



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 14, 2016

"The Three Conversions" (Acts 1:8 Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

As you know we are in the midst of a Capital Appeal to raise \$1.8 million from Aug 2016 to Aug 2017, with us turning in our pledge cards on Aug 28, at the 10th anniversary party of our Ko'olau campus! We are doing the Appeal to finish off what we owe for this place and to build parking, and to possibly pay for any governmental impact study. But there is a higher reason for all of this.

When it's time for appeals, it is like a barn raising. What is a barn raising? It's a time when an agrarian community comes together and work together build a barn that would benefit a family or the whole community.

Families in a town or village come together to get their ropes and pulleys to raise the walls of a barn. Some will be pulling, others nailing, some painting, some bringing food to the event. Every one—children and adults—all help. The success of a barn raising answers the question – are we really a community? Are we willing to sacrifice and help others for the sake of the community?

A capital appeal is our barn raising – and it asks us the question: Is the church just about my family, and me or is it about others? Are we consumers or are we a community committed to the cause?

Pete Grieg, an HIM speaker and friend of our church and leader of the 24/7 Prayer Movement, said that

there are three conversions for the Christian, and it's not just converting to Christ: a conversion to Christ, a conversion to His cause, and a conversion to His church.

1) Conversion to Christ

The day we converted to Christ, we realized that God is real. He came to this earth as Jesus Christ. After three years of intense ministry and teaching about God's love, He was killed. He gave up His life for us to tell us about God. To follow Him will bring us fulfillment and joy and love.

I love what it says in the Message version of the Bible of what the Apostle Paul wrote to a church in Ephesus. In the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians 1:11-17 it says:

It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, He had His eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose He is working out in everything and everyone.

It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit.

This signet from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

That's why, when I heard of the solid trust you have in the Master

Jesus and your outpouring of love to all the Christians, I couldn't stop thanking God for you—every time I prayed, I'd think of you and give thanks.

But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing Him personally....

2) Conversion to His cause

You have heard me say that the two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you know why. Why were we born? To KNOW AND love God, to love people. And ultimately the best way we love people is to lead them to the presence of God. That's the cause —TO BRING THEM TO CHRIST.

We don't have the luxury to take our time or amble down that road. Many of us have lost loved ones at ages way too young. This past year, we have lost attendees of our church – one as young as 3 years old, one in his forties, one in her sixties and others older. What this means for you and for me is that we can't put off the good that God wants us to do. Life is short! Every one of all ages needs to hear about Jesus. Now! Everyone needs to hear that it is ONLY through Jesus Christ can we have true hope, fulfillment, and purpose.

The money we raise through the Acts 1:8 Appeal is not just to pay off the debt on the land but to also reach others.

And the money we can save by not spending it on an annual debt service for the next ten years can go a long way to help those who desperately need the comfort and guidance of God.

3) Conversion to His Church

I love what the Bible says about God's church.

Eph 3:9-10 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the CHURCH the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

It's through the Church that God's wisdom and love will be made known to all. Are we passionate about God's church? I understand that it takes time for some to really appreciate and understand God's church.

Since I never tell travel stories, let me for once tell you a travel story that relates to this last point. As I told you last week, Pam and I were in Birmingham, England two months ago for a worship conference with Roz and Ryan. A donor paid our way, which was super nice. I preached and spoke at a couple of churches there and shared a tiny bit in the worship conference about Hawaii.

Out of the whole week we had one day off in London. Pam and I walked around town that afternoon, and happened to pass by a famous church called St. Martins in the Field. A man outside passed me a flyer about a concert that night inside this famous church. Now if you are into classical music, you would know that some of the best classical albums were made by the Academy of St. Martins in the Field founded by Sir Neville Marriner, whose present music director is the famous violinist Joshua Bell.

In fact, if you are a movie buff you would know that in 1985 the Grammy Award for Best Classical Album went to the soundtrack of *Amadeus*, performed by none other than the Academy of St. Martins in the Field!

So according to the flyer, there was going to be a concert that night at the church. I had always dreamed of going there for a concert. And that night they were going to play Bach's Brandenburg Concerto, one of my favorites, and also Vivaldi, Handel, and Pachelbel Canon in D among other pieces. Price of the tickets was as low as 9 pounds, which is about \$13 before Brexit. These are what are called *paké* prices! This was my dream!

I said to Pam, "It's St. Martins in the Field. They are playing my favorite music. We have this one night free! Let's go hear them!" But Pam said no. She wanted to go to the Tate Museum of Modern Art.

Now I like art, and many of you like contemporary art. Modern Art is nice, but we are in London. We could hear the Brandenburg concerto tonight! But no. Pam wanted to go to the famous Tate Museum of Modern Art. So being the awesome husband, a fantastic friend and spouse that I am, I gave in. I'll give it a shot. I have an open mind. I'll go to the museum instead.

So we go to the Museum of Modern Art. One of the first pieces of art I saw was a tree made of trees. Someone took 30 pieces of trees and made it into one tree as an art piece. And I'm thinking—why didn't they just put a tree in there instead of cutting down trees to make one tree? Pam said this was done by the famous Chinese artist Wei Wei. And I said this is like too WAY WAY out for me. Then Pam rolled her eyes.

The next pieces of art were these pieces of bent metal. And being the country bumpkin, I'm thinking—you have got to be kidding! Then came this pile of wooden crates with junk in between. The next room featured air-condition vents. Air condition vents? I am thinking—you call this art? I can see these vents at our church for free! And I gave up St. Martin's in the Field for this? At that point, somewhere in my mind I was hearing the Brandenburg concerto already, but being the good husband that I am, I tried to block it out of my mind.

Next came people lying inside cages. And I thought, "I am so glad I came, Honey. Who needs to hear Handel in London when I can see people in cages?"

But the piece de resistance of my building frustration was when I saw Modern Performance Art. I turned a corner and saw these two men holding a string. It was called Strangers 2008. I thought, "Oh, this is really good. Two guys holding a string and looking at each other. You call this art?"

I read the plaque next to the men: "Strangers 2008. Strangers is a performance work, in which two people who have never met before hold a string for several hours. The length of the string means that they have to stand ten meters apart. This is a "distance that allows for talking but not intimately"...so in a sense their bond also establishes their separation."

I took a closer look at these strangers who had never met (picture of one of the guys holding the string was shown), and I don't think he looks happy. So I looked closer and decided to take a picture since he couldn't look at me. Oh yeah, he looks real happy. But that was it!

Now, I have friends who work in Contemporary museums and who give tons of money to modern art museums. I affirm them and their love of art. But I am just a kid from lower Manoa, ordained in Kalihi. That was it. I had had it. I was as happy as the scowling Winston Churchill statue in London. I was glaring at these pieces of art like Churchill glares at Big Ben! I was glaring at my Big Ben of a watch wondering when we were going to leave!

So I told Pam she could continue touring the museum without me, and that I was going to the museum café. I would go drink my new favorite beverage, Elderflower soda, and drown my sorrows with it while eating my new British treat, Fiddler's Lancashire Crisps.

An hour later, Pam came down to the café. I was so ready to leave to head back to our flat, since I had completely missed St. Martins in the Field and the Brandenburg concerto when Pam, who was looking awfully happy and pleased, said to me, "Did you see the Picasso and the Claude Monet. Weren't they great?"

Wait a minute. What Picasso? What Monet? All I saw was bent metal, dumb air-conditioning vents, and two guys holding a string! No, she said. On the fourth floor are the works of famous artists Picasso, Monet, Dali, Degas, and Matisse.

No way! I didn't know there was a fourth floor! I didn't know there were such great paintings and sculptures there. So she graciously said she would go with me so I can see them, and she wouldn't mind seeing them again for my sake. So off we went to the fourth floor.

And sure enough – I saw Claude Monet. And I saw Henri Matisse, my new favorite! Such wonderful colors! And I saw the really

famous Degas sculpture of The Dancer. And sure enough there was Salvador Dali's painting in all of its crazy glory. And yes, I saw several Picasso's.

I think this is the first time I have ever shown our congregation a frontal nudity shot but because it is Picasso, you can't even tell what you are seeing! But not to be too revealing, let's change the picture to the church adjacent to the museum, St. Paul's Cathedral, a picture of God's church.

So here's my point. I said that three conversions in our life need to happen: to Christ, to His cause, and to His church. For many who come to Christ, it takes a while to fully understand His cause and to get involved. And then for many who follow Jesus, it may take a while to fully understand, and get excited about His church. We may be here for months or years, but we have not fully experienced all the floors and wonderful art and artists of the church.

For many in the church, it takes a while to see the fourth floor, to realize that God has some great art in some great people in the church, and that there are great things of beauty and opportunity and elegance in the church. It is worth investing in. Again as it says in the Bible in Ephesians:

Eph. 3:9 My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along.

Eph. 3:10 Through Christians like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!

God always planned it that it would be through His Church that the

wisdom and mystery and art of God would be made known! It would be in His Church that we would sacrifice for one another and others.

Friends, it takes time to go from one floor to another and then you see more and more of the beauty of God and hopefully be less judgmental or critical. Sometimes we get stuck on the first floor. Sometimes it's not our church but a previous church that really hurt us. Maybe abused us, let us down, and so it is hard to trust God in His church, and so we stay on the first floor. Maybe some people didn't say hi to us. We may be too scared to venture out to a second floor. Or we get so busy we never get to the third floor.

But as we know Jesus more, read the Bible more, pray more, and be more forgiving of others, we see that it is time to get on to the next floor to see more of the beauty of God, and the art of the people who are part of the church. We want to give to God for we know that the Church, as the Bible intimates, is the bride of Jesus.

The Acts 1:8 Appeal is not just an appeal to pay off our property, it is also a movement towards Christ, towards His cause, and towards God's church just as the people in the Old Testament were moved to build God's place of worship.

We want all of our attenders and friends of First Prez to give to this cause. It's not equal giving but equal sacrifice. What does that mean?

Everyone has different levels of giving. So not equal giving but we do hope that it's equal sacrifice to give something above and beyond what you normally give to the church. I told you last week that those who sat in the chair before us sacrificed tremendously in order to make room for us so that we might have a seat in worship or a seat at the table.

They sold property so that we could move here. An expensive motorcycle was sold. Cars were sold. Children were pulled out of private school and money was given to the cause. Kids collected soda cans and plastic recycling bottles to be part of the movement. Some gave up the equivalent of several Starbucks a week to give to the cause.

Similarly, I would want everyone to participate even if it means you can only give a dollar or ten dollars or a hundred or a thousand above what you normally give. I would love it if 100% of our attenders would give something so we can ALL be part of the barn-raising, so we can all say, "I was part of this," and that we were all in and we just didn't watch others raise the barn.

I like all of us to be involved in seeing God's church being built. It's a home not for a single family, but a home for hundreds, if not thousands, of families.

Pam and I were in Queen's New York once and that church we were visiting was having a building campaign. We knew the pastor and his wife. I said to Pam, let's give something even if it's just \$25 or \$100. Let's be part of this on the ground floor.

And that's a church we hardly know. But for a church we do know, for a church that we have received services from, for a church that has helped or blessed us, why not give sacrificially for that? We are all here today because someone else sacrificed greatly for us to be here. We are at the helm, and it's our time. Maybe we're behind on our tithes, so now it's catch-up time.

Why am I sold on First Prez?
Why is it worth investing in this place that God has put on earth to serve Hawaii and the world for Him?

We are not the perfect church, but I think we are one of the healthiest – no fighting, no gossip, no discord between staff and elders or with congregation. No staff falling from grace in immorality. No families not getting along with other families. These are not small things. Trust me, there are plenty of churches who have had those issues, but God has protected us and blessed us.

We are not the perfect church, but we are a church of great theology where we are learning what it means to love God and people in a nonjudgmental, generous way.

We are not the perfect church, and we openly talk about our imperfections. We talk of our divorces, and depressions and crazy years as a youth, or what it means to be a pregnant, unmarried teenager or to be in Lebanon where people are trying to kill your family, or how painful it is to lose your mother or your son or on 911 to actually lose family to terrorists. And that's just the staff stories. We try to be real. This is a community that strives for authenticity and humility in all that we do. It's rare. This is a church that proclaims our weaknesses, and only in our weakness do we receive God's strength. In our pain we discover His grace is sufficient for us.

We are not the perfect church but if you want to learn, we give you plenty of opportunities through classes in Life Training, WAKO, small groups, Bible studies, special conferences, and through our sermons, which can be seen, read, or heard through the website, TV or on the First Prez app.

We are not the perfect church but we try to be caring – whether it's through our small groups or one-on-one friendships or with our various support groups for those who are caregiving and those going

through divorce, grief, cancer, and other difficult periods in life.

We are not the perfect church but we have fun and fellowship – with Out and About, and crazy dance parties and Fezziwig balls and women's teas and men's retreats and picnics and slip and slide.

We are not the perfect church but if you want to serve there are opportunities to serve – whether it's on Do Justice Saturday or Laundry Love or Mustard Seed Miracle of building homes for the homeless or in other local or international missions.

We are not the perfect church but we ARE a giving church. We give tons of canned goods away every year as we collect every Sunday. We are the largest church giver of blood in Hawaii. Through Compassion International we have sponsored more than 1,000 children. We have given millions of dollars away to missions. We are the number one donor in the state for the Give Aloha gift-matching program that Foodland offers every year for nonprofits.

We are not the perfect church but we love our children! We have a great Sunday school curriculum for them and we offer great experiences through special programs like Vacation Bible School.

We are not the perfect church but we are learning how to live naturally supernatural. Almost 200 people come regularly to our healing services. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and miraculous healing and conversations with God. Many are prayed for and healed. Naturally supernatural. We are not the strongest church but our power comes from the Holy Spirit.

And that's where Acts 1:8 comes in – the key verse of our Acts 1:8 Appeal where we are trying to raise \$1.8 million.

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.”

Some people may think our \$4 million operating budget is big. And it may be big for a church with a small vision. But for a church with a large vision, \$4 million is not that big.

There is more we have to do. We need to finish off our mortgage. If we can retire the debt then approximately \$140,000 every year is made available for the next ten years, instead of paying off the debt. Now we can use that money for ministry. We can build more parking. One of the reasons our attendance has recently plateaued is that there is not enough parking. A healthy church should always have 20% empty spaces poised for growth. We are jammed at the beginning of the 9:30 am service. Fortunately we shuttle in people and that helps alleviate the parking.

For any church to move forward there are times of sacrifice. And as the generations prior to us have sacrificed so this is a time to sacrifice again.

If you look at the giving pledge card we mailed to you, you can see the spectrum of gifts that we need. If you didn't get one, pick one up at the reception desk or tell them to mail one to you. Some of the pledges needed are smaller amounts. Some are larger of like five figures. All of those levels are desired. It is a lot to give to make this happen.

It was a lot for past members to give and for some of you present members who also gave in the last campaign. But is it possible that we can give again as God has blessed us in the last ten years as we celebrate our 10th year anniversary? Please come to the Anniversary Party on

August 28.

But as much as we give to God, let us understand that we can never out-give God. His blessings will always outperform our investments. It may not be a one to one correlation in terms of money, but clearly in blessings. One can't out give God. He is a debtor to no one.

I remember the time for the last major campaign that Pam and I decided to give up some of our kids college funds to begin buying this property. It was five figures. It was a big sacrifice. It will be again what we will be doing for this campaign. But I experienced again that you can't out-give God.

Noelle became an RA. I thought that was good for her to be a resident assistant in her dorm to learn leadership. Only later did I realize that she got free room and board and a stipend. Huge savings.

Then our son Dylan got a 4-year, 50% off scholarship to his university. Suddenly we realized that combined, these stipends and scholarships equaled to 4 times more than the gift we gave to this church. You can't out-give God.

I hope you will take the card and pray and then fill it out and give a gift that is evident of your faith and your commitment to Christ, to His Cause and to His Church.

The Bible says the Church is the bride of Christ. Jesus is that tight with this church. He wants to be that intimate with us. This is our time.

When I think of Christ and His cause and His church, I think of a Broadway musical that I fell in love with many years ago. It was called *Man of La Mancha* which won 5 Tony Awards. There was one song that spoke to me as a young Christian that to me spoke of the cause of Christ to

love unconditionally, that even though it may seem hard, that we should dream the impossible dream – that the cause of Christ is to beat the unbeatable foe, to right the unrightable wrong, to love pure and chaste from afar.

The song spoke of a Christ-like figure who how the world would be better for this that one man scorned and covered with scars still strove with his last ounce of courage to follow that heavenly cause.

For me it captured it all the passion for – Christ and His Cause and His church.

So to close this sermon, I have asked Jordan Shanahan to sing that song. He's a friend of our church, a local boy from the Windward side who was one of our choir scholarship singers in our church choir who then went on to perform in the Metropolitan Opera as well as in Chicago, Munich, and the Netherlands. Please welcome Jordan Shanahan.