



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"The Four Chairs" (Acts 1:8 Sermon Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**Y**ears ago, I preached on a spiritual discipline I created called Jerry Coffee. It's a practice and a phrase of faith. It's also the name of one of our long-time church members.

Here's how I came about using that phrase of faith. It starts off with something very serious. Back in November 2012, while at a Texas airport, Jerry Coffee unfortunately had a heart attack. That, of course, is not good news. Thankfully he survived with no major complications.

His wife Susan and we all realized later on that if Jerry had the heart attack while he was already airborne, he would not have had the benefit of medical care, and the result could have been much more serious. So even though it was bad news that Jerry had a heart attack, it was good news that he had it at the airport. There was something good in a bad situation.

Hence, for that story and other similar stories I told that day, I coined the phrase "Jerry Coffee" to remind myself that God can bring good out of bad. Whenever apparent bad things happen, have patience because there might be some good coming out of it.

I rarely tell you my travel stories, but I want to share with you a recent travel story that is also a Jerry Coffee story. Last month, Pam and I and Roslyn and Ryan went to a

worship conference in Birmingham, England. A donor made it possible for us to go, so no church funds were used.

I always like to get to my seat on the plane early so Pam and I were in our seats 40 minutes early for the flight from LA to London. Long flight. I had the aisle, Pam had the window and there was an empty seat in between us.

But just before take off, a couple came on board and said to me that I was in one of their seats. I said no, I'm not, and showed them my boarding pass. But guess what? Their boarding pass had the same seat number!

A flight attendant got the gate attendant to come on board, and the gate attendant said that this couple wanted to sit together so they moved me into another section away from Pam.

I told them that wasn't fair since I made the reservation long ago. And besides, I've been sitting in my seat for 40 minutes, while they just arrived. But the airline representative stressed that they wanted to sit together, the man and his wife. So I said, "But I want to sit near MY wife for the 10-hour flight."

I didn't even launch into the fact that I am a million-mile flyer. Didn't matter. The airline representative told me to get my carry-on luggage and move to another row, another seat, leaving Pam in that section. I thought to myself two things: No fair! And then ...

Jerry Coffee. In the end, one just has to trust God especially when you are in a dead end and no reasoning seems to work. So off I moved.

But friends, it was indeed a Jerry Coffee moment! Get this. A few hours into the flight, a passenger who was sitting near Roslyn in the row in front of us at one point, suddenly got up and turned toward where I was supposed to be sitting. Then he threw up on the floor just IN FRONT of my former seat, spraying a 3-foot span of vomit on the floor!

Had I been sitting in my former seat, I would have to have witnessed that unfortunate occurrence and smell the results of that customer contribution for the next eight hours! Who says there is not a God? Let us say the phrase together – Jerry Coffee!

Later when we landed in London, I asked Roslyn how she survived that flight after that guy lost his cookies. And she said, "What? What happened? I was sleeping." Jerry Coffee! She was protected. And Pam was two seats away and she was protected from any collateral damage, if you know what I mean.

I have another story that will further illustrate the Jerry Coffee faith. It's something that happened to Mark Gehri, a former Compassion international staff member who's also a friend. He wrote me a few days ago on Facebook:

I am so grateful my car battery died at the Costco gas pump, even with the huge line behind me. No one honked or acted put out by the delay. The attendant pushed my SUV across the street and said, 'No problem, sir.'

"I took out my jumper cables and 3 cars stopped to help without me asking. The battery was very dead. Jumping it didn't do squat. But Costco amazingly had the right battery in stock! The Costco mechanic loaned me the tools to swap out batteries without asking for ID or collateral. I was at the airport last night at 10:30. Good thing it didn't die there instead of COSTCO.

"By the way, the battery had a sticker that said 'Nov 2011. I'm grateful I got over 4-and-a-half years out of it. Yep! I'm grateful for a dead battery.'"

Now that's a Jerry Coffee spirit. Seeing the good in the midst of bad. What does this have to do with us and our church? Nothing. Just kidding! Actually, everything. We are hoping that in a world where things often go wrong, where there is a lot of sin and incompetence or technological failure, we might have a sturdy, resilient Jerry Coffee faith.

We want our children and children's children to have a Jerry Coffee faith where no matter what goes wrong, we believe God is with us in the hurt and the hollow of our lives.

A Jerry Coffee faith is worth a lot. Can you imagine having a Jerry Coffee faith that gives you an optimism that God is with you and that He can bring light out of darkness and hope in despair whether we are having financial difficulties, health issues, grief over the loss of a loved one, a severe conflict in a relationship, pressure at work or at school, or even a life-threatening heart attack at an airport?

As many of you know, we are entering a season when we are talking

about The Four Chairs and how that impacts our life both here in church and outside of church. You will actually find three sets of four chairs throughout the campus, to reiterate the message of The Four Chairs in the Acts 1:8 Appeal video we showed you last Sunday. If you didn't see the video, you can watch it on our website: [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org)

To make sure we are all on the same wavelength, let me do a quick summary of what the Four Chairs mean. My definitions elaborate the definitions you hear on the video. These four chairs all stand for something in our church history and purpose for living.

This green chair represents your chair. It's where you're sitting today. It also represents the present generation. Many of you like your chair. You come to church to worship and you love sitting here. You look around. Nice church. Nice building. Amazing view of the mountains! Sometimes you may think "it is only MY chair," and so you don't want anyone to sit in it. But that's not right.

In this green chair, we experience the blessings of this church – our children's ministries, our care ministries, our small groups, our choir, the organ, the band, our youth and adult education classes, our times with young adults, young families, older adults, and retired adults. This is our chair today with all the opportunities offered by the church. This is the chair where we have been strengthened and inspired and helped.

But to the right of the chair is another chair. This chair represents the person or persons who invited you to church. It also represents the generation before you, who SACRIFICIALLY made it even possible for you to sit in your chair today. That earlier generation sacrificed. That generation had vision. That generation had hopes that people like you would someday

come. They made room for you. They prayed. They dreamed visions. They sacrificed their time, talent, and resources.

Just for us to be in this building for the last ten years – they gave up property, they pulled their kids out of private school and gave the tuition money to church. They gave up motorcycles (one was worth \$80,000); they gave up cars; they sacrificed part of their college funds for their kids. For some it was giving up one Starbucks coffee a day.

There were children who sat in this seat who collected recyclable cans to raise funds so they could give to a capital campaign. A nickel here, a nickel there – all ages involved in trying to make it possible so we could be here today. We've been here at Ko'olau for ten years, and that's thanks to the sacrifice of those before us. (So don't forget to sign up for the big 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party that thanks God and will also point to the future.)

Then there's the third chair, which represents all the people who have yet to come to our church. We need to make room for them just as people in the first chair once made room for us. We need to be thoughtful about them as people were once thoughtful about us. We need to lead them closer to Christ, just as others brought us closer to Jesus.

That is why we are having a \$1.8 million Capital Appeal called the ACTS 1:8 APPEAL. It will run from August this year to August 2017, so only one year. It is meant to pay off our million-dollar debt from purchasing the property, so that we can finally own it. Paying that off will make available approximately 140-thousand dollars a year for the next ten years that we could use for ministry. Imagine what we could do with 140-thousand dollars a year for ministry!

**T**he goal of \$1.8 million is like a single family home in Kahala. Well, if it's a beachfront, then maybe one tenth of a house for a single family. But we want \$1.8 million to have a house of God not for one family but for thousands of people.

The ACTS 1:8 APPEAL this month is also trying to raise additional money so that we can have more parking! Yes, we have a parking problem again. More parking allows us to make room for others in the third chair just as the previous generation of the first chair sacrificed to make room for us. So we need to raise about 1.8 million. I would love everyone to be a part of this, even if you give just a dollar. It would be great for us all to be all in.

The name of our capital appeal is based on the Bible verse Acts 1:8, which remembers Jesus' VERY LAST WORDS just before He left this earth. Last words are so important. This is what He said:

*Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

I like that verse because it says that we are always supposed to be living in God's power and outwardly focused.

To look at the four chairs in another way: Our church began with our home base in Makiki. It was our Jerusalem. But then we are always supposed to go out from here to Judea, which could be all of the windward side, and then to Samaria, which could be all of Oahu, and then to the ends of the earth, which could be far away places like Swaziland, Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand or wherever the Lord directs us to go.

There were always supposed to be these concentric circles moving out, hence our capital appeal logo. You see, it was never just about three chairs. There's a fourth chair. The fourth chair represents those people out there who may never want to come to our campus. So we need to go out to them, get to know them, serve them, and in the process show what the love of Christ looks like.

As you may have heard me say before, every member of our church is a minister. We, the pastors, are just the coaches who train the ministers. So all of us are meant to be living out our faith outside of our church campus. We are called to show what a Christian looks like in offices, in neighborhoods, homes, and communities. We are to be ministers in Jesus' name who help and care for people.

This should be our DNA. Our mission statement is to love God, love people, and reach the world for Jesus Christ. We can't love people unless we are out there with them.

You see, Monday is coming, as the Orange Conference said recently. What I mean by that is we need to be equipped not for Sunday mornings but for Monday mornings in our businesses, homes, and schools. The purpose of the Christian life is not so we can behave better on Sunday mornings and be all religious.

No, the purpose of a follower of Christ is to know how to live on Monday morning, meaning we want a muscular faith that sustains us for the everyday life of Monday through Saturday, and not how to behave on Sundays. The purpose is to live for Monday not live for Sunday. The purpose is to minister on Mondays in our vocations.

All of our preaching and teaching is not to make us better on Sunday but to be a vibrant follower of Jesus on the weekday. The weekday

and Saturday is our day to be with others and by our lifestyle we serve them in the name of Jesus and when the opportunity arises lead people to Jesus.

That's the DNA of our church. We are being trained to go out into the community to be light in the midst of any person's darkness. This is the DNA we need to pass on to our children and children's children to every generation.

That's not my idea. It's God's. Preparing the next generation and telling them about Christ is super important. Some may not like new forms of worship but it is one way that we must reach the new generation for every generation must be evangelized anew. Young adult, youth, children's ministries – super important.

Let's look at Psalm 78 to see how for thousands of years it has always been God's plan to live a life not only for the present and not only for the second chair, but also for the third chair or fourth chair people.

But before I read it for us, let me say that not all churches have the privilege of being a four-chair church. We were founded in 1959. We started in the YWCA on Richards Street. Then we went to a campus in Makiki, and now here in Ko'olau. We can point to a first chair before us. Some churches are just one-chair churches. They were founded as a new church plant in the last few years and that is all that they know. But we can point back to a first chair.

Some churches are philosophically one-chair churches who don't care about growing or reaching out to a third chair. It's mainly a club. It's all about the members. And their training and discipleship is not about going out to others and so there is not even a fourth chair. But we are a four-chair church.

**W**ith that context, let me read Psalm 78, which was written thousands of years ago.

*Psa. 78:1 O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying,*

*Psa. 78:2 for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—*

*Psa. 78:3 stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us.*

*Psa. 78:4 We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the NEXT GENERATION about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about His power and His mighty wonders.*

*Psa. 78:5 For He issued His laws to Jacob; He gave His instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children,*

*Psa. 78:6 so the NEXT GENERATION might know them— even the children not yet born— and they in turn will teach their own children.*

*Psa. 78:7 So each GENERATION should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting His glorious miracles and obeying His commands.*

It's pretty clear isn't it? When God created His community, the people of God, they were always supposed to be four-chair people.

As Psalm 78 said we are always to be a thankful people remembering the first chair - We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the present and the next generations about the first chair people and about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about His power and His mighty wonders.

We are always to fight the selfish narcissistic fearful feelings that

it is only about me and my chair, and I don't care about others.

Instead, we must fight those selfish feelings and to boldly courageously know that no, it is about others. We are here for others and not just for us and our chair, but for those in the other chairs.

We are here for the next generation of believers. We need to make room for them. We need to sacrifice for them. We need to also go out and minister in God's name to those in our community. We are not just to play it safe and take care of just us. God commanded us to reach others. Again, Psalm 78:

*Psalm 78:5-6 "He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them— even the children not yet born— and they in turn will teach their own children."*

Actually the healthiest way of taking care of ourselves and our children is to think of others. By doing so, we put our generation and the next in a position to be in God's will.

In order for us to have a Jerry Coffee faith – we need to remember Ps 8:7, a Jerry Coffee verse: "So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting His glorious miracles and obeying His commands.

Why is it so important for people to know Jesus Christ? It's because He is our ultimate hope. I know that many of you are going through a real hard time. You have lost a loved one, or may be losing one soon. You have a difficult financial picture and it is scary. You may have a medical situation that is terrifying. You may have a relationship conflict that is so weary and hard. You may have a care-giving context that is so wearisome and draining.

Our hope is that Jesus can give us strength and a positive outlook that

though things seem so dark that He can bring light for He is the Light of the World. Is He really the Light of the world? We know He is because an earlier generation testified that it was true not only a generation in our church but also we know that from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Peter Paul and, yes, Mary, and Sarah, Rebekah, Ruth, Esther and Priscilla in the Bible.

We know that it is true because in our present generation, many of us testify of the miracles and the help and healing and caring we have experienced.

And we know it is true that for any healthy church, we always have to be outward focused, that there can't be just a social or a spiritual component but there has to be a service component – always wanting to go out and bring others to Christ and to serve our community.

This is the crux of our Acts 1:8 Appeal which we will all have to sacrifice to be more equipped to be a four-chair church for all people. It won't be equal giving, for we all have different resources, but it will be equal sacrifice.

When the four chairs are arranged around a table – that is true community. We eat, fellowship, encourage one another. When these chairs are arranged around a communion table then we realize at the very center is this truth and hope. That God came to earth.

He left His chair in heaven, to sit with us in our chairs. He told us to make room for other chairs. He came to live among us. The testimony of His love is that He died for us. He was tortured, whipped, beaten and stabbed before being crucified for six long hours just so that all of our wrong doing and sins would be erased and that there would be a place for us at the table.