? The answer, just remember all the things we have to be grateful for. What are we grateful for today?
3. We must be grateful to God for everything we have because everything comes from God. When we are grateful to God and thankful to God we can praise God with the way we talk and the way we treat others. Always treat others with kindness and courtesy and God will be very pleased. This is one way to praise God with your life.

Again the emphasis in these modules is on creating healthy cultural images and symbols that relate to Christian faith and strengthen cultural identity. The 'ulu tree praising God is a strong visual image in the mind and spirit.

In summary:

And so with the this 'Ulu Series, you have four strong new cultural images and symbols to develop new avenues to communicate and reinforce the gospel of Jesus Christ in new and dynamic ways.

For example with the visual sightings of 'ulu trees growing on the land, or 'ulu patterns on Aloha wear, quilts in homes, or table cloths in restaurants, the teachings of these modules are reinforced in culturally significant ways.

In the eating of the 'ulu breadfruit, the remembrance or the stories can come alive to inspire faith and hope.

There are many other aspects of the ulu tree that can be added, for instance the sap that was used to catch birds for feathers, or to glue or chaulk parts of a canoe. Bubble gum was another by-product of the sap. And the leaves have a preservative chemical for preserving ulu underground for months at a time. The wood of the tree was useful for making drums and the inner bark a form of tapa clothes. The leaves and other parts of the tree were used in medicines. Not to mention that the breadfruit high nutritional value known throughout the world. Indeed the 'ulu tree was truly the tree of life.

And so there you have it the 'Ulu tree a very special tree, culturally, spiritually, and physically. And the Ulu series. To bring us the good news of God's great love in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the 'ulu from heaven!