



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
April 8, 2018
Tzitzit! (Hope Restored Series)
Pastor Dan Chun

Mark 3:7 Jesus departed with His disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed Him;

Mark 3:8 hearing all that He was doing, they came to Him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

Mark 3:9 He told His disciples to have a boat ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush Him;

Mark 3:10 for He had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon Him to touch Him.

Mark 3:11 Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"

Mark 3:12 But He sternly ordered them not to make Him known.

Mark 3:13 He went up the mountain and called to Him those whom He wanted, and they came to Him.

Mark 3:14 And He appointed twelve, whom He also named apostles, to be with Him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message,

Mark 3:15 and to have authority to cast out demons.

Mark 3:16 So He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter);

Mark 3:17 James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);

Mark 3:18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean,

Mark 3:19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Then He went home;

We continue our series on Hope Restored, our series on the Gospel of Mark going right through the entire Gospel. Today we are at a new adventure, a new episode in the saga of Jesus. This will be a different kind of sermon, as you will see. I'm going to be teaching more than preaching, and so hang in there with me.

Here's the story: Jesus is in an area called Galilee, and His popularity has grown immensely. Huge crowds are following Him everywhere. Why? Because wherever He goes people are getting miraculously healed, even those with demonic influences as Jesus cast out the demons from them.

Our passage says that people are flocking to Him by the hundreds if not the thousand He is becoming a celebrity. He is like a rock star who's greater than Taylor Swift or Jay-Zee or Justin Bieber. But no *despacito*. Things are not going slowly but faster and faster, and Jesus even tells the disciples, "Hey, get me a boat cause I predict the crowds are gonna be so big we are going to have to

jump into a boat to escape when we need to."

Jesus gets to the other side of the lake, and He calls to Him a group of guys whom He appoints as His 12 closest disciples, His inner circle. As we know from other Bible passages, they are a motley crew whom we might not have expected to be on the A-team. The Bible tells us that they are a mix of men who are prideful like James and John, impetuous like Peter, unethical like Matthew, and doubting like Thomas. This ragtag group of men (minus Judas) will later be known as the famous apostles.

So, is working and partnering with Jesus in ministry only for holy people, or only for those Jesus handpicked, like the apostles? No, and this is what I want to talk about today.

Here's the premise: As crazy as it sounds, we are all called to be like the Apostles and to partner with Jesus. That's right. That's the springboard of today's message. As Jesus called the 12, He is also calling us.

We have ALL been called on a mission. We were actually all called to be ministers in Jesus' name. The mission was stated millennia ago in the Old Testament and remains true through the New Testament and to today in the 21st century.

Let me take us through thousands of years of Jewish history all the way to us Gentiles, meaning non-Jews.

Gentiles who follow Jesus today are you and I, brothers and sisters. And I should add that I thank Ray Vander Laan, a great Holy Land Bible teacher for his research on this, and whom I met five years ago on a church tour in Philippi.

And if I can do a little commercial please ... you can actually watch and listen to Ray Vander Laan giving a tour of the Holy Land through a massive video library called RightNow Media. You can use his and many other videos for your small group or personal study.

RightNow Media has thousands and thousands of Christian videos for adults and kids, which our church is making available to all of you for free since the church has paid the annual subscription fee. I highly recommend you request access to it. Just send us an email to this address: rightnowmedia@fpchawaii.org

That address is also on the back of the worship bulletin and on the cover of the news bulletin, in case you can't write fast enough. And because we are so nice, you can tell your friends, even if they don't come to First Prez, that they too may access this video subscription for free. Such a deal. I feel like I'm doing a commercial. But wait! There's more! You get a free set of knives and a veg-o-matic! (Just kidding)

Okay let's get back to our sermon. I'm going to crunch three years of seminary in 15 minutes.

We know from the Old Testament that God decided to choose one people – the Jews, the Israelites—through whom He would teach the whole world—back then, and today, and in the years to come, what it means to have a relationship with God. The Jews were not chosen because they were better than others. They were chosen because Jesus had to choose a people, and HE chose the Jews to showcase how a people should live for Him. (Too bad He didn't choose the Chinese; then at the Last Supper there would have been take-out boxes!)

Through a Hebrew man named Abraham, then through Abraham's son Isaac, and then through Isaac's son Jacob, we learned how God interacted with people and tried to have a personal relationship with them. Then much later, the Lord showed the Jews tremendous power through Moses. God rescued them out of slavery and took them about of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

On the way out of Egypt at a place called Mount Sinai, God gave these important words to the Jews, which reverberate to us non-Jewish people and is the main lesson of today's sermon.

Exodus 19:3 Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:

Exodus 19:4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, *if you obey my voice and keep my covenant*, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,

Ex. 19:6 but you shall be for me a *priestly kingdom and a holy nation*. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

Sometimes when I look at up at the Ko'olau mountains, I think that it's our Mount Sinai. God is present for His people here.

But on that day, God was saying to the Jewish people, "I want all of this world to know that I am God, and I am going to appoint YOU, that's right all of you, every citizen, to be priests in My Kingdom. And it is your mission to tell the other people all of this, for you are a kingdom of priests."

Priests? Who wants to be a priest? Now let me say head-on that for some, the

word *priests* has a bad connotation. Maybe because of a previous church setting or denomination, or something you have read in the news, the word *priests* might not conjure up a good thought. But let me re-boot our minds of what the Bible meant by "a kingdom of priests," and see it in its best original light.

First, let me tackle the word *kingdom* and then the word *priest*. In English we think of kingdom as a territory; some land with borders. But in spiritual terms in the Bible, the concept is way bigger than that. The kingdom is ANYWHERE the King is obeyed, where His will is being done.

God was telling them, "I want you all to be a kingdom of priests, and that means your community will do the will of the King. And as you obey the king, the Kingdom extends and expands to the rest of the world."

Notice the passage had this key verse: Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, *if you obey my voice and keep my covenant*, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,

So obedience really matters. God's Kingdom will ONLY materialize if we do His will; if we obey Him. Yes, grace saves us, not because we are better, but because God chose us. But after God chose us, after we are saved, then God says I have a mission for you.

After Jesus heals you, saves you, extracts demons from you, instills joy in you, it is not for us to just go on our happy way. No, God says, "Now I have a mission for you. I want My kingdom to come here on earth. As we say in the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.' I want people to know of Me, My will, and My joy. I want you to reflect on how YOU live what it means to know Me, for you are My priests, My partners, My holy messengers."

God reigns, so let's show others what it means when God reigns in our lives. A prophet named Isaiah wrote these words:

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion (Israel), "Your God reigns."

The words "Good News" in Hebrew are translated to the word "Gospel." This is the Good News, the Gospel. How beautiful it is when God's people brings the news and joy to others that God reigns! That is what Jesus was trying to tell His apostles after all of the crowds were following Him because of their healing. Show people what it looks like when God reigns in your life.

But then as we shall see in the Old Testament, the Jews became selfish. They took God out of the picture and started looking for other gods to serve. Now don't be too fast in judging the Jews. We cannot dump on them because they are like a lot of us! We often are the same way. We go after false gods of success or laziness or procrastination or money.

So, the question is: How have we done with the mission? Does our lifestyle say to others that God reigns? How can our life possibly say that? Take a big gulp because God says, YOU are to live like priests.

Exodus 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

Exodus 19:6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Notice God says to tell all of the people that everybody is going to be a priest. Everyone! You might be thinking, "Dan, this is kinda scary. What is a priest? I don't want to change my wardrobe. I have really bad memories of priests. I don't want to be a holy roller."

Okay, I don't mean that kind. I don't mean you have to wear robes, or always wear heavy crosses around your neck, or live in a monastery. And yes, maybe when you were young maybe a priest was not nice to you. I am not saying to be like any of your bad memories or concepts.

When I say, and the Bible says we are to live like priests, it means that we have a holy role in God's eyes. God is saying, "You are to be my PARTNERS, My MESSENGERS in spreading my joy and purpose in life."

Don't live in a monastery. Don't leave your jobs or homes. Actually, it is important that you STAY in your jobs and neighborhoods.

So, let's look at what were the priests back in the Old Testament, and then let's relate their purpose for us today. Priests had two characteristics:

1) Priests mediate.

It means they demonstrate or explain to the people what God is like. When people don't understand God, or hate God, we are like mediators trying to reconcile people with Him. We do that by demonstrating to others God is like. We are to show and speak God's grace, mercy, and love. We listen to people. We are to tactfully and thoughtfully communicate what God is like to others by our lifestyle and our words.

It's not that we only pray for others but we live a life to show what God is like. In that sense, we partner with God to bring the good news to people. If God is kind, merciful, gracious, thoughtful, and righteous, then a priest or partner with God is to be the prime example of what God looks like.

2) Priests obey and keep God's Covenant.

Exodus 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured

possession. How do we obey God and keep His covenant? First, we need to be holy.

The Jewish word for holy is *Kadosh*. It means "to be set apart" or "different." It means we need to live uniquely different lives, unlike the world's. It doesn't mean we become hermits or goody-two shoes who have no fun like we just sucked on a lemon. No, it means we do not follow all of the world's values. We will think differently as God has taught us.

We will love the unlovable. We will take time to be with the uncool people. We will be thoughtful in the midst of a busy workweek to think of those who are hurting, and who could use a kind phone call or a lasagna or a card or a cake.

God was saying if you obey me fully and keep My covenant, then be *kadosh*, be holy. Live in ways that show others and the world what God looks like.

Now, many who are here may be thinking, "Whew. We are so off the hook. We are not Jewish so we don't have to live that way. We are Gentiles, or non-Jews, who follow Jesus so we are safe! We can live the way we want to."

Nice try, gang. The apostle Peter, one of the original 12 apostles, says this in the New Testament, writing to Christian churches throughout Asia Minor, which applies to all of us non-Jew, or Gentile, Christians:

1Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Oh my! The same phrase, *royal priesthood* is reaching from the Old Testament to the New Testament! The Bible is saying that you Gentile Christians are supposed to be a royal priesthood.

Every believer is to be like the Israelites of old who heard from God on Mount Sinai.

The Jews today do not believe in Jesus the Messiah. Hence, we Gentile Christians, God's people, are supposed to be priests in His name to tell people that our God reigns. So let's not look at the pastors of this church as the ones paid to be holy and compassionate priests who help the poor. Let's not say, "I just pay them to do it for me."

No, the Bible is saying, we are all pastors or priests—all of us. It's just that the church's ordained pastors are paid to train and equip everyone on how to be better in ministry and how to live a fulfilled life.

So if we are all priests, how do we remind ourselves of our very important role? What did God do to remind each and every Israelite that they were to be like a minister in every day life? That they were to always live holy and to care for others? That they were to communicate God's goodness to others as God's representatives?

The Jewish men, as you may know, were told to wear a garment that they could wear either under or over one's clothing. In Hebrew, it was called a *tallit*. It is a fringed garment, kind of like a poncho, with a hole to put the head through. Some today are seen more like a shawl.

The corner of the *tallit* is called the *kanaff*. And on the *kanaff* they attached tassels called the *tzitzit*. This *tzitzit* tassel could be a hassle. They got in the way at times because they were long. You could easily step on them. You can't tuck them away.

But the reason for that is so that the *tzitzit* could remind Israelites that they were ALL to be priests on behalf of God. They were to be messengers of God's good news. They were to be representatives of the message that God reigns.

They were to be channels of God's love, grace, and mercy.

In chapter 15 of the book of Numbers in the Old Testament, the *tzitzit* is supposed to have one blue thread. ONE BLUE THREAD. It does not say why. But we discover in another book of the Bible in Exodus chapter 28 that the only person who wears the color blue is the priest! So now it all comes together. God wanted every follower of God in the Old Testament to remember that he or she is a priest on behalf of God.

In the New Testament we find the Apostle Peter saying to the first generation of Christians, "Remember, you too are a priest."

It's not just the pastors of the church, like Dan or Steve or Tim or others. No every person, every adult or child, is given the mission that all of them are to be like a priest, a partner, a messenger of God in whatever setting they are. This is revolutionary. This is mind-blowing. We are all given this mission, not to just a few, but to all of us.

Numbers 15:37-38 The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel.

Numbers 15:39 You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by chasing after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.

Numbers 15:40 Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God.

Numbers 15:41 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God."

One would see and hold the tassel, or the *tzitzit*, and remember their calling. If you think God's mission for you is just to

sit back, be healed, and be taken care of, then know that is way off the mark. Rather, you are blessed to be a blessing to others. You were called like the original 12 apostles to minister to others.

Now, God never laid it on to us Gentiles to wear the tassels. Hey I'm Chinese, I'm as Gentile as you can get! But He calls all followers of Jesus of all races and cultures to live the mission of obeying God and telling others of what God is truly like.

So I want to do something today to help us remember our calling, our mission. I want to offer each of you a *tzitzit*, a tassel. I bought nearly a thousand of them. I want each of you to take one. It would help if you could give a small donation, like \$5, to cover the cost of the church buying them (I did say I am Chinese). But if you can't afford that, that's okay. Just take one as our gift to you to help you in your walk with God.

You can get the *tzitzit* in three places today: First, outside the sanctuary doors. Second, at the main lobby of the other wing near the front desk. And third, near our HeBREW'S Coffee Bar. (How appropriate!)

After you get one, this is what I want you to do with it. You don't need to wear it, but I want you to put it in a place where you can often see it, touch it, as if on our prayer shawl somewhere in your office. Stick it on your cubicle wall or on your desk. Hang it on your computer screen, or maybe somewhere at home near a kitchen counter or near a calendar, maybe by your bedside, or if you are a student, maybe on the inside of your locker door. Anywhere so that every time you see it, you'll remember that you are a priest.

You are on a mission to live holy, to obey God, and to tell people that God reigns. God wants you to love and minister to people as God would.

May it be a reminder to you – that you are to be the pastor to the people in your office or neighborhood or home or school.

If you put it in your office, it is to remind you that every employee there is part of your flock whom you are to shepherd and minister to with the love of Christ, whether that worker is above or below you in the organization chart.

If someone is grieving over the loss of a loved one or a pet, if someone is stressed or depressed, be there for that person. Be the one to check in on him or her, or share a kind word, or maybe send a card, or make some food for that person.

And as a minister of God, please act with integrity and honesty in your job. Be the hard worker that would be a model for all. Be the one with the servant heart.

If you are in school, be like a pastor to your friends. Encourage them, affirm them, and pick them up when they are sad.

In your neighborhood, look out for your neighbors, help the elderly, help those who are lonely or have medical issues. Offer to help with moving their garbage bins. Be a bridge builder with neighbors.

At home, the tzitzit may be a reminder that you are called to be a messenger of God's good news and serve one another with unconditional love.

And for all of us, if there is a chance to share the good news that Jesus came here on earth for us and others, then please share. For we are all called to be in a royal priesthood. We are to be mediators for people with God. Tell them about Jesus. Live out His love. And may we be challenged to clean up our acts, repent, forgive, and live the holy life that God has called us to and obey Him as much as we can.

So I highly encourage you to get a *tzitzit* to remember it is not about keeping

God's love to ourselves. The tassel reminds us that God is king and we are to partner with Him, and if we obey Him, the blessings will be immense. May it be a reminder too that He loves you, He's for you, and He's with you.

Remember the words:

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion (Israel), "Your God reigns."

And so, as the deacons and elders get ready for communion may we think on these things.

We just had a huge celebration of Easter. We are reminded that Jesus gave us two very specific commandments, which we today call our only two sacraments. The first was baptism. We saw 134 people last Easter weekend come forward to be baptized or to renew their baptismal vows. Amazing! Over the last 4 years more than 600 have done so on Easter alone, which can make your pastor cry because I know it's the beginning of hope restored for so many and the continuation of the mission.

The second commandment Jesus told us to enact is the sacrament of Communion – to remember Christ in the breaking of the bread and in the drinking of the cup. And by doing that regularly, may we always be reminded of the Good News of Easter, the Good news of God's Kingdom to come here on earth, and that He reigns.