



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

April 15 and 16, 2017

"Love, Faith, and Forgiveness" (Easter message)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

(A video of the Easter story was shown.) So there you are – the whole Easter story. As the children in the video said, "He is risen!"

It's Easter! Many celebrate it in different ways. Take my dog Molly. (Photo of Molly was shown) She's got her Easter outfit ready. My other dog Max, on the other hand, thought it was St. Patrick's Day. (Photo of Max was shown.) He didn't realize he was a month late. Got his religious days mixed up.

Today is a glorious day. It's the highest holy day for a Christian. It's a day we talk about love, faith, and forgiveness. We have a chance of having all of that in our lives. Why? Because the great, loving God decided to come to earth. And though He was divine, He chose to be one of us.

He was vulnerable, open to pain and suffering. And knowing our hard times, Jesus came down to fight with us and to let us know He has our back. It's basically all about three things: love, faith, and forgiveness.

## 1) LOVE

In a recent movie called *Patriot Day*, actor Mark Wahlberg plays the role of a Boston city cop who was on duty during the horrible bombing at the April 2013 Boston Marathon, which in fact happened four years ago this weekend..

My friend, *kama'aina* Kit Smith, was running in the race, and when we in Hawaii heard of the bombing, we were afraid for him. At the time of the bombing, we didn't know where he was.

We were also afraid for his wife, Margie, who might have been at the finish line waiting for him. There were two explosions, one right at the finish line, another 210 years away.

At the time, Kit was actually away from the finish line, a mere 12 minutes away when the explosion happened. Fortunately Margie was not anywhere near the finish line waiting for him.

In the movie *Patriot Days*, I was surprised at how some of the scenes talked about God. In one scene Mark Wahlberg, who played the lead role and produced the film, talked about how he and his wife learned they couldn't have any kids and how he felt that it was the devil that attacked them. But his wife remained hopeful because she sensed God telling her to not to let the loss overcome her.

There is also a scene in the movie where Wahlberg, after a gun battle with the Marathon bombers, tried to reflect on how does good keep fighting evil in this world. Will it ever stop? Will good ever win? Here is that scene. (Video clip was shown.)

We can't prevent all evil and hurt in this world. But with love, we can

prevail and overcome the hardship. The fact is we need to know that a loving God will always be with us. For those times when you've been told you cannot have babies, or if you've lost a baby, or if your marriage is not working out, or there are medical problems, financial challenges, or when terrorists strike and there is dreadful evil everywhere, for all battles of good versus evil—the only way to overcome all of this is with love, not hate, not despair. It's only with love.

Love is possible because God wants to pour His love into us when there is despair, disappointment, tragedy, or evil against us.

The Bible says God is love. And He brought us love in Jesus. And when He rose from the dead on Easter morning, we then know that love wins every time.

In *Star Wars*, Princess Leia says, "Help me, Obi Wan Kenobi. You're our only hope." But the REAL statement is, "Help me, Jesus Christ our Lord. You're our only hope."

Have you ever been betrayed? Jesus was, by His own inner circle of friends and by His people. Have you ever suffered injustice? Jesus did. Have you lost a loved one? Jesus lost one of his best friends. Amazing that God would come down to our land and choose to live with us and suffer with us. He gets our pain. He gets our disappointment.

**H**e gets our sickness. He gets our betrayals.

Why would He want us to know all of this? Because after we know He loves us, then we learn how to have FAITH in Him.

## 2) FAITH

You see, for many of us, we may know something about this Jesus. We may know something about what He once said. We may know some of His promises. But without faith, real faith and real trust in Him, the things we know about Him are all just gobbledygook, all just hyper religious talk.

But one day, we will hopefully realize that all we know about Jesus actually makes sense in the grand scheme of things. That Jesus was not just a mere mortal. He was different. He was more than just a moral teacher. He is God!

And so I ask actor George Clooney to help me with this point and be part of this service. No, ladies, he is not here in person, but He was in a film called *Hail Caesar*. And in that film, he was an actor playing the role of a centurion in a movie during the time of Jesus. George Clooney's character was shooting one of his scenes when, somehow, his words became more than just words from the script. From religious jargon, the words slowly, surprisingly became real. Let's take a look at this. (A video clip from *Hail Caesar* was shown.)

Faith. Don't skip on that word, especially when it comes to Easter. Without faith, all of the other words don't make sense! We have to add FAITH to the mix. When we add faith, it all comes together (and then the soundtrack of our hearts begins to soar).

If you hear all about Jesus, if you read about Him in the Bible, if you read

about Him in other books, if you pray, but you DON'T have faith that He is ACTUALLY God, then it's a real miss. It's off strategy in your living; it's a whiff at the ball of life. It is CRUCIAL that we have faith that Jesus came and rose from the dead because if He really did that, then that's a game changer. That's a transformer!

Maybe faith has been the missing link for you. When that darkness comes at night, when the loneliness sets in, when it seems you can't forgive, when you despair, maybe it's real faith in God that has been missing. Head knowledge is not enough; it's faith that we need.

Can we have the FAITH that He will be with us in the darkest times? Maybe not take away our problem, but give us wisdom and strength to bear it? Can we have FAITH that He actually existed? Can we have FAITH that He is who He said He was – God? If we don't – then all the other stuff is just window dressing.

BUT if He is what He says He is – The Lord, not a lunatic or a liar, but the Lord—then take the leap of faith and follow Him. Go for it.

## 3) FORGIVENESS

In the Bible you will hear these words from Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven." But who can really forgive sins? It has to be one who has the right to.

British author C.S. Lewis put it this way: "We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you.

"But what should we make of a man (Jesus), Himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that He forgave you for treading on

OTHER men's toes and (for) stealing OTHER men's money?

"Yet, this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin."

Whenever we sin, whether directly against God or by doing wrong to others, God feels wronged because sin is disobedience to Him. But the amazing thing is that God always forgives us. Always! Once again I quote British author C.S. Lewis, who adds another element to this: "I think if God forgives us, we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise, it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him."

Jesus once said, "Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say to a paralyzed person, "Stand up and walk?" He can heal people by saying stand up and walk, and He is the only person who can forgive sins. Why? Because He is God. He has the authority and ultimately He is the one wronged when we do disobey Him.

The Good news is that Jesus died on a cross as a sacrifice for all of us in this room, so that all of our sins would be forgiven. When He was on the cross He took on all of our sin. All of our sin. And then He rose from the dead on Easter morning to prove that He has overcome both sin and death.

Jesus said if we follow Him: "People will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter." (Mark 3:28)

**T**hat means no matter how big the sin is, it will be forgiven if we come to Him. When the woman, the so-called village sinner, came to Jesus to wash His feet, He said, “Her sins, which were many have been forgiven.” (Luke 7:47)

When a man was brought to Him for healing, He said, “Your sins are forgiven.” When a woman caught in the act of adultery was about to be stoned, Jesus convinced the crowd to drop their stones and leave, and then He asked her, “Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on sin no more.” (John 8:10-11)

In our heads we can hear the phrase, “Your sins are forgiven,” and they may not mean much. But if you know God’s love, and if you have the faith that Jesus is truly God, then the words “Your sins are forgiven” will mean a lot to you. Receive it, for He really means it.

On this Easter weekend, imagine that I am Jesus, and I am saying to you right now to you: “Your sins are forgiven.” Let me say it again, “YOUR sins are forgiven.”

Imagine a life where the burden of something you have done wrong is now lifted. Imagine being given a second chance by God. Let me say it again, “YOUR SINS are forgiven.”

Say it with me now, but say “My sins” instead of “Your sins.” Let’s say it together— “My sins are forgiven.”

Receive it for yourself and say it one more time: “My sins are forgiven.”

This is where it all comes together with the three words. If you have the faith that your sins are truly forgiven, you will be the most loving person in the world. For Jesus said, about a

town’s so called worst sinner: “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown GREAT LOVE. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” (Luke 7:47) Love, faith and forgiveness are all intertwined.

Jesus would say, if you really know you are forgiven, if you really accept forgiveness from Me, AND you know that I have washed away your sins, then get baptized in my name. In one of His last statements before leaving earth after the Easter Resurrection was He wanted all to be baptized in His name.

Baptism is a sacrament, a sign of grace that says, “Jesus, I accept Your forgiveness because You are God. I accept Your love. And I have the faith to follow You.”

There comes a time, maybe for you today, where you say, “OK God, I want to be all in. I don’t want to follow other things that lead to a dead end. I want to acknowledge formally Your love and forgiveness. I want to declare on this Easter weekend that I am now all in. I want to follow You for the rest of my life. In fact, on this day, I am willing to be baptized.”

Hear this: We would love to baptize you today! Now some of you may be thinking, “Oh, I think Dan means I could SIGN UP for baptism today.” No, I mean get baptized right now. No way, you say. I mean this is a church so that means there has to be a committee to approve me, or I have to join a class or take something. No committee meeting and actually, you just took the class right now.

Some of you may be thinking, “Oh, no way am I getting baptized; I don’t want to be a member of this church.” Well, the truth is, who says we want you as a member of this church?

Seriously, if you have a church, stay at your church. If you don’t have a church, baptism says, “Find a church.” It doesn’t have to be First Prez. But know there are no lone rangers. You need to be part of a church because Jesus calls us into community.

Some of you may be thinking, “Hey, I am a private kind of person. I have faith, but I’m not going to embarrass myself by getting baptized in public.” The deal is: baptism is a public way of making your ultimate commitment. It’s really important we at times do things publicly.

Take a wedding for instance – it’s a public declaration of love. Perish the man or the woman who says, “Hey, honey, I really love you, but my love for you is kind of private and I don’t want to make a vow of commitment to you in front of people. God already knows I love you, so why even wear a ring? So let’s just keep it on the QT about my love and devotion to you and not let anyone know.” Had I said that to my wife Pam, I probably wouldn’t be married today.

There are times when a line is drawn in the sand, and we cross it to take a stand. We put a stake in the ground and say I’m in. All in! No more sitting on the fence about our faith! LOVE from Jesus, FAITH in Jesus, FORGIVENESS from Jesus – I get it now.

When Jesus walked on earth He said, “Baptize my followers.” He knew we needed that commitment. That’s the spiritual ring on the finger. When you make a public commitment to follow Christ, something happens in your heart, your soul. The Holy Spirit supernaturally comes.

So how does this work? If you want to be baptized, we’ll have ten stations in front of the stage with 10 pastors and lay pastors assisted by some our elders and deacons.

**W**e will have bowls of water from which we will take a little bit of it into our hands and gently pour it on your heads. It is a symbol that your sins have been washed away by the life and death of Jesus Christ. Your sins have been forgiven. It's a symbol of how we are cleansed and we can start a new life, write a new chapter.

In the Bible, there were times when entire households were baptized all at one time as an act of faith. So if you want your children to be baptized, bring them too.

When you come up through the center aisle we will give you a card for you to write your names, and to indicate if this is a first-time baptism or a renewal of baptismal vows. If you have been baptized before, maybe even as a baby, we believe the first one took. So if you want to come forward, this will be for a renewal, like how some people do renewal of wedding vows, even though the first time was real.

After we baptize you, we will give you a small wooden cross to wear around your neck to commemorate today. And as you leave the front area, through the side aisle we have some things to give you to remember this day. Contact us if you'd like a baptismal certificate.

If you are a child wanting to be baptized, make sure your parents or guardians are okay with this. And if for some reason it is difficult to come up front, maybe you are in a wheelchair or have an ambulatory issue, signal an usher and he or she will come to you, have you fill out a card and we'll make sure one of our pastors will come to you and baptize you where you are.

Baptism is a big decision, so we want to give you some time to consider it first and not rush into it. In the meantime, Celine Carr will now come

up to sing. She will sing one part of the song in Latin, where she'll say *Venite Spiritus*, which means "come Holy Spirit come," and then *Et Emitte Caelitus*, which means "send your heavenly radiance." Let's think about baptism now as Celine sings as the elders and deacons get ready for baptism. (*Celine Carr sang "Far Away"*)

Let's take a short moment of silence now to collect our thoughts and for some to confirm in their hearts that they and/or their families will get baptized or renew their commitment of their vows of baptism. And may the pastors, elders, and deacons please get in position during this time.

Now, I ask all of you to please stand.

I have questions for those who want to get baptized or have a renewal of baptismal vows. You may answer these questions as loudly or as softly as you desire, while the rest remain quiet. To those who on this Easter weekend who want to get baptized or renew your baptismal vows from long ago - I ask:

- Who is your Lord and Savior?
- Do you trust and follow Him and accept His forgiveness of your sins?
- Do you promise to be a follower of Him, obey His word and show His love to all?
- Do you promise wherever you may be, to be part of a church, a fellowship of believers and to strengthen that faith community?

And if there is a child who wants to be baptized today and follow Jesus, I ask this congregation: "Will you do everything in your power to help this child be a follower of Jesus?"

And I now ask at least one of the child's parents or guardians:

Will you do all in your power to raise this child up as a disciple of Christ, that he or she will obey His word and show His love to all, and will you strengthen the child's ties with a church? if so say "I do."

And now all may be seated. As people come forward for baptism, we invite the rest of you to sing the next songs or prayerfully just listen to the music and watch this glorious sacrament of baptism. It is a highlight of any faith community when people make a decision of faith.

All who desire to be baptized, please come forward now, down the center aisle, and then leave by the sides. I will later close the service with a final blessing.