



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

March 8, 2015

"Never Give In"

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

(A video clip about Brian Warnecke was shown.) Even as a child with Cystic Fibrosis, Brian Warnecke never gave in to a lesser life. He wants to live life to the fullest even though he is greatly hindered and hampered by his illness.

What does it mean to give in, to quit, and to NOT live out the life that God planned for you? When we give in to temptation or the pains and the struggles of life, there is much to lose, and we miss out on the destiny or plan and future that God has for us. Sometimes seasons are so dark that we want to give up due to grieving, or to medical, relational, or financial issues, or maybe even give up on life all together by ending it as we feel no one understands us.

Did you watch the Academy Awards? American Screenwriter Graham Moore won the Oscar this year for best-adapted screenplay for the movie *The Imitation Game*. He gave an incredible speech after being handed the Oscar. In a sense, he talked about how it's important to NOT give in. Here is what he said. (Video clip of Graham Moore was shown)

If Graham Moore had taken his life, he would have missed out on one of the greatest experiences in his life: winning an Oscar, being praised by his colleagues, and being watched on television by hundreds of millions of people around the world and a chance to encourage others. More

importantly the terrific script he wrote was made into a film that was inspirational and educational. Had he taken his life, he would have missed out on a great destiny. Yes, Graham Moore felt he was weird and different and that he didn't belong. To boot, he later said that he suffers from depression every day.

If you have or are going through depression, it is really hard to work through. Logic often isn't there. Self-esteem is gone. Thinking is slow. Life is slower. To make matters worse, because you feel different and maybe act different, people say you are weird, different, and that you don't belong. And so you start believing all that. But Graham Moore didn't give in. He just accepted that he was different from others.

But I have good news for many of us today. Often times the most spiritual and weirdest people are those who follow Christ. In fact, to many, Christ was weird, different, and didn't belong. People still think that today.

To be sure, many of our favorite human leaders were thought to be weird. For his time, many in the country felt Martin Luther King Jr. was different and didn't belong, but he crossed that bridge in Selma 50 years ago this weekend. Considering a more recent time, Steve Jobs would have been in that category.

I actually think Jesus calls us to NOT be like the rest of the world so

that we will be seen as weird, different, and that we don't belong because we are really aliens and agents from another world.

My message is simple this morning —never give in to the voices that say you don't belong, or conform and then conclude that you are not of great worth. Never pull the plug on hope. Even if you are in depression, God is there and can lead you out of it, and maybe use that depression for good as what happened with Graham Moore. Don't give up or give in.

I told you last week that one of our former associate pastors, 53-year old Kurt Kiesling, died. Obviously this news hit us hard because Kurt was not only part of the church staff, but his wife Elke worked for HIM too many years ago. What I didn't tell you, and it's because I was not sure if it was public until now, is that Kurt Kiesling took his own life as life became too much for him and so he gave in.

We need to come to terms with life when it gets really hard. We need to come to terms with the challenge and temptation to throw in the towel and to give in and give up on what God has planned for us.

As we focus in on the annual season of Lent, the 6 weeks before Easter, we traditionally focus on the suffering of Jesus. Why? Because it's all about not giving in to tremendous odds and pain.

Here's our first passage today. Jesus is talking to the Apostle Peter.

Mark 8:29 Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

Mark 8:30 And He sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Mark 8:31 Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Mark 8:33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Suffering is part of life. Feeling depressed is part of life for many of us. Setbacks, failures, pain are all part of life.

But when Jesus told Peter that He would suffer, Peter in all of his pride takes Jesus aside and rebukes Jesus. It's hard to believe that Peter had the gumption to do that. Peter, a human, tells Jesus, who is God, that He got it wrong. He was saying, "You are not going to suffer; you're God. You are not going to die. You're the Messiah, so hear what I have to say. After all, I'm a veteran fisherman...and you are just The Messiah!"

It takes a lot of chutzpah or nerve to say something like that. But then Jesus blasts him by saying, "Get behind me Satan," which I think is one of the greatest put-downs in history. What could be worse than Jesus calling us Satan? Yet, He put it in perspective. What could be worse than putting ourselves above God,

even in the darkest times?

Peter didn't get this fact – that suffering is part of life, even for Jesus who is fully God and fully man. Jesus had to suffer to bring salvation into the world. Because I believe if you love someone, you will suffer for them.

And Peter still doesn't get it even later in the gospel. When Jesus later says that someone will betray me tonight:

Matt. 26:33 Peter said to Jesus, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."

Matt. 26:34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

Matt. 26:35 Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

Matt. 26:36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Matt. 26:37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.

Matt. 26:38 Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

Matt. 26:39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

Matt. 26:40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?"

Matt. 26:41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Matt. 26:42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

Matt. 26:43 Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

Matt. 26:44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

Matt. 26:45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Matt. 26:46 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Now why did I pick that long passage for our Lenten Season? Jesus is fully God and fully human. Christianity is the only religion that believes that God actually came down to earth in the form of a human.

And in this scene, more than any other in the Gospels, we see how Jesus' divine nature is in conflict with His human nature.

Humanly, Jesus knows that if He keeps on this path, He is going to get punched, stabbed, whipped, and crucified so that God pays the price for all of our sin. When that price for our sin is paid, we should know that we can be forgiven by God, be in His presence, and have a real chance in life by living out what God has planned for us.

But the human part of Jesus says, "No, take this cup from My lips. I don't want to do this.

I should have escaped to the desert when I had the chance. No, God, I don't want to do this."

But the divine nature in Him gets Him to pray three times. The divine part of Him says, "Okay, Thy will, not My will, be done. Yet not what I want, but what You want."

And that, my friends, is the battle inside of us on most days. We struggle. We are tempted with my will versus God's will; with what I want and what God wants.

In the Scripture passage we read, we see the humanness of Jesus Christ. This is a God who gets us, who understands us. He knows what it's like to be depressed and agitated and in agony and needing to throw himself down on the ground in near utter despair.

And sometimes, God allows us to go through pain and suffering. And when it hurts, that is when we are tempted to say "No fair. I shouldn't have to suffer. Because when I follow You, Jesus, I shouldn't have any suffering. Following you means I get rich, and have a big house and a big car and no pain."

But Jesus says, "Hey, stop right there. I suffered, so why do you think you are exempt from suffering? My will is for you to know Me personally and have a close relationship with Me. And that will include suffering at times."

Now if you look at the passage I just read, the amazing thing is that Jesus is doubting and fearful even unto death. Our Bible passage shows that after He prayed THREE times, it was like He was a different man. He was more in control. He knew what to do and what to say as Temple guards rushed in and arrested Him.

Jesus is strong and is fully in command. He speaks directly to Judas, and names him as His betrayer. He sees Peter pick up a sword and slice off a guard's ear. He tells Peter to put away that sword. Jesus then heals the guard's ear and then He encourages the disciples.

It was after prayer that Jesus got more strength and direction. And I know many of us here today will say but I have prayed and nothing seems to happen. I say pray again and pray again and pray again like Jesus Himself did! Don't give up because God heard you and is moving but you just don't know it. Keep listening for His voice. He knows what you're going through. He knows who you are. He knows your name.

The Bible says: "I love the LORD because He hears my voice and my prayer for mercy." (Psalm 116:1)

But you say, "No, He doesn't. He doesn't hear my voice. He is too far away, like thousands of miles away."

Hear this true story: I have this mug in my office. It has on it a picture of a bird, a kookaburra bird—a bird native to Australia and New Guinea. The mug was given to me by a man from Australia. The mug is in my office to remind me to never give up, to never give in.

Here's the story behind it. Years ago I was preaching on Robert Schuller's TV show called Hour of Power, which was beamed around the world and a man in Australia happened to be watching. He was about to take his own life. But he heard me say on TV that "God knows your name; He loves you; and if you're thinking about taking your life, don't do it."

Later he wrote me an email to tell me that he was a Christian but had walked away from the Lord. He

was going through a tough time, had depression, and was about to take his own life. But when he heard me preach those words—that God knows your name, don't do it—he stopped. And then he rededicated his life to Christ.

Has it been easy for that man since then? Actually no. The financial market has been tough, and so his finances are challenging too. It is still a hard life for him. But now, five years later, he knows that God hears his prayers, and so he is not giving in. As Robert Schuller would say, "Tough times never last; tough people do."

This man from Australia and I have become friends as he has written me and even visited me when he came on holiday, so I got to put a face to the name from an email. And that's also why I cherish the fine bone china the kookaburra mug.

Some of you might say, "Wait, he's a Christian and he still finds it tough?" Yes, as a follower of Christ, it may still be tough, as it was tough for Jesus the Son of God in the Garden of Gethsemane, but know God knows your name. You are not alone in the pain, so don't give in.

And so I say again, if anyone here at church or is listening to this show, which is on TV every day even at 2 am as well as Sunday mornings and weeknights, as printed in your bulletin, or if you are listening on our church app or on the web, don't give in! God loves you, and He knows your name. He will help you if you let Him.

I understand that for some of us, it's not that easy to just let go and trust God. When some of us face tougher struggles, we start seriously to consider taking our own life. If that's you, I'd like to give you a resource. Here is the Hawaii Suicide Hotline: (808) 832-3100. That's a 24/7-crisis hotline for anyone to call at any time.

Think of this: God heard the cry of a man in Australia thousands of miles away. God had me write a sermon in Hawaii, preach it in California, and made it possible for that sermon to be seen on TV in Australia. Amazing, right? It's because God is amazing. He hears our prayers and He knows our name.

I know there are illnesses and mental challenges that medicine can relieve or alleviate. And sometimes when we are depressed we don't take our meds. But we really must. For by not taking meds, we are giving in.

Near the end of his distinguished career, Winston Churchill was asked to return and speak at his old school called Harrow. Get this. He almost flunked out of that school. And there he was standing on that stage speaking to them as Prime Minister. This is just like how I flunked out of a course in seminary, and now I'm one of the Trustees of that seminary where I had been on stage to speak to graduates. Crazy! Only God can redeem us.

Again, good thing Winston Churchill didn't give in just because studies were hard and he didn't do well in them. God had a purpose for him.

But on October 29, 1941 this is what Churchill said to his old school, now as Britain's Prime Minister as World War II seemed to get worse and that the Nazi's could invade England and that Britain could actually lose. He said:

"You cannot tell from appearances how things will go. Sometimes imagination makes things out far worse than they are; yet without imagination not much can be done. Those people who are imaginative see many more dangers than perhaps exist; certainly many

more than will happen; but then they must also pray to be given that extra courage to carry this far-reaching imagination....

"...surely from this period of ten months this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.

"Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.
"We stood all alone a year ago, and to many countries it seemed that our account was closed, we were finished....

"Do not let us speak of darker days: let us speak rather of sterner days. These are not dark days; these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race."

Eventually, the Brits won the war, because they didn't give in to despair or low odds of winning.

But this talk is not about just positive thinking. When we follow God, He changes our whole perspective on life from the inside out. Suffering is not the end; failure is not the end; losing money is not the end.

Somehow through the Holy Spirit, our whole perspective on life changes when we follow Jesus. I close in going back to our Bible passage with Jesus in the garden.

The Garden of Gethsemane story may be the pivotal point of the entire Bible, gospel, history and all of creation. Everything that happened including the journey to the

crucifixion after was a result of Jesus' decision in that garden to follow through and not give in.

The significance of it all is that all of humanity fell into sin through the first man Adam in the Garden of Eden. But Jesus is the second man through which all of redemption flows through the Garden of Gethsemane. Adam gave in and threw in the towel and gave into temptation.

But Jesus is the first man in the history of humanity not to give up this incredible sacrificial act of love. We are all condemned through Adam, yet we all find forgiveness through the obedience of Jesus (the second Adam).

When Jesus was in that garden and he despaired and he was agitated almost to the point of death, was it simply that he was afraid of physical torture? Was he afraid of public humiliation? One might make a case that there are other figures throughout human history who dealt better with public execution or torture than Jesus in that case.

Then was Jesus a lesser man than these? What was it that He lost there on the cross or experienced in that garden that could drive Him to such depths? In a different but similar way, Jesus already had what all of us are looking forward to. He had all power, all glory, and all the love of the Father.

When we get to heaven and are reunited with God, it will be the ultimate existential and personal fulfillment. That emptiness we've felt our entire lives on this earth that we've tried to fill with money, sex, drugs, alcohol, power, popularity and success, even human love will seem cheap and absolutely worthless when we encounter the one true thing we've been missing all this time.

But now think what it would be like to already have all of that and then to lose it. What Jesus began to experience in that garden and fully on the cross was the true abandonment of God. He lost all of heaven and the love of the Father that he had enjoyed since before the beginning of time.

What did Jesus have to gain from it all? What could he possibly have come down here to get that he didn't already have with God? What could have made all of that worth it? There's only one possible answer: it was us. Jesus made the exchange because of us! He came for us!

To Him we were worth leaving all of heaven to him. The reason you should never give up or give in is because Jesus already gave everything up for you. It's not that He's taken away all of suffering--at least not yet on this earth and in this life. It's that He gave up everything by coming here so that your suffering can have purpose. There's a hope to hold onto: everything will be redeemed in the end.

Therefore, although God does not always give us an answer for our specific suffering at this moment, he does give us a general answer: It can't be because He doesn't love us. To just be an atoning sacrifice, all Jesus really had to do was live for a short while like a lamb and then die. And yet He did so much more.

He became ENTANGLED in the messiness, confusion, chaos, and convolutions of our lives; He slept and ate and talked story with us. He taught us. He was not only executed but also tortured, mocked and scorned for us. The story of Christianity is not a God who reluctantly sends His son to clean up milk that humanity spilled. Rather, it's about a son who so loves His father and so loves those that His father loves that He willingly enters into our

sin and sits with us among the heaps of garbage and refuse and pain of our lives.

So if there's a reason not to give up, it's this: Don't give up because you can trust God. You can trust that all will be made well in the end as long as you keep your eyes on Him.

The hope of Easter is that when all seemed lost—when Jesus had died, and the disciples scattered, out of the ashes, or should I say out of the tomb, Jesus came back for us.

And that's the hope for us all. That is why we must never give in. Jesus is God who came to this earth and suffered, hence He knows our pain, He hears our prayers, and He knows our name. Never, never give in.

Amen? Amen! Let's pray.