



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### April 20, 2014

#### "What If" (Easter Sunday Sermon)

#### The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**W**hen it comes to religion and faith, the question is: is it really true? This Jesus guy, is He really true? We don't want a faddish faith, a faith *du jour*, a faith of the day. What if Jesus was just a nice guy? What if He was just a guy who had good moral stuff to share with us?

No one really questions whether there was a man named Jesus who lived and taught people how to live. But what if He was just a human being who is as flawed as you and I, and He just had some good ideas about love but then died and is still in the grave?

But what if He was MORE than that? What if He really is God and HE wants us to be involved with Him? How would that change our lives? Really?

What if the Easter story is not just a story? What if it is not fiction or just a cultural religious tradition? What if, as crazy as it sounds, God really did come down to earth in the form of a man named Jesus of Nazareth?

What if God did decide to visit earth incognito at first, disguised some 2,000 years ago as Jesus? What if God did decide to live among us because by doing so He would be fully human, and also fully God? He would come as a commoner born not in a palace bed but in a stable, because they didn't recognize Him and told him that there was no room at the inn for Him.

He would then feel our emotional and physical pain. He would know what it is like to be overlooked, rejected, and then later betrayed and abandoned. Though He would never sin, He would hang out with the worst of sinners, and show them again and again that there is nothing they could do to prevent Him from loving them.

What if He only loved the greatest of sinners and only got mad at religious people who were more into rules and regulations than a relationship with God? What if God, like King Richard in the Robin Hood movies, disguised as a monk, comes back from the Crusades to join forces with the faithful merry men and Marian to save England from the evil Prince John and rid the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. What if God did something like that—come camouflaged with the intent of ridding this earth of the evil Prince of Darkness, the Devil himself?

To use another metaphor, maybe Jesus was like the TV show *Undercover Boss*, where the CEO of a company disguises himself and works with his employees as a new employee. And by working among them He is able to see who is really faithful to the company. He sees who is doing good and who is doing bad.

If you have never seen the show, here is a clip of Rick Silva, CEO of Checker's and Rally's fast food and burger chain on the mainland. He disguised himself with glasses, wig, and a moustache, and went to work as a new management trainee and

discovered that the restaurant manager at one of the chains was treating the employees horribly by yelling at them, demoralizing them, and threatening them with physical beatings. One employee said the way the manager treated him made him feel worthless.

This branch of Checkers also had no organization in the business, no working speaker system at the drive-through, no properly labeled buttons at food preparation, and no formal training of employees.

And so when he had seen enough, Rick, the CEO still in disguise, asked the manager to step outside because his treatment of his employees was so wrong. In the video clip, the CEO is the tall guy in the red shirt; the manager is in the blue shirt. (Video clip was shown.)

What happened at the end? Rick Silva did shut down the restaurant for a day. He brought in a new manager. He kept everyone on pay roll. Like God in the Bible, he now knew who were the good and faithful workers. And if you weren't kind to the least of his employees, you were not kind to him, the boss.

For employees who were loyal and hard working he gave them huge rewards in five figures. He promoted them. In essence saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants." As for the manager he got mad at, who thought he was doing the right things but his heart was not in the right place, well, GRACE ABOUNDED!

**T**he CEO kept him on and trained him to be a better manager.

The CEO then gathered all of the employees and revealed who he was and told them that he would take the hit, and lose money for days; it was his responsibility that they were not trained right and that he had inadvertently allowed it to get bad. That is why they would not be fired and that he would train them. Check it out on Netflix: Season 3, Episode 4. It's a metaphor.

What if God, the real perfect, all-loving undercover boss, transformed Himself and came to earth not as the King of Kings that He is, but disguised as a carpenter named Jesus to live with us and then take the hit, take on the penalty of all of the sin of all of humankind. So instead of us going to a very warm place—hell—Jesus said, “I will take on YOUR SIN that you are ultimately responsible for and which would normally have sent you to hell, BUT I WILL DIE on a cross as a sacrificial lamb taking it all on so you can enter heaven, if you but just be loyal to Me, follow Me, and live your life for Me.”

As our short drama earlier in the service showed, it doesn't matter how much you have made or what accomplishments of good deeds you have done. Good deeds don't save you. That's the shocking truth. What matters in getting into heaven is if you have the faith in Jesus and commit your life to follow Him.

Imagine, what if it were true that everything the Bible says about Jesus is the actual reality? Wouldn't that be mind-blowing? What if God really walked on this earth? What if all He said in the Bible is true on how to live life to the fullest? How would that change your every day life if that were true?

What if all the crazy things He said about forgiveness for others and forgiving ourselves and loving the unlovable, helping the poor were true? What if it is true when He said that He would always have our back that He would never leave us behind? What if it is true that GOD NEVER FAILS?

We may not understand Him at first, we may have had a great deal of pain, but the story has not ended, and when we get to the end, we will see that God never fails. Imagine how that would cut down our worry.

When I pray I always say, “I am praying for big things Lord, and if you fail me that will be the first time.”

God never fails. He has our back. He is with us in the valleys and the mountaintops. He helps us battle our spiritual emotional and physical battles. He promised that He would be with us always. And He knows what it means to be abandoned, beaten, lied to, betrayed, rejected, assaulted, tortured and crucified. If I want someone in my corner, I want someone who knows something about the pain of life.

What if, what if it is true that He is with us always? So why would we ignore Him or just make Him a hobby or a once- or twice-a-year observance?

Sometimes I ask my agnostic friends to tell me what they picture God to be if there were a God. And nine out of ten, they would describe a god that looks and acts a lot like Jesus.

What if it is true that Jesus wants to be our friend, that He is alive right now, that He is in this room, that He can heal and give us hope? What if we could feel His presence? How would that change our lives?

Why wouldn't we want to live for Him? Too busy? If He really existed, are we really too busy to follow Him?

And too busy doing what? Or maybe, and I get this, maybe we really doubt whether He existed. I mean how could we believe Jesus existed since He lived so long ago?

But come on. We believe in other things long ago that have FAR LESS evidence of their existence. If you really study non-Christian historians, like Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius, they too wrote about Jesus. Within Jesus' lifetime, Jewish historian Josephus, born in 37 A.D., wrote these words: Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to all him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. (Josephus, Antiquities, XVIII 63f.)

Most people here in the room have no problem believing that Alexander the Great really lived. He was born at around the 4<sup>th</sup> century. We read about his exploits, but there are ZERO original copies of the ancient historical works about him. Zero. The most recent copies about him were written hundreds of years later.

The book *Caesar's Gaelic War*, which is about Julius Caesar, only has nine or ten copies, but they are not originals. They are copies written 950 years after Caesar died, but we have no problem believing that Caesar existed.

We have only 8 copies, no originals, of the work of historian Thucydides, which was written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century before Christ, and the copies discovered were 1300 years later! The earliest copy we have of the famous *History of Rome* by Livy is dated 900 years after the original was written, and there are only 20 copies of it in the world. And we use that as evidence of how Rome lived back then.

But when it comes to Jesus, people question His existence and the

authenticity of the gospels and the Bible. And yet, there are 5,000 Greek copies of manuscripts, 10,000 Latin copies, and 9,300 other copies in other languages, plus 36,000 citations in writings of other authors. (Source: Nicky Gumbel. Questions of Life. P 24) The earliest copies were written not 900 years later, but just 30 years after the apostles died. There are also full manuscripts dated two hundreds years later.

These people wrote about Jesus. What do we make of this man who says not that I forgive you for wronging me but that I forgive you for wronging others? Who dies He think He is? We would say that is crazy, unless maybe He thinks He is God.

And when one says "I am God," we either think that person should be in the loony bin, or he knows better but is lying, or he is who he says he is—the Lord God that humankind has been waiting for all time. Lunatic, liar, or Lord? These are the only options when we come face to face with a man who historically lived and said He was God, and that He would one day judge us. We could ignore Him, but why? Too busy?

According to the Bible, Jesus could heal the sick while He was on earth. He could cast out demons. He could calm a stormy sea. So either this is all just a Mother Goose fairy tale or Jesus is who He says He is. And if He is the real deal, then we better follow Him. If He is who He says He is, then it means that no matter what sin we have committed, He says He forgives us and loves us. He says He can teach us how to pray and heal others. He tells us how we can live lovingly and live with inner strength. He tells us how we are to handle our money so we live an abundant life.

The people who follow Him say that He has changed their lives. Time and time again people have come

up to this pulpit even in recent weeks to say that even though they were beaten by their dad, or assaulted by a stranger, or have gone through post deployment issues, or have had anger issues, addiction issues, relationship issues, health and financial issues, Jesus has made a difference. In their lives. God never fails.

Whether a member of this church or a visitor, why don't we live as if it were true? Really true. Why don't we follow Him? Why don't we just say, "I want to live for you 100% in everything I do, everything – socially, business wise, relationally."

It's Jesus who says, "Trust Me. Follow Me." Why should we trust Him? Because God never fails. You see, Jesus wanted us to know that He loves us so much that He went to a cross because of us. It's not about how much you have done or what accomplishments you have that will entitle you to go to heaven.

Years ago we put three crosses on the church lawn overlooking the putting green. But a few months ago, the middle cross fell over, and I said we've got to have that third cross. Imagine an Easter where there are only two crosses, the two representing the two thieves who died on the crosses with Jesus. But without the third cross in the middle, it means God wasn't nailed on a cross. Jesus didn't die for us. That means we are only left with our sin and despair. We are left with our failures and no hope.

But because there is a third cross, because Jesus chose to go undercover on Christmas day and then as an adult, jump on the grenade for our sake, then we truly have the hope of Easter. And He rose from the dead! Jesus wants us to realize it's about a relationship with Him, not about following rules or regulations. He wants to encourage us in the midst of our failures.

I want to end with an encouraging word. There are people here today who are fully bummed out about life. Money is not working out. Work is not working out. Marriage is tough, or perhaps you're bummed that you are not married. Your body is going. Maybe you are looking back and thinking, "I have not done anything. I'm not good enough. I'm not accomplished enough. I have really done some bad things."

It is at this point that I need some help to get the point to us that God is not saying you haven't done enough. Instead He is trying to encourage you that you are loved as you are, and that's good enough, only if you follow Him. After that, His Holy Spirit will enter you and help you see things in the right perspective and help you live right. He will actually empower you to live how YOU want to live. His simple message to an adulterer was to go and sin no more. Your life doesn't make you a loser, but go and with Jesus you can have a better life. He said the same thing to an embezzler named Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9), and to a guy named Nicodemus who was into legalism (John 3:1-21).

It's at this point I need some help to get us to understand this, so I have Brad Pitt to help me. You see, I need all the help I can get. In the movie *Moneyball*, Brad Pitt plays Billy Beane, the general manager of the baseball team Oakland Athletics. This movie was based on a true story.

In this scene that you're about to see, Billy Beane is really bummed out because after a great run of 20 wins in a row, the team loses in the play-offs and is eliminated. Billy is more than bummed. He's depressed that they lost. He feels like a loser. And he talks to his assistant general manager Pete, played by Jonah Hill. (Video clip was shown.)

On this Easter, we need some good eggs, so to speak, to say to other people, "Hey, look at your life. You have hit some home runs. You just don't know it because your face is down in the ground. You may not feel it, but you've actually done well."

Let's be a good egg to others. Let's encourage them. On this Easter we also need, maybe me for right now, to be a good egg and say to you, "Don't be so hard on yourself. You are hitting homeruns and you don't even know it. You don't even remember it. Don't be so tough on yourself. Forgive yourself, and Jesus will give you the power to forgive and to hit more homeruns."

You see Christianity is not about the word "doing" but about the word "done." It's already done. Jesus Christ has died on the cross and has been resurrected. The game is won. The ball is over the fence.

In the end, evil will lose and justice will win. For now we fight on, but know that the weeds have been sprayed and it will just take time for the good stuff to grow and the weeds to completely go away. And the greatest proof of all is the resurrection of Jesus. Only God could do that. God never fails.

Jesus is is risen from the dead! More than 500 people saw him, in fact. What if Jesus is who He said He is? What if? All He is waiting for is for you to commit your life to Him or recommit. He really is God. And so I say to you all today, "He is risen. He is risen. He is risen indeed! Let's pray.

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*Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org). The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. It can also be sent to you by e-mail. Request the free audio version at [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com).*