Mahalo to the authors and artists who have contributed to “Open the Heart.” This volume contains works by:

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Open the Heart

The Bible uses the word “heart” 727 times – at least, it does in the New Revised Standard Version translation. It is often a metaphor for affection, or for will and commitment, or for courage. In his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 6:11-13), the Apostle Paul declared that his heart was open wide to the people of that church. “In return,” he wrote, “I speak as to children – open your hearts also.”

This Lent, we seek to open our hearts. Closed, they neither give nor receive love. Closed, they leave us uncommitted and purposeless. Closed, we cannot reach into our courage to do our work.

Open hearts, however, beat with power. With an open heart, we find the strength to face the challenges and obstacles of living lovingly within the world. With an open heart, we hold to our convictions despite the distracting forces of the day. With an open heart, we love in word and action – and we can accept the love returned.

Members and friends of Church of the Holy Cross United Church of Christ in Hilo, Hawai‘i, have contributed these reflections. Some are prose, some are poetry, some are photographs, some are drawings. You will find the fresh imagination of keiki and the seasoned experience of kupuna. You will find thinking honed by education and you will find the unencumbered dance of new encounters with the Spirit.

In short, you will find a wide range of people bringing their wisdom, spirit, knowledge and... heart.

May their gifts help you to open your own heart... wide.

Eric Anderson, Pastor
February, 2019

They crowned him with thorns so cruel.
Yet, laid in the grave,
God determined to save,
So the stone must roll aside.
Jesus emerged, the resurrected crucified!

[Chorus]

What is our need for weapons
When Jesus is at our side?
Why give our hearts to money
When it could not deprive Christ of life?
All the things we assume,
All that keeps us in gloom,
Roll away as did that stone!
Jesus emerged, and we are never alone!

[Chorus]

It looked like every morning
As the sun began to gleam
But it transformed every morning
With the touch of the first sunbeam.
By the power of One
Death’s sting is undone
And the stone can never close
To contain this wonder:
On Easter Christ arose!

[Chorus]

Eric Anderson
Monday, April 1

Psalm 53:1
Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”

My goodness, what a depressing message for April Fools’ Day!

David (Psalm 53 is credited to the Poet-King) had no notion of a day of jokes and pranks. What he saw was people whose greed and corruption suffered no restraint. They did what they wanted to whom they wanted and anticipated no consequences.

Some things don’t seem to change...

In contrast, centuries later, the Apostle Paul urged Christians to be “fools for Christ” – again, with no notion of a day of jokes and pranks. To his contemporaries, the idea of a God so concerned with human beings as to take human form, suffer, die, and be resurrected sounded... foolish.

Many think that way today, too.

On this April Fools’ Day, I hope I choose the foolishness of Paul over the foolishness of those who say, “There is no God.”

Prayer:
May I choose the foolishness of faith, O God. Amen.

Eric Anderson

Tuesday, April 2

Hearts can open in very strange places. Anthony Ray Hinton had every reason to close his entirely and give in to
the darkness. He was incarcerated for 30 years on Alabama’s death row despite being innocent of the crime. He chose to open his heart to his fellow inmates, and built a community of love and hope in a very dark place.

If you have not read *The Sun Does Shine* by Anthony Ray Hinton (New York, St. Martin’s Press), I encourage you to do so. It is an astonishing story of love, hope, and building community. He opened his heart and built community with those around him in the darkest of places. Could we do that? Do we open our hearts even if we are not in a dark place to those around us?

Do we build community?

Anna Kennedy

Wednesday, April 3

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Friday, April 19: Good Friday

Sail, spirit of Christ.
Take to Your canoe and catch the wind.
Rejoice in blowing spray and flowing tide.

Sail, spirit of Christ.
Do not let these soldiers of empire nail You to the barren land.

Sail, spirit of Christ.
We sorrow these three days but You, dear You: fly free.

*Eric Anderson*

Saturday, April 20: Holy Saturday

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*Eric Anderson*
Thursday, April 18: Maundy Thursday

John 13:34
I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Eric Anderson

Thursday, March 4

Invited

I was born to a Buddhist family. I can recall sitting on a cushion in front of the shrine, beside my mother, and praying. I can also picture my grandmother offering a fresh scoop of rice on the shrine daily. I can hear her telling a friend that the priest gave a good sermon.

WWII started and the Buddhist priests were sent to the mainland internment camps. My mother felt that the children should attend church services. She therefore invited the Mormon elders to hold services at our community center. This was my introduction to Christianity.

The war ended and the Buddhist priests returned. I went back to attending Buddhist services at the temple. Services were difficult to understand because the priest spoke much of the time in Japanese. I did not enjoy going to church and therefore attended sporadically.

While attending school in Honolulu, my friends and I visited several churches. After graduating, I worked at Mid Pacific Institute and attended chapel services there.

Upon moving to Hilo, I was unable to find a job and I attended the University of Hawaii. There I met up with Ronald Fujiyoshi who was a senior at MPI when I worked there. He invited me to attend the service at the Church of The Holy Cross as his father was the pastor at that time. I felt welcomed and comfortable and I have attended this church ever since and that was over fifty years ago.

Moira Tanaka
Friday, April 5

Philippians 3:1
To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.

Ah, Paul.
No wonder you still sound like a repeating record skipping back and forth.
You had a certain message for the churches that you loved; no trouble to repeat.

Eric Anderson

Saturday, April 6

How can we love the ocean?
Its friendly waves deceive; They rise to overturn and overthrow.
Its cooling depths will smother; Its countless fathoms crush.
Its gentle surface warmth rises up
In thickening clouds
Which rage in rain and tempest.
So unlike us – or not so unalike?

Wednesday, April 17

Hebrews 12:3
Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

To not grow weary, O God.
That would be my prayer of prayers, my hope of hopes.
The day wearies me.
The world wearies me.
The sun wearies me.
The rain wearies me.
The tears weary me.
The joys weary me.
To not grow weary, O God.
That would be my prayer of prayers, my hope of hopes.
In you, my great High Priest, my soul finds its renewal, and though weary, I will not lose heart.

Eric Anderson
Prayer:
Give us a word, O God, to fill our heart. Amen.

Eric Anderson

Tuesday, April 16

John 12:25
Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Oh, my. That second phrase really struck me this time. “Those who hate their life in this world will keep it”? Does that mean I’ll keep the things I hate about this life?

Well, no. Probably not.

It does raise the question of what we open our hearts to. As good and right as it is to love this world, to love its people, and to love those with whom we’re closest in it, we can love it so much that we fail to love life beyond it. Wealth and power certainly bring a high risk of claiming not just our attention but our affection. People give their hearts to their reputation, or to a specific person. They give their hearts to a cause, or to an idea.

That’s a good thing. It opens the heart – as long as it doesn’t close it to something else. To other people, other concerns, other causes, other ideas.

As long as it doesn’t close the heart to God.

Prayer:
Help me love my neighbor, God. Help me love my world. Help me to remember: I love you, too. Amen.

Eric Anderson

If we could love each other,
Then we might love the ocean.
If we could love the ocean,
Perhaps we’d love ourselves.

Eric Anderson

Sunday, April 7

John 12:3
Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.


I have friends who would flee a house that smelled that strong.

Her actions won her near-universal condemnation. The disciples (in Matthew and Mark), the host (in Luke), and Judas Iscariot (here in John) decry her wastefulness and, in Luke’s version, her character. Near-universal.

The exception, of course, was Jesus.

By both training and inclination, I resist the extravagant gesture. I get uncomfortable with “such a show.”

Yet I dare not resist this extravagant gift, this profound opening of the heart, this offering of love that Mary gave to Jesus. I dare not resist it, lest I seal away my own heart from my Savior.
Monday, April 8

Prayer:
Open my heart, O God, with a perfume rich with Mary’s deep love. Amen.
Eric Anderson

Prayer:
Give me, O God, an open heart to sail the seas of grace. Amen.
Eric Anderson

Monday, April 15

On Sunday, the stones would shout. But on Monday, the sages would argue. Jesus spent most of that last week arguing, in fact. Sometimes, I’m sure, they were earnest, faithful, faith-filled conversations. “Here’s what I believe about God.” “That’s amazing, Here’s where I have questions or responses.” “That’s a great question. Here’s what I think about that.”

The stories that linger in our gospels, however, are those describing the tricks and traps. Plenty of people loved Jesus and his teaching, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Others did not. Some held positions of power and influence. Some truly suspected that he was a danger to them and the welfare of Jerusalem.

Later, Jesus’ followers marveled at his conduct this last week, his faithful willingness to put himself at risk each day. The ancient words of Isaiah found their echo in their hearts. “My chosen, in whom my soul delights... He will not cry or lift up his voice.”

In their mingled devastation over Jesus’ crucifixion and their elation at his resurrection, their hearts broke open, and this Scripture poured in.

What Scripture will fill your heart today?
Sunday, April 14

Luke 19:40

[Jesus] answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Quieting the crowd made sense that day. Noisy demonstrations attracted unwanted attention: Romans. Roman governors treasured order. Raucous receptions of visiting rabbis were... disorderly. And if the Romans didn’t recognize the signs of Messianic pretension and the acclamation of a royal figure, that was plain dumb luck.

Everybody within earshot knew they were proclaiming a King.

Everybody within earshot prayed the Romans wouldn’t figure it out.

The Romans would respond with shields, spears, and a ruthless willingness to use them. The shouting crowd would scatter, no doubt. They had no power to resist.

Everybody within earshot knew this could only end in sorrow, blood, and tears.

They shouted anyway.

The occasion was greater than their fear. The joy was greater than the crisis. The moment was greater than its sequel.

That’s what Jesus meant when he said, “the stones would shout out.” There are times so great that nothing can stop them.

Nothing can prevent the overflowing of the heart.

Tuesday, April 9

A Verse and a Song

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

He Keeps Me Singing (by Luther B. Bridges, public domain)

There’s within my heart a melody, Jesus whispers sweet and low.
“Fear not, I am with thee, peace, be still,”
In all of life’s ebb and flow.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.

Esther Kodani

Wednesday, April 10

Psalm 20:4

May [the LORD] grant you your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your plans.

Heaven, spare me from this mercy!
May I never see my plans fulfilled.
May I never find desires satisfied.
For then... How would I know to seek your grace?

Eric Anderson
Thursday, April 11

Psalm 31:16

*Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*

One of the Scripture’s mysteries – one of the mysteries of faith itself – is why God has any regard for us at all. Regard for the well-being of “lesser creatures” is not, shall we say, a common feature of humanity. Ask the mosquito that I killed so casually a few days ago.

Why should God care for us?

I suppose there are plenty of reasons that a Supreme Being might care, but time after time, I come back to this simple assertion: God loves us.

God loves us.

What better reason could you find to open your heart?

*Eric Anderson*

Friday, April 12

Many times we feel pangs of guilt because we did not do what we should have done. We are here due to God’s grace, so we should do what is right. Why do we fail?

Life is very ironic! As children most of us were fortunate to have parents and other family to guide us. When we became parents ourselves, we were so busy trying to provide for our children that often we needed to make choices based on available time and energy. Often times the choice made was not ideal, but it worked! Now in retirement, we have the time to do more, but our children are busy with their families and may not even be here. “I wish . . .” is the common phrase these days!

Regret gets us nowhere, so “open our hearts” – do what we can to help those in need, socialize with others, provide assistance when requested, pursue personal interests to keep ourselves healthy and alert – using our God given time and talent as God would want us to. We can provide the support to family as they did for us, maybe in a different way.

Life is a continuous cycle, so we need to look at the positive, doing the best we can at the time. Our God understands and loves us unconditionally.

Listen to your heart! Praise be to God!

*Anne Sadayasu*

Saturday, April 13

Smile with all your great heart.

*Mikael Leung, age 5*