



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 9, 2013

"Will You Remember Me?" (Gospel of Luke Series)

The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Luke 23:32 *Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.*

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

Luke 23:34 [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

Luke 23:35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"

Luke 23:36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,

Luke 23:37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Luke 23:38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Luke 23:41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Luke 23:43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The gospel of the Christian faith is both good news and bad news.

First the bad news. We are a lot more sinful than we could ever imagine. As individuals, we are a lot more selfish, prideful, maybe at times even narcissistic and self-centered than we are willing to admit.

As a society, it is pretty bad. Page after page, newspaper headlines speak of sin over and over again—broken promises, deception, embezzlement, betrayal, violence, hostility, war, terrorism.

The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God." (Romans 3:30)

But the Bible also has this good news: God loves us a lot more than we could ever imagine. His forgiveness is greater than we could ever dream. His justice may seem slow but it is never late. His love and Holy Spirit can transform people and societies. And His forgiveness—His

forgiveness and grace—what is so amazing!

We all have the sinful nature, which means we all have tendencies to sin. The dangerous thing about these tendencies is that they can start off gradually and subtly, hardly noticeable, but then they can snow ball, and pretty soon we are truly in deep *kim chee*.

This reminds me of a quote from Sir Walter Scott: {Oh what a tangled web we weave when at first we practice to deceive." (from Marmion, Canto vi. Stanza 17)

Let me tell you a true story of how small lies can grow into big trouble .

Remember now that this is a true story. You may have heard a version of it, but my relative heard this first-hand from the main character of the story, and so this is the real account of the famous Rabbit Story.

There were two neighbors who, over the years, became so close that they trusted each other to watch over each other's pet and home while the other person went on vacation.

Susan was neighbor #1 who had a white rabbit for a pet. The rabbit was her best friend. Manny was neighbor #2 who lived on the other side of the fence. He had helped Susan and her husband build a beautiful cage for their rabbit in their backyard.

Every year Susan and her husband would go to Las Vegas for a vacation, and they would ask Manny to check on their rabbit once in a while. They would tell him not to worry about having to look after it too much because they made sure the rabbit had tons of grass, food, and large bowl of water that would last the rabbit for the three days they would be gone. Manny knew just how much Susan loved her rabbit.

Susan would also take care of Manny's dog, a black Labrador, when Manny travelled. Susan knew just how much Manny loved his dog.

So it was that time of the year again for Susan and her husband to go on their annual trip to Las Vegas, in hopes to win big! Off they went! Manny understood, without having to be told, that he was to look after Susan's white rabbit.

The day after Susan left, Manny's dog came into his house with something brown in its mouth. Manny tried to see what it was, and to his horror, he realized it was Susan's white rabbit now brown with dirt! Manny was shocked! He scolded his dog, and then realized that the rabbit was not moving; it was dead.

He panicked! He didn't know what to do! Should he call Susan and her husband in Las Vegas and tell them the sad news? Or should he not say anything so as not to ruin their vacation, which they had been talking about to Manny for months? What would YOU do?

Manny decided NOT to tell Susan. Instead he took the dead rabbit to the kitchen sink, gave it a sponge bath—with Palmolive dish soap—to get rid of all the dirt off of the rabbit until it was pure white once again.

He then carefully placed the rabbit back into its cage, which was in

the back of Susan's house. He positioned the dead rabbit so that it was lying faced down with its long ears neatly placed on both sides of its face. Manny also put lots of fresh grass and fresh water in the cage as well.

Two days later, as Manny was watching a football game in his house, he heard someone yelling at the top of her voice, "Ahhhhh! Ahhhhh! Help me! Help me!"

Manny ran outside, and discovered it was Susan. She and her husband had returned from Las Vegas.

Manny asked, "What's wrong! What's wrong?"

Susan was so shocked that she could hardly talk. "Manny, we forgot to tell you that just before we left, my rabbit ... my rabbit ... passed away of old age, so we did a burial. We did a prayer and we even buried her in our backyard.

"So today, I wanted to clean out the cage. But when I opened the cage door, I found my rabbit back in there. Aaahh! How did my rabbit get back in her cage?!"

Manny didn't know what to do, but then realized he had to tell the truth. He said, "Susan, I know how much you loved your rabbit; she was everything to you. I thought when my dog brought home your rabbit. That he killed it...oh man, I didn't think he dug it up from the ground already dead!

"So, I gave your rabbit a bath with Palmolive Dish Soap and carefully placed her back in her cage hoping you would think she passed away naturally in her sleep."

Susan and her husband stared in dead silence, in shock. And then, they all started to laugh to the point that their stomachs hurt. In fact, they couldn't look at each other for days

without laughing again. Susan forgave Manny!

It was so funny that even till today, they talk about how much each neighbor cared so much about the feelings and love for each other.

Susan got another rabbit and Manny eventually got another dog to replace his Labrador that passed away of old age. They both continue to watch over each other's pet when they go on their Las Vegas Trips still till this day.

So what does this story have to do with the sermon? Hang in there; there is always a meaning to Pastor Dan's madness. This story of lies and deception and then forgiveness gives us a springboard into our text today. What could have been a horrible tale with a bad ending turns out to be a great story because someone chose to forgive.

Our scripture text for today begins with a horrible tale of deception and sin.

Judas Iscariot, one of those in Jesus' inner circle, one of the select 12 apostles, betrayed Jesus, lied to Him, which then started a chain reaction of events in which Jesus is whipped, beaten and then nailed to a cross.

As a society, we have put Jesus on the cross. The headlines of our papers show that we are far from being a God-fearing society. As a society we—like in our text, like the religious leaders and the soldiers—have mocked Jesus.

In America it is prohibited to promote the name of Jesus in a public school grade school, high school or even in some universities. The mere mention of Jesus' name may be cited as a violation of the separation of state and church. We mock the name above all names!

And more recently it was discovered that the IRS purposely targeted such organizations as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritans Purse because they followed Christ and were conservative.

But forget Federal and State government policy. Here on our driving range, someone on staff once saw tourists going up to the three wooden crosses on our hill, and these tourists pretended to be hanging on the cross like Jesus. They took pictures of one another, laughing and giggling while acting like they were nailed to the cross. They mocked the great and selfless sacrifice of our Lord, who was crucified for their sake too.

As our passage says in Luke 23:35-37: *And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

There are three crosses on our hill on the driving range. Why three? Why not just one? One cross reminds us that Jesus sacrificially died for you and me even though He was innocent. The other two crosses represent how you and me, and how we have all sinned and should be punished.

In the Bible, the other two crosses were for the two criminals who were also tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death that day. One criminal nailed next to Jesus looked at Jesus with disdain and disbelief, but the other criminal somehow perceived that Jesus was different.

Amazingly, the Gospel of Luke is the ONLY Gospel out of the four in the Bible that records the criminals' actual conversation with Jesus. Dramatically important! Stunning

dialogue! Crucial! Listen to what they said to each other:

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Luke 23:41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

Fascinating to see what criminal #1 is doing. The text says that he kept on—repeatedly, continually—deriding Jesus. "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and oh by the way – save us!"

Hear what criminal #1 is saying. "Are you the Messiah? You, the Messiah? Then save yourself!" Bam! The upper cut of sarcasm and then boom! – the cross punch when he adds "...and save us!"

The second criminal has a completely different attitude. He says:

Luke 23:40 But the other (criminal #2) rebuked him (criminal #1), saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Luke 23:41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

The second criminal knows he is a sinner. He knows he should be condemned for wrongdoing. He is aware of his sinfulness. And he is also aware that Jesus is different, that Jesus has done nothing wrong.

How did this criminal perceive this? Were he and Jesus cellmates the night before? And could he tell through their conversations that Jesus was a good man? Was criminal #2 in the courtyard where he saw Pontius Pilate ask the people if they should free a guilty terrorist named Barabbas or Jesus and how unfairly the crowd chose innocent Jesus for crucifixion? Or did criminal #2 see Jesus beaten, scourged and mocked?

While on the cross, criminal #2 heard Jesus say the most amazing thing: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

That may have been the tipping point! What kind of guilty man would say that? What kind of man is this? Jesus who did nothing wrong was choosing to forgive.

Friends, the mark of a follower of Christ is that he or she is able to forgive. You can tithe, which is a good thing. You can go to church, which is a good thing. You can help the poor, which is a real good thing. But the true mark of a Christian—the one that cuts down to the marrow of our selfishness, our narcissism our feelings of entitlement and our self-centeredness—forgiveness!

Can we forgive others who have wronged us? Can we be like a Susan who can forgive a Manny who has done a horrible deceptive thing? Forgiveness is the only way that the vicious cycle of retaliation ends.

Forgiveness is defined as giving up the right to retaliate. When wronged, you have a right to retaliate, but as a follower of Christ, we give up that right. We don't forget the sin against us. We don't condone it, but we give up on the vengeance.

It was Susan forgiving Manny for his deception that allowed them to still remain friends and to trust each other again. It is forgiveness that allows God and humankind to be reconciled.

This is amazing. Jesus was innocent. He is beaten and nailed to a cross. While on the cross He is mocked and derided, not only by the religious people, or by the crowds or by the soldiers. And He couldn't even get a break on the cross while hanging there; He had a detractor on the cross next to him deriding him and sarcastically mocking him. How bad can life get? Real bad.

But Jesus says, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

We think people hurt us because they know what they are doing. But people often have no idea of how much harm they are doing to you, and you have the choice to forgive as Jesus does for they know not what they do.

But you say, "But these people do know what they are doing!" Maybe. Maybe their hurt from the past is blinding them to the hypocritical hurt they are heaping on you. They don't know.

Pam and I were talking about this last night, and she said what helps her to forgive is that people often are really just doing the best they can do. Their best actions may still be offensive but that's the best they can do with their present level of life experience, immaturity, or abused life. But even if they do know what they are doing, we are not off the hook in forgiving.

More to the point: can we forgive as Jesus has forgiven us for our wrongdoing? Our ignoring God? Our saying one thing but not doing it? We say we have given our life God and He is our Lord. Really? Is He the Lord of all

that we do? Or are we just FANS of Christ, and not really FOLLOWERS?

FANS of God are those who like Him, who learn about Him, and those who attend church events but who are not really committed to follow Jesus.

We have choices in life. We can look at Jesus the way Criminal #1 did and be angry, distrustful, fearful, sarcastic, or critical of Him. We can be like the religious leaders who mocked Jesus thinking that they didn't need Him because they have followed the religious laws and that they were basically good people. We could be like the Roman soldiers who mocked Jesus thinking that their human power, might, and success were sufficient. Or we can be like the repentant criminal #2 and identify our own sinful behavior, recognize our imperfection and neediness, and then see Jesus as who He really is, our Savior, the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah who, in His own words, desires to be our friend, savior and Lord.

When the repentant thief on the cross, fully realized who Jesus was, he said these stunning words: *Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)*

All the thief had to say was "Jesus, remember me." In just those three words came the full, unadulterated, pure, genuine, high octane, high grade, 24-carat, intense passion of his heart, concentrated down to the simple request to "remember me." Those brief words were saying, "I DO BELIEVE you are the Christ. I believe you are going to heaven, so please remember me when you die and when you go to Paradise."

Those three words—Jesus, remember me—are so packed with faith. It was all it took for Jesus to

acknowledge what He could see in the deepest parts of the man's heart. Jesus responded by saying, "Truly, from today on, you will be with me in Paradise," which meant that from that day on criminal #2's name was in the guest book of heaven.

The fact that it was said on a cross near death shows that it is never too late, even at death's door, to say "Jesus remember me."

Notice it didn't have to be a formal prayer of "I accept You, Jesus, as my Lord and Savior and that I am washed in the righteous blood of the lamb, baptized fully in the Holy Spirit, and I believe in all of the confessions of the church starting with the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, etc." No, just a simple prayerful request of "Jesus, remember me" was enough

Jesus knows our hearts. The heart of the repentant thief is that he knew he was guilty. He knew he had sin in his life. He had no entitlement other than he knew he was entitled to penalty and pain.

But what a picture! In the midst of the criminal's pain on the cross, in the midst of the criminal's penalty, Jesus was right there next to his cross offering him forgiveness and a new life in heaven.

What a metaphor! Jesus is right next to us in our pain and struggles but we don't always know it.

For all of us Manny's who say small and big lies, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But may the Manny in us all know that the Son of Man has come to save many and, yes, us Mannys.

And my hunch is there are a lot of Mannys here today who, when confronted with the evidence, know that they have sinned. We know we are far from perfect.

Yet, may we know that even when we feel that life is at a dead end—where we tried to cut corners, break the law, lie, cheat, or be stingy towards God—that somehow we hear the refreshing voice of Jesus saying, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

I believe that there are some Mannys here this morning who want to with all of their hearts say with courage, “Jesus, remember me,” meaning, “I have tried my way and it doesn’t work. I want a new start, a life without You, Jesus, doesn’t work as well. From here on I want to follow You. I don’t want to be just a fan but a follower of You.”

If this is your heart’s desire then I am going to lead you in a prayer to declare that to Jesus and to make the commitment to FOLLOW Him for the REST OF YOUR LIVES. If you truly have a repentant heart when you say this prayer and will commit to following Him no matter what, Jesus assures you of Paradise today.

Let’s pray. “Lord Jesus, I am so sorry for the wrong things I have done. Please forgive me of all my sins. I want to start anew. Thank You, for loving me and for forgiving my sins. Please come into my life today. I want to follow You. I want You to be my savior and Lord. In Your name I pray, Amen.

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Sunday sermon texts are also available at 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.