



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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The Dance, the Devil, & the Lion's Den (Hope Restored Series)

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If you have not been here for a while, you may not know that we have started a new sermon series on the Gospel of Mark entitled "Hope Restored." Two weeks ago Pastor Steve kicked it off telling us that when Jesus came, it set off a huge divine domino reaction where not only did God touch down on earth during Christmas, but nearly 30 years later, after living incognito, Jesus announces His presence and tells people about Himself and what He expects us to do.

Last week I told you that a man called John the Baptizer was preparing the way for our Lord Jesus by saying, "God the Messiah is now walking this earth so repent and do His will." I said the good news is that there is a Messiah. The better news is that it's not you.

Last week was a call for us all to do God's will, follow Him, and be all-in. And now as the curtains fall back in today's passage, we see that Jesus has now started His ministry by getting baptized. We begin with just three verses, and later we'll add two more:

Mark 1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Mark 1:10 And just as He was coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on Him.

Mark 1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Jesus gets baptized. Why would He need to get baptized? Why is it such a big deal? For John the Baptizer and for Jesus, baptism would be the sign, the sacrament that a person is all in. Jesus modeled that. For much of His life on earth He modeled what He wanted us to do – help the poor, pray and heal the sick, forgive, and, yes, get baptized.

Baptism is like the wedding ring on the finger, or signing the name on a contract. It would be the mark of a committed all-in follower of Jesus. It shows a sacred commitment, covenant, a promise, a vow that my family and I are going to follow God no matter what. It's like what we say in wedding vows, "in want and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy, in sickness and in health until death do us part." In your name, Jesus, I will be your communicator of the gospel. I am all in!

Baptism is a big deal. We want all followers of Jesus and their families to be baptized. And often we baptize on Easter morning, and hundreds have been baptized the past three years, and hundreds have had renewal of baptismal vows (just like people have renewal of wedding vows).

Without exaggeration, did you know that nearly 600 people have made such baptismal commitments—both first-time and renewal of baptismal vows—these last three years at our church. That's not including the more than 220 women we helped baptize with other churches in the women's prison in 2016.

At the prison, it was so moving as it was said to each prisoner baptized, echoing the words of affirmation from this passage – "God says to you now, 'You are my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased.'" The women cried realizing God has forgiven them. It is the same message to us all when we get baptized. God delights in us.

Making promises or re-commitments are incredibly important. We are the sum of all of the promises we make. That is what our integrity and character is about. For us, baptism means acknowledging that we are sinners but that our sins have been washed away when Jesus forgave us and died in our place so those sins can be atoned for. We are forgiven because of what Jesus has done, and NOT because of what we've done.

I like what pastor author Tim Keller points out: "God does not look at us in terms of our own record. When you see Jesus dying on the cross ..... This is what it means to be a Christian. You don't say, 'Now Lord, I'm going to try to be a good person.' You say, 'Father, accept me, not because of my record, but because of Jesus' record. Not because of what I have done, but because of what Jesus has done. Accept me for His sake.'

At that point, Jesus has moved out to you. You moved toward Him in repentance and faith, and God again moves around you and says He delights in you. He delights in you! You're precious to Him. You're as beautiful to Him as a gorgeous bride to her groom.

**T**hat's what the Bible says over and over again. Then you start to obey Him and live a life out of the assurance of His love. [Keller, T. J. (2013). [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#). New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church]

The baptism of Jesus is a huge event! Bigger than we can imagine. In fact, all of the four Gospels, either report it or refer to it. This is huge! But sometimes we wouldn't know a huge event even if it stared at us in the face because we have been anesthetized with not so much fake news but hyped non-events. For example, I just saw a magazine cover of a so-called huge, important big event discovery. *Food And Wine Magazine* had this on its cover. ((Photo of magazine cover was shown))

A picture of a huge delicious chocolate cake that must be worth thousands of calories with the headline "Eat Smarter Live Longer." Really? The cover says the article is on page 45, and so I eagerly turned to the page to find out how I can eat chocolate cake and be seen as a smarter eater and a longer-liver. I looked at the page and saw all of the ingredients, which didn't seem that healthy, and then I see way down on the bottom left this little sentence: "Lighten up. Instead of sweetening whipped cream with sugar, add a little cinnamon." Sooo, that is how I can now eat smarter and live longer! Cinnamon!

Back to the magazine cover. Did you see way on the bottom right that hook: *Is Tequila good for you?* Oh man, now I can DRINK smarter and live longer too. So, I turn to that page cause I want to know why tequila is good for you. I have been missing out for years. I have an inquiring mind. I want to know. So I turn to the page.

The article "In the Clear?" says they tested dozens of tequila drinkers to find out. (Wow, extensive scientific research – dozens of drinkers.) And so, I read the first paragraph where it says, "If you blithely follow the interwebs (that's a new term) you may have come to the

conclusion that tequila is a miracle drink. In the past year, stories have bounced around about the wonders of Mexico's most famous spirit: 'it helps you lose weight, improve the bacteria in your gut, lower blood sugar levels, fight cholesterol and even reduce your chances of developing dementia. Most of these claims, unfortunately are boneheaded. And honestly, declaring any 80 proof liquor to be 'good for you. Is mighty suspect in the first place.' "

So I am thinking, why did they put that line on the cover? The next line said, "However, there is a tiny shred of truth to the idea that tequila won't damage you as cavalierly as some other spirits might." Wow, compared to other spirits, Tequila might be good for you – front page news. [from *Food and Wine*, February 2017, pp.45-55]

We live in a world where there is a lot of confusion and misleading come-ons, and people like me fall for them. But let's not miss out on the real headline news that when Jesus gets baptized it is super important for us.

First of all, did you notice that it is the only time in the New Testament that all 3 persons of the Trinity show up at one time? Jesus the son gets baptized and then God the Father speaks out saying, "In you I am well-pleased," and then the Holy Spirit arrives flying, fluttering, floating like a dove above Jesus. This is a big huge event. It means that finally after 30 years in obscurity, Jesus reveals Himself and starts a three-year ministry.

Why is this important that we see the Trinity? Why do we need to understand the Trinity? Because if we understand the Trinity, we will see the uniqueness of our faith...and how God is a deeply personal God, and how He calls us to dance with him. Dance? I'll elaborate on that in a few minutes. I know for many, including myself, the Trinity is sometimes hard to fathom.

Is the Trinity tritheism, meaning three different gods? No. Is the Trinity unipersonalism, meaning one God who

changes from one form to another, like bad mutant Mystique played by Jennifer Lawrence in *X-Men* movies? No.

Is the Trinity trinitarianism, meaning one God in three persons? YES! The Trinity is ONE GOD in three persons who know one another and love one another, and in essence are in an eternal dance with one another. There's that word again—dance. I'll explain that very soon.

And you say, "Say what?" Now, the fact that this might seem confusing doesn't disprove God.

Actually if God is really God, His essence should be not so easy that it's a quick answer to a Jeopardy question. The fact that it is a bit complicated makes it more real. We are complicated but God is even more complex.

Now some of you might be saying, "I can't stand it anymore," and you want to ask, "What do you mean they are in a dance with each other?" (Help me, Obi Wan Kenobi. You are my only hope. No, actually, help me C.S. Lewis you are my help right now.)

C.S. Lewis, a British writer, wrote not only children's books like *The Chronicles of Narnia* but also books on science fiction, poetry, and theology. C.S. Lewis, a writer of so many genres, a true renaissance man and one of my favorite Christian theologians, explains the difficult concept of Trinity in this way. He says that:

"In Christianity, God is not an impersonal thing or a static thing. He's not even just one person, but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, a drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, *a kind of dance*. The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person.

I know this is almost inconceivable, but look at it thus. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the 'spirit' of that family, or club, or trade union.

**T**hey talk about its 'spirit' because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart.'

It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God. [C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, chap. 26]

I love the reality of the Trinity because it means that God in His essence is always personal. It's always about community. It's about relationship. It's a personal universe. But I really like it that Lewis calls it a dance between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is in a dance with themselves, moving in unison like a beautiful waltz and sometimes moving into different roles but still the same God but three persons, who are perfectly interacting with each other.

But here is where it gets really personal. God is calling out to us to join Him in the dance. He wants a personal relationship with us. Don't worry about stepping on His toes or He on your toes. The Trinity means it is not about us. It is about being in the dance, being in a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and interacting with all of them, being filled by them.

Last week I told you about consumer Christians versus committed Christians. Consumer Christians make the faith all about them and how Jesus is only here to serve and help them, but they are not committed to the cause of serving Jesus and other people. When we know we are in the Trinitarian dance, there will be a check in our spirit if we make the faith all about us.

Keller, who pointed me to C.S. Lewis in thinking about the dance wrote this:

"Now, why do they talk about the dance? Here's why. If you're going to graphically, physically depict selfishness, selfishness is stationary. Do you know why? A self-centered life is a stationary life. It's a static life. It's not a dynamic life because a self-centered life wants everything to orbit around it.

"You might give to the poor, sure. As long as it makes you feel good about yourself and it doesn't cut too much into the way in which you live your life. You might help people. You might have friends. You might fall in love, as long as there's no compromise of your individual interest of what makes you happy, of your needs.

"Self-centeredness, therefore, makes everything else a means to an end and in the end, a non-negotiable is what I want and what I like, my interests over theirs. [We can say] 'I'll play with people. I'll talk with people. But everything orbits around me.'

"In other words, the unipersonal god makes an idol out of individual. The polytheism god makes an idol out of the tribe or the family. But see, the triune ... leads to a unique understanding of human society." So says Tim Keller. (Ibid.)

When we really understand the Trinity—the Fellowship of God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and its very essence—it changes how we see all of our relationships. Everything must be seen as community. It's not all about us.

For many people relationships are often transactional – I want this relationship because it will help my business – or it will help my family – or it will help me get ahead. Or I will hang out with you as long as you support my agenda. And, this may be hard, if you are politically different than I then we will not be friends because you are in the way of my agenda. If you are religiously, culturally, morally different than I, then I don't want to hang out with you.

Relationships then become nice only if they help our goals, our business, and our intellect. Then it becomes a lonely life because we don't know how to be friends. We don't know how to relate intimately without strings attached, without using people for our gain.

Keller points out that in the corporate world, the irony is that the better you are at your job. It often is structured so that the more promotions you have, the LESS time you'll have for relationships, friendship, and community. LESS time to hang out with your family, spouse or friends. LESS time for even a serendipitous meeting with a stranger.

But here's the shock to our calendar and our desire to be successful: whenever you are a follower of Jesus, it should affect your priorities. Once we follow Jesus we need to throw out a lot of idols in our lives. Money and accomplishment might be two of those idols, if we tend to choose career over rich, deep friendships.

That's where church helps. We try to give opportunities to create rich relationships in small groups, Rooted groups, or Alpha groups, fellowship groups, men's women's, youth events where we can get accountability, responsibility, and spiritual friendships. We can chase having high self-esteem, but we won't get it if our life is all about us, instead of being in community and doing the Lord's work.

My sermon title is *The Dance, The Devil and the Lion's Den*. We go from having a wonderful dance with the Trinity and now to the second part where the Devil says, "May I cut in?" Every day, the Devil says to us, "May I cut in? May I lead you on the dance instead of God?"

Jesus knew that after His baptism, He had to face the devil. It was like Gary Cooper in the cowboy movie *High Noon* that ends with a fast draw duel between Gary Cooper's character and the villain in the movie. Jesus had to face the devil, who controlled the town.

**M**ark 1:12 And the Holy Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness.

Mark 1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Notice how the Trinity was involved. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. Now this may seem peculiar that the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to meet the enemy of God.

But first of all, it shows that Jesus, our Lord and the Good Shepherd, is not afraid to fight those who threaten His flock. If you are going through a tough time today, know that if you're a follower of Jesus, He is on your side. He will fight for you.

Second, Jesus was putting Satan on notice that there is a new sheriff in town. On Jesus' vest He has the Star of David on one lapel, the Star of Bethlehem on the other. Satan, like in Harry Potter, tried to throw three enchanting spells against him.

In other Gospels stories, we see that Satan tempted Jesus three times with power, with wealth, and with the allure of the spectacular, but Jesus deflected them all. It is important for us to know this because many of us have chosen to give in to those temptations in lieu of true community with God and other people.

You see Jesus is often called the Second Adam. The first Adam, who we met in the first book of the Bible called *Genesis*, was *tempted* by Satan to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and to have all of the power through knowledge he would want, and Adam fell for that. He failed the test. Originally Adam lived in a Garden peacefully with animals and was even told not to eat any animal and to lead a vegetarian life, but he fell from grace.

Now Jesus, the Second Adam, is again being tempted by Satan, the Prince of this world, but this time, Jesus says no, and

proclaims the Kingdom of God is at hand, like King Richard has come back to England to overthrow the Evil Prince John. Jesus the King has returned and He will defeat the Evil Prince Satan who wants His throne.

You see, Satan only has power over us when we do not want to bruise our ego. When we want to make life all about us and be a consumer Christian, Satan has power over us. When we use Jesus to get what we want and make it all about us, Satan has power over us, and we minimize Jesus into a holy butler.

But Jesus challenges us and says, "If you lose yourself for My sake, if you are willing to surrender yourself and sacrifice some of your comforts, options, career plans, family plans, or retirements plans for My sake, you won't lose your life! Instead you will find it."

Yes to be true, to follow Jesus means you must be willing to go into the wilderness for the sake of Jesus to fight evil and help people with their pain. That is why it was great to hear from Jen Hopley in her testimony last December how she chose to leave the comforts of Hawaii to help hurricane victims in Texas. It's great how we send people from the so-called Garden of Eden paradise of Hawaii to go into "dark" places like Cambodia or Thailand to help people suffering because of the satanic sex industry. It's great how some of us have gone on trips to help release children in poverty through Compassion international. It would also be great if some of you would consider going to China to help orphans with special needs. To be true, to follow Jesus means we go into the wilderness to do battle with Evil.

Finally, briefly, let's wrap up this passage with this strange ending. Let's look at verse 13 again:

Mark 1:13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on Him.

Wild beasts? Strange. No other Gospel account talks about the wild beasts. Why did Mark put that in? Remember in the first century when the Gospel of Mark was written it was a time when Christians were killed by being thrown into an arena with wild beasts. So, now you're thinking, "Okay, I don't want to be the man in the arena, if there are scary wild beasts in there. Maybe I should compromise my faith and just stay clear!"

Actually, I think it is the opposite. If we try to continue our self-centered ways, then Satan wins the showdown with us every time. And we WILL BE torn up by wild beasts due to our selfishness.

Historian Mark Lane believes that the Gospel writer Mark wrote in about the wild beasts in that verse to say that with God, you can be like Daniel in the lion's den, where God tames even the wild beasts. And like with Daniel, the angels will minister to you in the midst of difficult times. Many of you are going through a difficult time. In whatever situation you're in right now, or wherever God calls you, He will be there.

Writer G.K. Chesterton, friend of C.S. Lewis once wrote:

"Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."

Yes, there may be a Devil, which most societies in the world know, but it's the Gospel story that says that the Devil can be beaten. Don't give up! May your hope be restored! So be faithful. Be obedient. Push away self-centeredness. Follow God to the ends of the earth, and fight on, for the Lord is with you.

And I say this in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. LET'S PRAY.