



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
February 28, 2016

**"Why I Admire Vegetarians and Vegans"**  
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**G**en. 1:11 *Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so.*

Gen. 1:12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

Gen. 1:20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."

Gen. 1:21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Gen. 1:22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

Gen. 1:23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Gen. 1:24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

Gen. 1:25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every

kind. And God saw that it was good.

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

Gen. 1:27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Gen. 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Gen. 1:29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

Here are all of these animals and plants created by God. It is interesting, fascinating, intriguing that God said in the last verse we read that we were to eat plants only. It was only after the fall of Adam and Eve into sinfulness that they were allowed to eat animals.

Today I want to talk about social justice, but not just about man's inhumanity to man. We will talk about

a topic we don't usually talk about: the social justice of lovingly treating animals, the *aina* (our land), and our bodies. And this will all have to do with a faith in God, as we shall see in the end.

My sermon begins with a thought about how all of us should have compassion on animals. This will be a talk on why I admire vegetarians and vegans.

I wish I could be like them. They teach me a lot about life. They are so compassionate and disciplined in their diet. Many vegetarians and vegans choose not to eat animals because they have compassion for animals. There is a deep sense in their hearts that animals are SENTIENT. That is not a word we use very often. It means able to feel and perceive. For an animal to be sentient generally means that living creature is able to experience pain and pleasure.

In 2007, professional football player Michael Vick was sentenced to 23 months in prison for running a cruel and inhumane dog fighting ring and lying about it. It was a federal felony. There was a public outcry. Raising dogs for violent entertainment did not seem noble. It violated the law pertaining to the treatment of animals and was seen as cruel.

Expanding on that, vegetarians don't eat meat, and vegans don't eat meat, eggs & dairy products because they see it as unnecessary and in some cases cruel to animals.

**T**hey believe that most animals are sentient, able to experience pain and pleasure, and that livestock industries are unnecessarily hurting animals, as I shall describe later. We do know that animal slaughterhouses can be violent. That is why we don't take our children to them.

For vegetarians and vegans eating animals is a social justice issue. Do not hurt the animals and don't use up the land for livestock production environment in a way that hurts the environment and eventually humankind.

I really didn't understand their position until relatively recently in the last few years. I read several books and articles on the matter. One of the most practical ones on defending veganism was a book entitled *Mind If I Order A Cheeseburger*. Author Sherry Colb is no slouch. She's a Cornell Law professor, a Harvard Law grad, and former law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun. Colb makes a case for diets that promote social justice along three issues: animals, health, and environment.

## **ANIMALS**

Let's start with animals. Most of us like dogs or cats. We would not raise them to be killed or to make them fight for entertainment, and we don't raise them to be eaten. We find them cute, cuddly, and smart. We love them.

But for vegetarians and vegans they extend that love to other animals that are even smarter but not necessarily as cute or cuddly. Pigs, for example, are way smarter than dogs and yet pigs are killed often for our consumption. Same for dolphins and porpoises. We know that certain monkeys, elephants, and birds mate for life. They're also sentient.

William Wilberforce was a famous Christian who fought against slavery of Africans. Clearly a social justice issue. We would agree with him that no human should be enslaved. Did you know that he also started the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which started its American counterpart? It was a social justice issue that animals should not go through unnecessary pain and suffering.

Wilberforce was consistent. Treat people fairly and don't cause pain in their lives, and treat animals fairly and don't torture or cause unnecessary pain in their lives. Many here may not like pets but we probably agree they shouldn't be tortured or go through unnecessary pain.

Vegans and vegetarians would not eat animals because they believe they could instead eat a plant-based protein diet. I respect them for that. But I don't have the strength or willpower to be a vegetarian. I'm not disciplined enough though I understand their cause.

However, I do try to cut back my meat eating diet by about 50%. I may be Presbyterian but I guess you could say I am also flexitarian. I try to be vegetarian, but if you invite me out to eat and you offer me a prime rib, I will eat it and say, "Medium rare please." Whenever I am a guest I will eat what is offered. When I'm the host, I will offer what the guests desire.

But if I am at home or ordering for myself at a restaurant I will try to be vegetarian. I will not order veal for those are young calves that, from the day they were born, were put in small, isolated cages so that they would not have much physical activity and, as a result, will have tender meat. I personally don't think it's right that calves are put in cages for all of their lives so that we

might have delicious food.

I will not eat foie gras either because it is a result of food forced down the throats of ducks that make their livers explode so that we can have fine tasting creamy light food. Foie gras is not necessary or healthy for our diet, and so for a social justice reason I will not eat it.

I also try to cut down on shrimp because the ways of catching shrimp using huge nets are antiquated and results in catching not only shrimps but dolphins and porpoises too, who are so smart and are unnecessarily killed. Very smart whales are captured too for aquatic shows. All unnecessary. I understand the movement of Free Willy and Free Flipper! The Bible says, "The righteous know the needs of their animals but the mercy of the wicked is cruel." (Prov. 12:10)

## **ENVIRONMENT**

My wife drives a Prius. I drive a gas-guzzling SUV. I'm not some liberal tree-hugging, savior of the white-spotted-owl-environmentalist (though our new denomination is called ECO). But I would say, it's a social justice issue to care for the environment that we need to think about. Whether liberal or conservative, whether pro-environment or not, there's little disagreement that the livestock industry produces a lot of gas emissions that affects our climate. There seems to be no debate that the use of land for livestock as opposed plant protein crops uses a lot more land and water and produces a lot more gas-emitting waste, than if we were to use it for protein-rich beans, for example.

If you think what you drive or how often you use your dryer makes the biggest difference in saving our environment, it's actually not. It's our diet, what we eat, which is related to livestock production that makes the biggest impact.

**T**he United Nation's Global Livestock Environment Assessment Model concluded in 2013 that livestock, including beef, milk production and poultry, accounts for 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. That's a lot just from the gas from their excrement. Some would say that if you throw in the plant, water, and transportation of livestock into the mix, it might be as high as 25% of greenhouse gas emissions that's contributing to the harm of the environment. If we were to eat less livestock, it might really help the climate.

But we might say, doesn't today's Bible passage say that we are to have DOMINION over the animals? So we can treat animals anyway we want and destroy and pollute the environment any way we want? We are in control after all. We have dominion. That's what the Bible said.

But Matthew Scully explains that's not what it means. Scully is a conservative who once served as special assistant and senior speechwriter to President George W. Bush, VP Dan Quayle, and Dick Cheney. Scully researched the word *dominion* in Genesis chapter 1. In his book entitled *Dominion*, he wrote that it is NOT okay to be cruel to animals. By definition, *dominion* means sovereignty and control. We are, in God's behalf, the stewards, caretakers, and keepers of God's covenant with Noah to protect the animals.

Some defined the Hebrew word for *dominion* as an invitation to be like God as His steward. God made a covenant not just to humans but also with all living things when God said in Gen. 9:13-15: "*I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember MY COVENANT that is between me and*

*you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."* God made a promise with all creatures, including animals, to protect and save them when needed.

For us in Hawaii, the Christian walk has always been about the treatment of the *aina* (the land), the *pono* (righteous) treatment of animals, and the healthy treatment of our bodies—God's temple—and our souls to have non-prideful compassion.

Maybe we can approach the practice of not eating animals like how we develop the practice of tithing. In tithing, you are advised to give 10% of his income to God every year. But maybe you discover you only give 1% of your income, so maybe this year you can increase it to 2% or 3%, thereby doubling or tripling your giving to God's work as you attempt to move it up to 10%, which is the goal.

As for food, consider that if perhaps you would see that the use of our land would be better if we didn't eat as much livestock, then maybe cut back by one meaty meal a week or maybe two meaty meals a week.

#### HEALTH

More vegetables, more plant proteins like beans, broccoli, tofu, is better than eating a heavy meat diet like most Americans. A pivotal book in my life was a book I read seven years ago called *The China Study* by Colin Campbell, Thomas Campbell II, Howard Lyman and John Robbins. It's a culmination of a 20-year study by Cornell University, Oxford, and the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine. Nobel Prize winner Robert Richardson endorsed the book as important and its story needs to be heard.

The book presented the results of the authors' study of the health of different groups of people in

China based on what they ate. People say that your predisposition to certain illnesses depends on your genes. And since it's predetermined, you won't be able to help it, so eat away.

So these researchers chose to study just one ethnic group to limit the genetic variation between ethnicities. They surveyed 880 million Chinese citizens in mainland China alone for over 20 years. They found that the people in the more primitive, rural western China who have a high-vegetable, low-meat diet hardly had any cases of cancer or diabetes. 90 per cent of their protein intake was through plants. (p. 103) But as you move eastward, those in the more urban cities like Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing who have adopted American/European eating habits, had significantly more cases of cancer and diabetes.

Scientists also discovered that fewer rural Chinese men had coronary heart disease than their American counterparts. In fact, cases of American men's coronary heart disease were 17 times higher than those in rural China. Another discovery: U.S. breast cancer death rate was five times higher than the rural Chinese rate.

The book really made me look at my own eating habits. What would happen if we ate less meat and more plant protein, fruits, and vegetables as a normal pattern of eating? The book claims, we would have these benefits from a plant-protein diet: less cholesterol, less fat, longer life, less cancer, and less diabetes. Not bad.

Now you may ask, was Jesus a vegetarian? I would guess that since He was a faithful Jewish man He would eat lamb at Passover. So you would ask, does God really care about animals when so many were slaughtered for sacrifice and Passover meals?

**G**od made it clear that those sacrifices are not necessary today. It's a new day. Second, they called it a *sacrifice* because it was a terrible thing to do to take an unblemished INNOCENT little lamb and then kill it for a sacrifice. It's not something you were to do every day just as you wouldn't want to have a sacrifice of Jesus every day. Crucifixion of an innocent man is a horrible thing.

The Daniel diet in the Bible, which is found in the book of Daniel Chapter one, was a vegan diet. The Scripture reported Daniel, a hero of the faith, and his godly friends ate as vegans and turned out to be healthier than those who ate choice food similar to what the king ate. Plant protein is not bad for the body at all.

As Christians who are interested in social justice, what should be the morals of how we eat that would transcend any culture of the world? Vegans are amazing to me because they don't even eat dairy. They know that mother cows and their baby calves suffer when separated from one another on dairy farms.

Dairy cows are continually forced to be fertilized and to continually make milk until they are so weak that they are then slaughtered. A cow could normally live from 20 to 25 years, but the dairy cow lives only between four and seven years old.

We know that a female hen, like the Jungle fowl, might normally lay 20 eggs a year. But when raised in poultry farms for egg production, it is forced to lay 300 eggs a year. The hen becomes very weak and suffers so much pain from the continual contractions and uterine complications. By the time the hen is two years old, it has produced nearly 600 eggs, and when spent because of the pain, it is then slaughtered for food.

This is why vegans don't eat

diary or eggs, and vegetarians don't eat meat. They know that animals at a slaughterhouse are ordinarily terrified, miserable, and vocalize distress in a way that clearly shows their suffering. That's why we don't take children to animal slaughterhouses.

To be clear, I'm talking about 21<sup>st</sup>-century industrialization of livestock production and not about first-century Palestine or old Hawaii and how they took care of land and animals. I really am not judging anyone today. Pam drives a Prius. She gets points for being green. I drive a gas guzzling SUV. I am not a vegetarian though I try to eat that way if I am ordering on my own or eating at home.

It's just that as Christians we must always strive to do what is right, be just in an unjust world, and always try to enlarge our heart of compassion for ALL. Yes, ALL living things to keep God's covenant to all living things. What would the reign of God look like here on earth?

At this point you say, "Dan, I thought I heard from others you love preaching about grace, and you preach grace like 95% of the time." That's true, and so this is the 5% of the time that I don't! Just your lucky day. So you might be saying right now, "Sorry, Dan, I can't buy this. I am going to eat the meat that I want. I love the taste. I really don't care about those animals." I say, that's fine. As Pope Francis would say, "Who am I to judge?"

So let's move on. Forget the animals. But God DOES CARE about children raised in poverty. There are more than 2,000 Scriptures about children and poverty. Children definitely are sentient. They have feelings and feel pain. We may not care about animals and how they might die to give us life. But do we care that children are dying unless we

give them life? It's not about us being disappointed or dying by not getting what or how we want our food, but about them dying by not getting anything to eat.

Jesus said in Luke 18:16, "Do not hinder the children from Me," or as it says in Luke 17:2: "It would be better for people to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble."

And we say, "Darn, Dan, this IS one of your 5% sermons where you don't talk about grace, isn't it? You got me thinking about my not caring about animals and liking what I eat, but now you get me thinking about children who don't even have enough to eat.

Well, 600 million children in this world live in extreme poverty. More than 3 billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day. As I said there are more than 2,000 references to children and poverty in the Bible. That's a big priority in God's word.

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"—when you already have it with you." (Proverbs 3:27-28)

*"Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God." (Proverbs 14:31)*

*The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor." (Proverbs 22:9)*

*"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and will be repaid in full." (Prov. 19:17)*

*"Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse." (Prov 28:27)*

**H**elp the poor and you will be rewarded – don't help the poor you get cursed. Great! And like the ole boxer Roberto Duran we say at this point No Mas, No Mas! But yes, uno mas!

*“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless and see that they get justice.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

Okay, you say, “Dan you tricked me. You got me thinking about animals and now how can I say no to children?”

Okay, so now we're thinking about children. Now how can WE help children in poverty? I mean how can WE really help so that my money is not wasted and I get a real bang for my buck. Here's the deal: Independent studies show that's the most effective way to defeat poverty is through child sponsorship, the monthly supporting of a child. It's the best bang for your buck. Better yet if you are writing them lets say every three months as they write you.

Compassion International says, “Children in our sponsorship program are at least 30 percent more likely than their unsponsored peers to become leaders in their communities and at least 40 percent more likely to grow into church leaders.”

Why do I like child- sponsorship and specifically how the organization called Compassion International does it? There are four reasons and they all start with the letter “C.”

### **1. Child-centered**

Compassion focuses on the child. Through sponsorship, you follow the child from baby through college or trade school. You write to

them. They write to you four times a year. You encourage them to believe in themselves. The letters are more important than the \$38 a month you send. You build a relationship with them.

One of my sponsored children is Leo Paul. His mother abandoned him. His father got murdered in his house in a case of mistaken identity, then Leo Paul's house gets obliterated in a hurricane and he loses everything! Everything. The guitar I bought him that brought him so much joy, was washed away by the flood. Do my letters and money mean something to him? You bet. For Leo Paul I am a voice writing him to say hang in there. God and I believe in you! In fact, for many children it's the box of letters from their Compassion sponsors that they grab first when they need to evacuate their houses because of a flood. The letters are worth gold to them.

More than 1.7 million children are sponsored right now through Compassion international. Sponsorship saves them from child labor, from being child soldiers, from child abuse, sexual abuse, sickness without care, from AIDS, and, yes, from poverty.

### **2. Church-centered**

Compassion only works through churches to help the children. And right now it has nearly 7,000 church partners. No government rip-off because Compassion does not have to go through the government. And by working through the local church, Compassion causes the church to grow because sponsorship brings in the children, as well as their parents and uncles and aunties. Church growth! The kids get health and care through the local church through which Compassion sends it money and staff. And at a church they hear about Jesus.

### **3. Christ-centered**

Last year more than 122,000 children in the Compassion program in 26 countries committed their lives to Christ. Compassion isn't interested in just the children's health and food, but in their souls too. Compassion also only hires Christians to be part of its staff. And no Americans on staff; only people who are indigenous to the country Compassion's at.

### **4. Committed to Integrity**

Lastly, Compassion is committed to integrity. In fact, Charity Navigator gives it 4-stars in its annual review. And 80% of the funds raised through Compassion goes to front-line ministry.

Today is Compassion Sunday, and I want to encourage you to consider sponsoring a child. We have many sponsorship packets on the tables in the back of the Sanctuary. Please go there after the service and prayerfully consider sponsoring a child.

But does child sponsorship really work? At this point I want to introduce to you Jey Mbiro, a former Compassion child from Nairobi, Kenya. He's an adult now and lives in Atlanta, but he continues to speak on behalf of Compassion on how his life was changed because of Jesus and through child sponsorship. Jay is here to tell you his story. (Sermon ends with Jey's story.)