



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

January 29, 2017

"More Eyes, Clearer Vision" (Real Faith for Real People Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money."

James 4:14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."

James 4:16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

There are times in our lives when we think we are completely in control. Our work ethic and sense of responsibility can make us think that we can dictate what happens in our lives. Of course, it's not bad to have a work ethic or be responsible. But the fact of the matter is, we are not that much in control. Anything at any time can get out of control, and that makes us vulnerable.

My first point on this Bible passage is an obvious but perhaps forgotten one: We are not in control, and we are vulnerable. And so it is not practical to have an attitude of "I will definitely do this or that" considering that we don't know everything about life and the things happening down the line.

This can be bothersome for those who rightfully want to plan a great and long career. But the reality is, we need to be humble about our plans because at any time things can go sideways.

There is a great movie directed by Clint Eastwood that came out last year. It is called *Sully*, starring Tom Hanks (who some people say sounds like Pastor Tim Shaw, or is it that Tim Shaw sounds like Tom Hanks?)

The movie title refers to Chelsey Sullenberg, whose nickname was Sully, a pilot for US Airways. On January 15, 2009 he flew US Airways Flight 1549 from La Guardia Airport in New York City for North Carolina with 155 people on board.

But soon after takeoff, a flock of Canada Geese flew into both engines, causing a fire. With his plane losing power, and knowing he can't make it back to the airport, Sully decides to do an emergency landing into the Hudson River in the middle of New York City. (This is not the kind of movie I want to see as an in-flight film on a plane.) As the plane is losing power, Pilot Sully tells his flight crew to immediately go into the emergency landing protocol; And here is how that scene unfolds. (A video clip was shown.)

Hearing the emergency protocol of the flight attendants of "Brace, brace, head down, stay down" should make us grateful that there are certain protocols in place meant to help everyone on board when things go wrong. The good

news is that the protocol was followed and all 155 on board Sully's plane survived the emergency landing. (A picture of the plane afloat in Hudson River was shown.)

Today I am going to give you a protocol to live every day in your life. It won't be "brace brace, head down, stay down," although it will be similar. The protocol is: "Faith, faith, pray with head down, stay down (to keep praying)." Always having faith, always praying will give us strength for the journey.

Our church has a saying "More eyes, clearer vision." It means when you make a decision that will affect your church or your own personal life, get as many wise people as possible to weigh in on the decision. Because life is complicated, and we all have blind spots, we need other people to see life's issues from different vantage points.

There are so many facets to an issue, and like the proverbial blind man who touches an elephant to learn what it is like, he might only touch its trunk or its tail or its leg and think he knows what kind of animal it is, but he doesn't.

We all have blind spots, and we need others to see the full picture. In real life, we need God's view, God's principles, God's intervention, and God's wisdom to guide us.

In reality, there is God. In real life, there is God who desires to be involved in our life. There is God who wants a personal relationship with us.

The Lord is a major player in our lives. He can approve, allow, or help with things in our lives. Don't ignore Him. Sometimes you hear people refer to God as the Big Man Upstairs, or the Big Man in the Sky. When I hear those phrases I always worry that people refer to Him as that because they think He is up there, detached, not caring, not intervening. He's the Big Man up in the sky, rather than God who is in us who we talk to all the time.

It behooves us that in any big or small decision we make, we need to always be asking God what HE want us to do. Make Him the center of our lives. Continually talk to Him. Remember the protocol: "Faith, faith, pray with head down, stay down." Actually you could pray with your head up. A prayer with head down is often out of respect. My real point is to pray always and stay in prayer, whether head up or down.

People often ask, "What is the will of God for me?" The Bible has the answer. The phrase "this is the will of God" appears only twice in the Bible, so when we see those verses, we better do what God wills for us.

1 Thes 5:16-18: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Pray without ceasing is the will of God. There is a correlation that when we pray all the time, be thankful all the time, we can rejoice all the time. This is the will of God. Can't be clearer.

Don't make a family decision, a business decision, a social decision, or a financial decision without getting God into your prayer evaluation of what to do. We need His perspective. More eyes clearer vision, and we certainly need His eyes on it. When we sing *Be Thou My Vision*, we should mean it.

When we say "Tomorrow I will do such and such," the author James says we

need to stop and know that God needs to be there in every part of our decision-making. Now, you could hear this sermon and you might think, "Oh my goodness. Anything can happen any day. My plane can get in trouble, or I could trip or I could get sick. So is this passage saying, I should worry every day. Worry that tomorrow may not come. Worry that tomorrow might turn out bad."

Actually, I am saying just the opposite. If you REALLY dedicate your life to Christ, then

You don't need to worry. James is saying, that when we put our complete faith and trust in Christ, we don't need to worry any more.

Jesus said: *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear." (Luke 12:22)*

The Apostle Paul said: *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:6)*

Here's how it works: While we can know that we cannot be sure about tomorrow, we can know that God can be in our lives. AND He is more than able to help us. Therefore, don't worry. If we have dedicated our life to Him – our business, social life, family life to Him – then no worry because God is saying, "I got this. I got you."

Even when there is heartache and tragedy, remember how God said in the Bible: *"Do NOT fear for I am with you, do not be afraid for I am your God. I will help you and strengthen, and lift you up with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)*

When we live a life that God is in the very CENTER of our lives—where we are always talking to Him, listening to Him, trying to do what He says for us to do — then life will be easier in that life could have less worry.

We must begin with the FIRST STEP – the realization that we cannot orchestrate every phase of our lives. We are in la la land, if we think that. Step one as said before,

1. More eyes, clearer vision.

The Bible lays down this reality. Don't say with certainty "I will do such and such tomorrow" because there are always other factors. It's better to get advice and perspective from other godly people. It says in the book of Proverbs:

Prov. 15:22 Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.

We need to get as many advisers in our lives as possible. When you're dating, one of the most important steps in choosing a spouse is to give your friends permission to say what they really think about your boyfriend or girlfriend. Most of the time we don't give our friends a chance.

A girl might say, "Isn't John just great? He is so gifted, and kind and generous and so Christ-like, and has such a heart for children. So what do you think of him?"

And at that point you feel so boxed in. If you tell her what you really think, it might burn your friendship. And what if she marries the guy? You wouldn't want to start off badly with the new couple. So you kind of stammer and say, "Oh yeah, John is a really nice guy." But under your breath you add, "If you don't mind marrying a real psychopath."

A few years ago a friend of mine broke up with her boyfriend of 10 years, and she was stunned to discover that 100% of her friends thought the ex-boyfriend was a super-jerk. Not just a jerk but a super-uber-alles jerk.

Why didn't she know that? Because she never gave her friends permission to tell her truthfully what they thought of him.

She said to me later that she felt she wasted ten years of her life. Now I don't think they were wasted years in that she can learn from those years. But it was sad.

But then it happened again with her next boyfriend of two years. She didn't ask her friends what they thought. This one was just as painful if not more because a wedding date was set. She cancelled it because the two of them were just a bad fit. Now being a good friend, I told her early on that I felt there were enough warning signs that he was not good for her. But, as we say in Hawaii – eh, she *neva* like listen. Two years later she realized it.

The Old Testament backs up what James says in the New Testament: *“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.” (Prov. 27:1)*

Life is so unpredictable! Here's a recent example.

I have done hundreds of funerals so one would think I know what a day will bring. Recently I presided at an early afternoon graveside funeral. And I have the family's permission to share this story. Fifteen close family and friends gathered around the grave. Suddenly, the grandson said, “We are going to toast Grandma.”

I thought, “Okay that's fine.”

And then he said, “With tequila.”

What? Suddenly, everyone was poured a shot of tequila, including me. I said to the person next to me, “I don't drink alcohol except occasionally wine.” I was told that I had because it was for the grandmother.

I said, “I have never drunk tequila.”

The other person said, “We all are drinking, and it has to be in one shot.”

So, after someone said a few words they said everyone drink, and it was bottoms up...! And I being awfully sneaky but

trying to be respectful, bent back my head, but I didn't actually drink anything. Kept my lips sealed as I pretended to take a swig.

Unfortunately, standing next to me was the deceased's daughter who saw my still full cup of tequila. I was busted and she said, “You didn't drink anything.” Which I felt like the entire cemetery heard.

I said, “Well, I don't...I just took a sip.”

She said, “You have to drink it all in one shot, for my mom.”

So in that moment that it felt something horrible like a cross between *Sophie's Choice* and *Schindler's List*, I felt I had to do the right thing and so I drank it all. Then she said suck on this lime. I thought, “Gee, is that the protocol?”

But the worse was yet to come. I was supposed to go to my dentist 30 minutes after the service, and I feared that when I got into the dental chair, the dentist and his assistant would examine my mouth, then smell the tequila, and say, “Oh, started early today, huh, Pastor?” So I called the dentist's office before I got in my car and told the receptionist my dilemma, and why, when I come in, I might smell like tequila but that there is a good reason for it.

The receptionist who is the wife of the dentist then proceeded to laugh out loud uncontrollably for what seemed like a minute. She finally got herself together and said, “Just get here.” I said you can give me one of those sample toothbrushes and toothpaste and I can brush my teeth first.” She said, still giggling, “Just get here.”

So you see, part of life is acknowledging how unpredictable it is.

“But Dan,” you might say, “You said there is a way I could live a life with less worry and more peace without tequila. So how does that come about if life is so unpredictable?”

If step one is more eyes clearer vision, step two is:

2. Make sure those extra eyes are God's.

We need to get in the practice of always saying – if the Lord wills: “I hope to go to the college of my choice if the Lord wills. I hope to get that job – if the Lord wills. I hope to get into that relationship if the Lord wills. I will make that business deal, if the Lord wills.

Saying “if the Lord wills” is not being a wimp. Rather, it's evidence of a focus in our lives that in everything we do, we want God to be the center of it. And we also realize we have a lot of blind spots. So we want His eyes on this.

When we hear ourselves say “if the Lord wills,” it reminds us to seek more and more of God's will in our hearts; we learn more about God and we become like Him. Then His will becomes our will.

So when God says, “Ask anything you want and it will be granted to you,” it is always granted because we are seeking His will of what He wanted us to do in the first place. But you say, “Dan, then that is a stacked deck. If we ask what He wanted to give us in the first place, then of course He will give it to us.”

And I say, but if you're desiring what God wanted to give you, then you'll be even more grateful because He's giving you something that He knows is best for you. Now it makes more sense when we read such Bible verses as:

Prov. 16:3 Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

Prov. 16:9 The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.

If we ask God to be the center of our lives, then He will direct our steps. If we truly commit our work to the Lord, then our work is His work and our plans will be established.

So you say, but sometimes it is really hard to figure out what the Lord wants. And that is why we must listen not only to God but also to mature, hopefully Christian friends. God calls us to community, and God speaks to us through the community. Now of course it means you need to surround yourself with humble, wise people who love God or else you could get BAD counsel. The point is not to get any counsel, but godly counsel.

I know the plans of God can seem so convoluted. My own life journey was convoluted. But looking back now I feel that it was all part of God's plan, although I didn't know it at that time. You don't know it at the time, but if we can look back and feel it was all for God's use.

In college, I thought I was going to be an English teacher. I didn't become an English teacher but I ended up in TV news, which I really loved. It involved a lot of writing and reading and meeting cool people. As a TV news reporter I was taught to write quickly and for the ear and not the eye in a way people can hear and understand.

TV news taught me confidence in public speaking, about business, excellence and exposure to a national media in CBS News. ("60 Minutes" is the best!) Then I went to seminary and then to film school, and then finally arrived here as an assistant pastor, then went to Silicon Valley to start a singles ministries and learned in the Silicon Valley a new way of managing people, then I left the pastorate when my dad unexpectedly died and I headed up a nonprofit with Pam called Hawaiian Islands Ministries, and then came back to be your senior pastor to use ALL that I learned for more than two decades.

God used all of that – with so many twists and turns. There is no way I could have said when I was 21 I know for sure what I will do tomorrow, let alone at age 31 or 41 or 51 or beyond.

So you see, it began with a desire to be an English teacher and God led me and used an unexpected marketplace profession of broadcasting to prepare me for ministry in a church and significant friends telling me what to do at certain points.

I could have held tightly on that I am going to be an English teacher no matter what, OR I could hold life more loosely and say I don't know what tomorrow will bring. But if the Lord wills it, then I will do it.

Some of you may be in a transition in a profession or in a relationship. The Bible says: "*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.*" (Prov. 16:3)

Start with committing your life to God and then all things will fall into place even in the midst of disappointment and suffering. God sees things from the 30-thousand foot level. He sees the big picture from Heaven.

I always talk to God. I ask for His help. I ask for His insight. I ask for His way to handle and guide people. I write the Lord a letter about once or twice a week, journaling my thoughts. It keeps me always asking Him for advice. NBA star Jeremy Lin writes a diary too. He said it is a manly thing to do.

Proverbs 16:9 says: *The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.*

What's the alternative? James says it clearly:

James 4:14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."

When we say "if the Lord wishes," that could send a chill down your spine

because it shows how vulnerable we are. Or it can be a reminder to take it to the Lord. What does He think about it?

One of our members said he was about to buy a car last week but but delayed the purchase because he realized he didn't ask God about it. Now you may think, "Isn't asking God whether to buy a car or not a *manini* thing?" No, it's not! For one, most cars are expensive. It's a big expenditure of your personal budget. Nothing is too small or *manini* to talk to God about that. Now asking God at Starbucks about whether to order a latte or a macchiato might be too crazy small. Or should I say Crazy Venti?

I close with step 3 in remembering that we can always seek God's eyes on an issue because we can trust God.

3. Trust God.

He gave His life for us. He came down to this earth to live among us. He suffered with us. That's the essence. If the great God Almighty, Creator of the Universe, King of Kings decided to come down to earth to be one of us, and was willing to defend us and suffer for us and then die for us – to fully experience our pain in order for us to know His love, then I say, we can trust Him. We don't need to worry if we trust God. In the words of St. Winnie the Pooh and Piglet: "What day is it?" asked Pooh. "It's today," squeaked Piglet. "My favorite day," said Pooh.



And it can be all of our favorite days if we know the Lord is in it. Amen? Amen. Let's pray.