



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### April 1, 2018

### Did You Hear (Easter message)

### Pastor Dan Chun

**D**id you hear? Children and teenagers are saying "Worship Him! Worship Him!" Did you hear that a man rose from the dead? What does that mean? A man named Jesus actually came back to life three days after He died. How can that be?

Here's the crazy Easter story in a nutshell. Jesus was crucified, nailed to a cross, and then died. He was hung on a cross for nine hours. He was blindfolded, beaten, tortured, whipped with pieces of bone or metal on the end of the lashes to make it more painful. Then a crown with long thorns was forced down on His head PIERCING into His temples and head. Soldiers forced Him to carry a beam of wood that was used to make a cross to which He was nailed and left for dead.

As a writer named Fleming Rutledge has said: "Christianity is unique. The world's religions have certain traits in common, but until the gospel of Jesus Christ burst upon the Mediterranean world, no one in the history of human imagination had conceived of such a thing as the worship of a crucified man." [Rutledge, Fleming. *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (p. 1). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Kindle Edition.]

The Easter story is this peculiar story that God takes on the sins of the world on Himself as a sacrifice, and by being this sacrifice, it takes care of all of our sin. Are we sinful? If we are truly honest with ourselves, can we admit that society, our systems, and we have a human nature that leans heavily towards pride,

selfishness, and self-centeredness that often makes forgiveness nearly impossible?

Such a peculiar thing this Christian faith that God would say that humans are sinful, and yet He says we don't need to pay the price for all of the wrongs that we have done. He says, "I will pay the price for you." That's crazy! It's like you have robbed a bank and are sentenced to be locked up for 20 years, but the judge who gave you that sentence comes down from his bench and says, "I will go to jail for you."

This is the Easter story. God of the universe decides to show His love for us and come to this earth to live with us to tell us how to live a life of love. And then knowing that we are not perfect and will fail, God decides to pay the price for our selfishness and sin.

The hard thing is that the world doesn't understand it when it hears that three days later Jesus rose from the dead! Wow! Maybe He is God! No one has done that before. Maybe everything He said on earth was true. He really was God. He really was God, not just a great moral teacher, not only a good humanitarian, but really was God.

How would we, adults and children, act today if Jesus were really God? How would that radically change our life in terms of hope and a purpose for our life? What are we going to do with this stunning news that Jesus rose from the

dead and actually appeared to more than 500 people at one time?

We can ignore it. We can choose not to really understand it. We can water it down and see the Easter story as something frivolous, as the world makes it mundane, just like just a guide for dating. Dating? Welcome to American culture! See this TV episode from *How I Met Your Mother*. (Video clip was shown)

A three-day rule? I think the Easter story is more than that, and definitely more than Easter bunnies and eggs. The Easter story is that it has much to do with a crucifixion on a cross, which ends with the incredible news that when Jesus' enemies and friends checked His tomb where His body was placed, it was gone! He had risen from the dead! And three days later He was seen by a few and then by hundreds of people.

The very first person He had seen who reported His resurrection was a woman. Women were not given a high status back then. They were not even seen as credible witnesses in courts. Yet, God rejected the culture of the world and chose this woman to become the first preacher communicating the good news of His resurrection. She ran to tell and yell to others, "He is risen!"

Jesus was 2,000 years ahead of the Time's Up movement. Jesus was for women's rights in that He always honored and lifted up women. He talked to them. He listened to them.

**H**e defended them from bullying, from stoning, and from being unfairly ostracized. He always looked to defend the outsider. He was there for the sick, the demoniac, the poor and the rich, the widow, the widower, the leper, the embezzler, the cheater, the adulterer, the promiscuous sleep-around-er.

In this crazy Easter story, Jesus takes a bullet for them and for us so that we can always have our hope restored. What if He were really God? How would one then live?

At some point in our lives, if we're open to it, the peculiarity of this story really hits us. If Jesus were really God, then we should dramatically change our lives to follow Him, the one true God, the only one in history who came back from the dead, who could miraculously heal the sick, who truly loved all people, and has a mission for each of us.

But here's the secret. The ones who get it, the ones whom it really hits, are the ones who come with humility and awareness that they are far from perfect. They know they need help.

I told you of the woman who first saw Jesus after He rose from the dead, who shouted "He Is Risen!" Her name was Mary of Magdala, better known as Mary Magdalene. People have said she was a prostitute, but the Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says something worse. She was a demoniac.

The Bible says when Jesus met her, she was messed up. She was not in her best mind. She was confused, maybe angry, maybe hurtful, and lustful. The Bible says she had seven demons in her. Not one, not two, not three, but seven—the number of completion. She was a complete demonic mess.

Having seven demons probably meant her life couldn't have been harder, trying to make a dollar, people kept her farther, saying "Why bother?" And maybe she wished she were smarter, by trying to be

a self-starter. She got a bad rap, or maybe I just spoke a bad rap!

If you were seen in the community as a demoniac, then probably your life was lonely. You'll be isolated, misunderstood.

Mary knew she needed help, so when she met Jesus and her demons were cast out, she realized Jesus was different from other men. And she was grateful.

We all have emotional or spiritual demons in us that we fight. We can hear their voices that whisper we are not smart enough, pretty enough, handsome enough, cool enough, or accomplished enough. Those voices tell us we'll never amount to anything.

Wouldn't it be great if Jesus could extract these demons? Wouldn't it be great to know He could? But it's true. The phrase "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," in Psalm 23 means that in this crazy, stressful, hurtful world, we have the choice to no longer be on our own. We don't have to be in control and not in want.

We can be in the care of someone else, a Shepherd. We can follow a kind, tender, healing, good Shepherd who's also strong, courageous, brave, and powerful, and who could be our Lord to protect and lead us through whatever valley of death we are in. Jesus actually said these words: "I am the GOOD Shepherd."

When Jesus died a horrible death, Mary Magdalene was there at the cross to support Him. How her heart must have been gutted. How crushing it must have been. The one man who really could offer her the love she had so longed for was gone. Maybe He wasn't God. He died. He was always there for her. But now He's gone, so now she wanted to be there for Him even in death. When Jesus' body needed to be embalmed in a special way on the third day after His death, she was there.

As our kids earlier said in the video, early in the morning Mary went there to the

tomb of Jesus' grave, walking slowly up a hill in that twilight of night before day. And to her surprise and amazement, the guards of the tomb were in a deep faint and Jesus was standing outside the tomb! But He was supposed to be dead!

She thought Him to be the gardener. But when she heard Him say "Mary," her heart jumped, and she knew it was Him, the man, the Lord her God who had indeed risen from the dead. He could walk and talk. His rising from the dead proved to her, and the millions later after her, that indeed He was actually God who came to earth. She then dedicated the rest of her life to Him. She would do anything for Him.

There's another woman in the Bible who experienced an unconditional love, and though her story is in the Old Testament, nearly 800 years earlier. It links itself to Jesus. It is the Old Testament story of the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer.

When the man Hosea married Gomer, she had come from a past where she was not faithful to one person. In fact, she was unfaithful with many men before and during her marriage to Hosea. But Hosea loved her even though she struggled with being loyal.

Over the course of their marriage she again would wander off because she felt other men would offer her more pleasure, and more material wealth. And again, Hosea would forgive her and they would make up, and he would convince her to return. She gave birth to several babies, but Hosea was not even sure they were his. They stayed together, until one day, she said, "No, I am leaving you again and this is it."

And off she went and to another man who later decided to auction her off to any man who would be the highest bidder. She was like a slave. She chose a lifestyle of being that kind of woman rather than have the comfort and safety of being Hosea's wife.

In those days, a woman who was sold would be chained to a stump in a town square. And a crowd of men would surround her to bid on her. Imagine the scene: A human auction. Maybe at that moment, she thought, "What have I done? Look at all these men staring at me and ogling me and touching me to be just their possession to treat me like an animal for sale. Why did I leave the comfort of home? I'm dirty, disheveled; my clothes ragged and torn.

And then the bidding started with maybe a low bidder offering a few copper coins, which brought laughter to the crowd in the town square. Then the bidding got higher. One piece of silver, two pieces. Do I hear three pieces? Three pieces!

Men now were yelling and jeering and howling as the bidding war escalated. Four pieces, five pieces of silver! Maybe Gomer began to cry because she knew she wasn't worth much. She had no assets. Her body had been used so much. She left a good husband. She gave birth to three babies while married, and likely none of those children were her husband's. She had abandoned them. Her morals were way off.

On went the bidding and more men shouting "Six pieces of silver! Seven pieces of silver!" Her heart was breaking. She had been used so many times. "Why was I doing this to myself," she asked. Eight pieces, nine pieces! And then a hand went up way in the back of the crowd. A man's voice rang out, "Fifteen pieces of silver!" The crowd murmured, "Fifteen pieces? Whose voice was that?" It was a man in a brown robe in the back row.

But then the bidding continued higher and higher. Do I hear 16, 17? 20 pieces? 25 pieces of silver! But the brown-robed man, who only had 15 pieces of silver, bid again and offered all that he had and yelled, "Fifteen pieces of silver and five bushels of barley and a measure of wine," which would equal 30(!) pieces of silver back in those days. ["How Much Did Hosea Pay

for His Wife?"] March 5, 2009, Claude Mariottini, Prof of Old Testament, Northern Baptist Seminary]

In essence he bid 30 pieces of silver! But this was a used woman, a beat-up woman, a rebellious, immoral woman. But the man in the back in the brown robe who raised his hand said, "I will give everything I have for her."

Who was this guy? The crowd parted. They looked back and saw that the man was none other than Hosea himself, Gomer's faithful husband. He remained faithful even though his wife was not faithful. He sacrificed all of the silver, wheat, and wine he had to show his undying and sacrificial love for a woman who did not even return his love. He did it to redeem her.

And all throughout the town the people were asking, "Did you hear? Did you hear what Hosea did? What kind of love is this?"

It's the same kind of love another man paid for people who needed to be redeemed, a man who said, "I will love you even though you may have been unfaithful to Me, rejected me, and tried to run away from Me. I will love you even though you went after other false gods."

This man was Jesus Christ, for whom His enemies paid 30 pieces of silver to a man named Judas Iscariot so they could find Jesus, jail Him, torture Him, and crucify Him. With His life Jesus then paid the price to save us from the slavery here on earth and the things that tempt us. He gave all that He had to redeem us. He paid with His life that we might know someday that in Him, we would have a faithful redeemer, a good shepherd, a loyal friend, protector, and Lord who offers us the best life possible on earth.

As Hosea gave up all of the silver he had plus a lot more, Jesus Christ gave up all He had plus more. He suffered and died for us to pay the price of not His sin but our sins and that we might be invited to His sin-free, holy home in Heaven

forever. He died for us so that we might have a greater, fulfilled life here on earth if we choose to follow Him.

Did you hear? When one really understands that Jesus is God, that He is real, that He is risen from the dead and offers us greater life today, then it can hit us deeply into our hearts. We will do anything for Him. We will accept His forgiveness of our sins and healing as Mary Magdalene did, and we will want to live for Him.

Before Jesus went back to heaven after His resurrection, He affirmed that there was one thing He commanded His followers to do to show that they were indeed all in. In essence He said, "Get baptized. Get your children baptized."

Baptism would be the mark that you would be a follower of Him. That would be the sign that you got it, that your sins were washed away because of His sacrifice for us. It would be like His ring on our finger to say that we are His; that we are committed to Him to receive all of His love and in turn to love Him with all of our heart soul and mind.

By getting baptized we are saying, I am all-in and dedicated to you. By baptizing our children, we are saying we are promising to raise them to be followers of Jesus. We believe that they will grow to have a mature faith to follow Him.

Baptism is a sacrament, which means a sign of grace that says, "Jesus I accept your forgiveness because you are God even though I don't deserve it. I accept your love. I will have the faith to follow you. And yes, I will tell people You are risen!"

There comes a time, maybe for you today, where you say, "Okay, God, I get it; I want to be all in. I don't want to follow other things that lead to a dead end. I want to acknowledge formally Your love and forgiveness. I want to declare on this Easter weekend/Sunday that I am now all in. I want to follow you for the rest of my life.

In fact, on this day, I am willing to be baptized."It's the realization that the man in the crowd who has been bidding for you all your life is Jesus our Lord.

Hear this: If you want to be baptized today, we would love to baptize you today! Now some of you may be thinking, "Oh, I think Dan means I could sign up for baptism later." No, I mean get baptized right now. In the Bible baptism often happened immediately right after a fresh encounter with the Good News of Jesus. For centuries many have chosen Easter as the time to get baptized. They see it as the highest holy day.

Some of you may be thinking, "Oh, no way am I getting baptized; I don't want to be a member of this church." Well, the truth is, who says we want you as a member? Just kidding! Seriously, if you have a church, stay at your church. If you don't have a church, baptism says, "Find a church." It doesn't have to be First Prez. Jesus does call us to community. And yes, we'd love for you to attend here.

Some of you may be thinking, "Hey, I am a private kind of person. I have faith, but I'm not going to embarrass myself by getting baptized in public."

The deal is: baptism is a public way of making your ultimate commitment, not caring about what others think. It's really important we at times do things publicly. Like how a wedding for instance, is a public commitment. There are times when a line is drawn in the sand, and we cross it to take a stand, as Jesus is willing to take a stand with you.

When Jesus walked on earth He said, "Baptize my followers." He knew we needed that clear commitment to remain faithful. That's the spiritual ring on the finger. When you make a public commitment to follow Christ, something happens in your heart, your soul. The person of the Holy Spirit supernaturally comes into your heart to reside in you forever.

Baptism is a big decision, so we want to give you some time to consider it first and not rush into it.

Let's take a short moment of silence now to collect our thoughts and for some to confirm in their hearts that they and/or their families will get baptized or renew their commitment of their vows of baptism. (And may the pastors, elders, and deacons please get in position during this time.)

Now, I ask all of you to please stand. I have questions for those who want to get baptized or have a renewal of baptismal vows. You may answer these questions as loudly or as softly as you desire, while the rest remain quiet. You may answer "I do" for all the questions, but for the first question the answer is obviously "Jesus Christ."

To those who on this Easter weekend who want to get baptized or renew your baptismal vows from long ago, I ask you these baptismal questions:

- Who is your Lord and Savior? (Jesus Christ.)
- Do you trust and follow Him and accept His forgiveness of your sins? (I do.)
- Do you promise to be a follower of Him, obey His word and show His love to all? (I do.)
- Do you promise wherever you may be, to be part of a church, a fellowship of believers and to strengthen that faith community? (I do.)

And if there is a young child who wants to be baptized today and follow Jesus, I ask this of at least one of the parents or guardians: Will you do everything in your power to help this child be a follower of Jesus? (I do.)

And I now ask the congregation: Will you do all in your power to raise this child up as a disciple of Christ, that he or she will obey His word and show His love to all, and will you strengthen the child's ties with a church? If so say "I do." (I do)

And now all may be seated. Again, those who want to be baptized, and hear Jesus calling you, I invite you to come down the center aisle as we sing.