



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 11, 2018

"The One Who Takes You By the Hand" - Hope Restored Series

Jenny Sung

Good morning! I'm Jenny Sung and one of the lay pastors on staff at First Prez. It's a pleasure to share God's Word with you today.

How many of you have had run-ins with flu-like symptoms or had fevers during this winter season?

I was scrolling through some news outlets last week, and noticed that the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that this is the highest rate of flu-like illnesses since the flu pandemic of 2009. They also reported the highest flu hospitalization rate seen since the agency started keeping comparable records in 2010.

Influenza, or the flu, caused by viruses, has mild to severe symptoms that can sometimes lead to death. Digging in further, I directly went to the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/takingcare.htm>

It said, "You may have the flu if you have some or all of these symptoms":

1. Fever
2. Cough
3. Sore throat
4. Runny or stuffy nose
5. Body aches
6. Headache
7. Chills
8. Fatigue

9. Diarrhea and Vomiting

Yuck!!! What nasty symptoms! The spread of the flu commonly happens when people sneeze or cough and the viruses go airborne.

In fact, the government of South Australia launched an advertising campaign to urge people to get the flu shot. The commercial you are about to see is called "The Sneeze" made in 2009 (<http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/2009/the-sneeze-in-south-australia/>).

I have to warn you, it has a messy factor, so this may be kind of disgusting. However, I find the pairing of the music and slow motion hysterical.

An article describing this commercial says, "...an explosion at 165km/hour, globular debris and waste material fly upwards and outwards, splashing across things and people near and far."

Now before you run off to wash your hands, or rub yourself with hand sanitizer, you may be asking, "What in the world does this have to do with the book of Mark?"

Well, besides being a caution to cover your hands and mouth when sneezing, washing hands, using hand sanitizer, etc., this was

an exercise to heighten your senses (and perhaps your visual senses were heightened a bit too much; maybe you want to sneeze out the Holy Spirit at 165km/hour!). But as you think about today's story in the book of Mark, I want to engage you into using all your senses.

There are two parts to our sermon today. One is about an individual person, a woman who is sick in bed with a fever. The second part is about the masses, an entire city that gathers to be healed.

Let us stand, pray to receive God's Word, and then together, we will read the Scripture passage for today.

Lord, we pray that you will open our senses in every way to receive Your truth of Your Word. Lead us and guide us. And may we be filled with the power of Your Holy Spirit, for You who is in us is greater than anything in this world. Thank You for being our Lord and Savior. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

So let's read today passage from the book of Mark 1:29-34.

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 *Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.*

31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

So Jesus has just come out of the synagogue, teaching with authority and cast out a demon from a person, and news about Jesus began to spread. Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John were fishermen living in the village; they are now followers of Jesus.

I'm going to take us through an exercise, very much like how Pastor Dan opened up our senses last week when we imagined being in the synagogue. He asked us to imagine how the room was, how we felt in the situation, who was there.

This Bible meditation is referred to the Ignatian Method, or something similar Pastor Rick Warren uses is the "picture-it" method of Bible meditation.

You know it's very helpful as you go into God's Word, to really give it space. Sometimes, if you have been reading the same passages over and over, or even if it's new to you, taking that time to pause, letting the words and images sink in, and listening for God's voice through that will open up

barriers and deepen your intimacy with God.

You begin to understand and see connections, and the truth penetrates deeper into your thoughts and actions. You begin to live more and more seeing through the eyes of Christ, seeing the world as He sees it.

Let me first describe the exercise and then we'll go through it together:

The steps are Prepare, Picture, Ponder, Pray, and Practice.

Prepare: Find a quiet place and quiet yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Open the Bible to the passage you are going to study.

Picture: As you read the passage, create a picture in your mind. Place yourself in the scene and ask questions: What do I see and hear? What do I smell, taste, or touch? Who are the characters and what are they doing? What emotions do I sense?

Ponder: What does this mean? What does this mean to you? For God's people?

Pray: Convert your reflections and considerations into prayers to God. Ask God for help, guidance and blessing.

Practice: Make a specific commitment to apply what you have learned. Rest in God's love.

Okay, now we are going to do this together. The practice part is for you after you leave the service today. I'm going to read the verses again and ask some questions. You can close your eyes or you can jot down what comes to you if that's easier.

Begin by quieting your heart. Breathe normally. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Listen to the verses again:
29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Picture: Imagine walking into Simon's house. Now look upon his mother-in-law, laying feverish in bed.

How does she look? What are the sounds in the house? What emotions do you sense?

See Jesus arrive at her bedside. What is His expression? Do you see her gaze upon Jesus? What is her expression?

Do you see the face of the disciples, or Simon's wife? As Jesus takes her by the hand? Who are you in this story?

See the glow of health return to her pale face. See the strength return to her limbs as Jesus lifts her up. What is the woman doing now? What is she feeling? What do you hear in the background? Is there chatter? How does the room feel?

Ponder: What does this mean to you? What does this mean to the people? Do you see the compassionate humanity of Jesus? Does He take you by the hand and lift you up?

Pray: Convert your reflections and considerations into prayers to God. Ask God for help, guidance and blessing.

Practice: Make a specific commitment to apply what you have learned from this passage. Rest in God's love.

We've been in the series, "Hope Restored" going through the book of Mark. In the very first line, Mark wastes no time in telling us the true identity of Jesus. The first sentence starts with: *1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

In the next several chapters you see healings and miracles and events that give the account that Jesus is who He is—the Son of God.

Our story today continues to give evidence to that, but in the lines you'll also see the personhood of Jesus as a compassionate God, the One who takes us by the hand.

Jesus comes to the woman who can't even get up, and He is the one who touches the sick places that no one wants to touch, or even if we want to, we don't have the power to heal.

Jesus comes into the room, and she rests her eyes on Jesus. He takes her by the hand and lifts her up.

Can you imagine the hope restored as she begins to feel better? Can you imagine her gratitude when Jesus healed her? Can you imagine the hope for everyone who saw what happened, for the people who heard in the city? Can you imagine the exhilaration, the awe, the joy, the hope?

Jesus comes as a servant, sent by God to redeem all of us who are fallen, and in need of hope restored.

Jesus is the one who gathers us and lifts us up. He is the one who heals the wounds that no one else can heal.

Jesus is the one who reaches in with compassion and he tells us to lift our gaze up to Him. Not on other people. Not on power or possession or status, but on Him.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, *1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with endurance the race set out for us.*

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

As the greater story of Jesus' purpose is revealed, you see that the One God sent came to finally do away with sin's consequences forever. Ultimately, Jesus came as a suffering servant, was betrayed and killed. Through His resurrection, He set us free to live the lives for which we were originally created. Jesus restores hope forever.

Now the final part of this sermon moves from the individual person to the masses, to an entire city that gathered in hope.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

At this point in time the people around Jesus did not really know who He was. It's early in His ministry and it's not until chapter 8 that we see Peter declaring Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus knew His

appointed time, and you'll see He does not let people reveal who He is, much less demons—the enemy and father of all lies—to speak about Him.

But the masses are flocking to Jesus as the whole city gathered. Scholars say the city of Capernaum had about 1500 people, and I'm thinking more if they counted children and women.

And here, we see Jesus drawing the entire community unto Himself, healing those who are tormented in body and spirit. If you read the books of Matthew and Luke, they tell the same story with different nuances.

Matthew refers to a passage in the book of Isaiah, saying Jesus healed all who were ill, *"THIS WAS TO FULFILL had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases'"* (Isaiah 53:4)

Luke says He touched them all, laying hands on each of them and curing them. In these passages, we see a compassionate God who takes our infirmities. He draws the entire city unto Himself. He is the God who loves the city, ushering in a new kingdom.

Pastor Steve had talked a lot about God's kingdom in his sermon, "Purple spaces". He spoke about the Kingdom of God, that it's about the in-breaking of God's rule on the earth as it is going on in heaven. It is about the freedom from the life we know and bringing about the purposes, plans, values and character of God in real and tangible ways.

In the book, "Why Cities Matter" Stephen Um and Justin Buzzard explain the gospel as: "That God came to dwell among men is earth-shattering in itself.

That He would willingly identify with us to the point of experiencing all of our pain, temptation and sorrow takes the story of redemption to a new level.

“Jesus is ushering in a new community, a city on a hill, which presently mirrors that future city with the Lamb at its center. In this way, God’s coming into the world is the entrance of an urban renewal plan, a rewriting of the history of the earthly city. Humanity and its idols will no longer be at the center of the city, rather, the renewed city will be a community gathered around Jesus.”

So what kind of a community will we be? Are we a community that draws people unto Jesus? Are we a community that ushers in the Kingdom of God into all the brown spaces of this world?

Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Seminary says this, “The smallness in churches that most concerns God is not small numbers but small vision about who should be included in our home. Too many churches don’t see past their own comfort zones, so their vision is the story of their own world, not the story of the Kingdom of God.”

I confess that I like my comfort zone, but if I’m blocking the plans and purposes of the Kingdom of God, then shake me out of the comfort zone God. I want to infuse His kingdom into our world.

I’d like to end with an experience I had last year in Los Angeles. I was doing a summer intensive at seminary, and the class had us do an urban exegesis, meaning you walk the streets and pray, asking God to show you the city through His eyes.

Groups of us walked downtown, along Little Tokyo and

the Azusa Street Mission and Skid Row. Skid Row is the nation’s largest concentration of homeless people living and sleeping on public sidewalks. Many of you who worked with City Impact have served in Skid Row.

As I walked through the streets of that city, I began to sense God’s love for the city, for its people. In walking along those streets, I was experiencing both the beauty and pain and I prayed for the kingdom of God to be evident one earth as it is in heaven.

It was in the city that I met pastor Kevin Haah who founded New City Church LA.

It was about the most diverse church I’d ever seen, a church that loved the city. They have 18-22% in each major ethnic group: Latinos, Anglos, Asians, blacks, and multi-racial. About a third of their leaders and members and leaders are from Skid Row, a third from the lofts, and a third from outside of Downtown.

Kevin states, “Our church is beautiful in its diversity. As you get to know one another, you will start to appreciate one another’s beauty and truly learn to love people who are different than yourself. This will stretch your soul and help you love more broadly and deeply. We believe that this is the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to give us life and restore hope forever. And just as God the Father sent the Son, Jesus sends us. Sometimes while we are still healing He sends us, restoring us as we serve. He says, “I love you. I am going to give you everything you need. I will be in you and you will be in Me, and I will never leave you. You are not alone. You are going to do great things in My

name, through My power, not yours. Remember, My grace is sufficient for you.”

Let us pray. Lord, you are God of this city, you are the light in the darkness. You take us by the hand and draw us into perfect communion with You. We pray that we may draw others toward You, that we would build Your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. May You be the center of our communities, our homes and hearts. It is in Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com