



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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God Seems Slow But He's Never Late (Hope Restored Series)

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The amazing thing about the Bible is that it is so revolutionary, so radical, so upending. To better understand the context of the story, let me set up some unique characteristics of the Bible.

A) The Bible is transparent and authentic.

You read about a king named David, who was being so vulnerable and putting it out there for all to read about his adultery and murder of an innocent soldier. When is the last time you have seen a world leader so humble and willing to say he had made major moral mistakes? Or express his doubts and sins about himself with such clarity?

And as if the narrative of what he has done isn't clear enough, we see in his poetry and songs, that King David talks openly about his sin and need for repentance:

Psa. 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Psa. 51:11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

You read about a man named Moses, who was scared and doubtful at times and stuttered, as recorded in the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, that he himself had commissioned. But God calls him a humble man.

Reading those accounts makes me trust Christianity and the Bible more. They

don't hide all of the flaws of their heroes and models.

B) The biblical accounts upend the whole thinking of ancient society of primogeniture.

Primogeniture is the practice that the first born should get most of the blessings, that the first born is the one who should have the most responsibilities and be the future of the family. But in the Bible, we see time and time again that God chose not the first-born but a younger child to lead the family or a country.

Moses was not the oldest. Aaron was. But Moses was chosen to lead Israel. David was not the oldest son, but one of the youngest. But He was chosen to be King of Israel. Joseph was not the oldest son. But He was chosen to save the future of Israel. This cut across centuries of Jewish tradition. This was radical. But the God of the Bible upended that cultural behavior.

I once was talking to Peggy Campolo, who is the oldest child in her family, and I said, "See, how God uses the youngest children, like myself? We are the anointed ones." To which she replied, "Uh, Jesus was the first born." Okay, good point. Peggy is such a wise woman in so many ways. This leads to the next revolutionary aspect of the Gospel that I want to mention.

C) Jesus put women on an equal plane with men

Wahine power! And when it comes to women, we see in the Bible that the

gospel, and specifically Jesus, radically revolutionized the way women were treated. The ancient Jewish culture did not give full rights to women. Women were not to be educated. They were not trusted as court witnesses. They were seen as subservient to men. They couldn't even touch another man, unless their husband in the privacy of their home.

In the daily prayer of the Torah, men would pray this: "Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a Gentile, a slave and a woman"

We know that that when the Apostle Paul wrote the New Testament, he wanted the new Christian community to get it right – that to follow Jesus meant you are NOT to continue in the ancient tradition. No, in the new community of Christ, women would be elevated, and that masters were now to be loving and supportive of those in a slavery position and Gentiles could become Christians and wouldn't have to be circumcised which was a huge, big revolution. (And all the Christian Gentile men said, "God! God is so good!")

For Paul specifically wrote this in a letter to the early church that completely contradicted this traditional Jewish prayer:

Gal. 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

What a radical new community! Boom!

In one verse the Apostle Paul upended the Jewish culture and replaced it with the new Christian culture he and others learned in the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

Okay, now we are ready for our Scripture passage for today. We will listen to a reading from *The Bible Experience* (audio Bible) to help us get acquainted with what we do with Just Show Up, which is a class that's all about the public reading of Scripture that's offered as one of our Life Training classes and soon to be held throughout the community on other days.

Mark 5:21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.

Mark 5:22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet.

Mark 5:23 He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live."

Mark 5:24 So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.

Mark 5:25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

Mark 5:26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

Mark 5:27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

Mark 5:28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."

Mark 5:29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

Mark 5:30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

Mark 5:31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

Mark 5:32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

Mark 5:33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

Mark 5:34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Let me now list – three quite profound and heavy principles found in this one passage.

1) Christ elevated women.

The episode begins with a synagogue leader named Jairus, who comes to Jesus to ask Him to go to his house to heal his daughter. Jesus says okay, and He starts heading to the home. A huge crowd surrounds Jesus.

In the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, we find that Jesus is already a rock star. He is now known for miraculously healing people. But then a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years comes up and does the unthinkable. She touches Jesus. No woman in ancient Middle East should touch a man. She has little rights. She is not respected. Remember, the ancient prayer that was recited daily - God, I thank you that I was not made a woman.

More than that she is dirt poor. It says she has spent all of her money. No more money for medical care. No Obama Care for her. She tried to get the right medical help but was not the healthier and in fact grew worse. Desperate in faith, she touches Jesus.

Last week I showed you a painting of 19th century French artist James Tissot and the demoniac, and this week here is his picture of *The Woman with an Issue of Blood*.



There it is, so crowded, people pressing in every which way as if Jesus were Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift or Jay Z or Beyoncé or like Jackie Chan! Look at the woman in the picture who's just trying to touch the hem of his garment. Perhaps she believes, at least superstitiously, that if she just touches Him, she will be made well. And lo and behold, the bleeding stops! She could sense in her body that something changed. She was supernaturally healed.

Jesus then turns around in the crowd. He felt that His healing power had gone forth from Him. But notice He doesn't get angry with the woman. He is not upset that a mere woman touched Him, which is a great cultural offense.

One of my all-time favorite lines in the Bible is His disciples' response to His question "Who touched me?" They say to Him: "How can you say 'who touched me?'" It's almost as if to say, "Jesus are you nuts? So many people here pulling, pushing, jostling, and you want to know who touched you? Duh, like we can tell."

Of course, the disciples don't know what happened – that a POWERFUL surge of healing power had just left Jesus and a woman who had suffered for a dozen years just got healed!

But the woman knows what happened. She also knows she just violated a big societal taboo, so she began to tremble in fear, then confessed: “Um, it was me.”

Maybe she cowered in fear. She was getting ready to be yelled at, to be told she had violated centuries of culture, and of all the men, she had touched a rabbi!

But then Jesus, kind Jesus, tender Jesus, loving Lord, calls her not scum, nor woman, but rather daughter. He says, “Your faith has made you well, so go in peace. You are indeed healed of your disease.”

Jesus healed her and does heal today. All we need to do is to reach out and touch Him with our prayers. Does that mean we will be instantly cured like her? Not necessarily though I have seen instant healing. Sometimes it is instant, sometimes it’s not. And for many of us, it can really bother us when it is not instant. We all want microwave ministry when it comes to us. We can say, “You can take your time Lord on other people, but when it comes to me and my family and my friends, don’t be ever slow.” This leads me to the next profound principle:

2) God may seem slow, but He is never late.

Use that as a bumper sticker, or stick it on the refrigerator in your kitchen. Let’s unpack this.

The woman suffered for 12 years. Is she prayed during those 12 years, why didn’t she get healed earlier? Why did it take 12 long years? As we mature in our faith, we will learn to trust God that He always has our best interests at stake. We will trust that He knows the best timing.

What Jesus always wants is a deep, intimate relationship with us. The woman waited 12 years but it was worth it. Not only did she get healed but she also got to really know Christ, the Messiah, the actual Son of God.

In our sickness, we get to know Christ more intimately. If we are more aware in our health or sickness, I believe we would perceive many miracles in our lives. But a life following Jesus is not about the miracles, though we should seek them. It’s always about having an ongoing dialogue, an ongoing relationship with Jesus. That’s what our Lord wants.

Mark 5:35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the synagogue leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”

I want to point to the first phrase “while Jesus was STILL speaking.” Jesus had healed the woman, but now He wanted to talk to her. He wanted a conversation. People are clamoring all around Him but He wanted to talk story. He wanted to build a relationship with her. He was starting to DISCIPLE her.

Did you hear that? He doesn’t want miracles without the relationship. He doesn’t want just believers, but disciples—followers who know and love Him passionately. Healing wasn’t the only goal. No, maturing people to be followers of Jesus, having a relationship with Jesus is way more important. In healing we give glory to God. Not all people who get healed become Christians. Jesus will still want to heal them and has, but a deep friendship with Jesus is better than just a healing. Healing points us to the kindness of God.

Let’s zero in on something that’s crucial for us to understand. There is a hope or a false belief that may be deep down inside of us (yes, even us Christians) that we expect Jesus to answer our prayers when and how we want.

And when He doesn’t, we get super upset. And for some, they leave the faith. I have a friend who, when he saw suffering in the world and Jesus didn’t intervene as fast as he wanted, ultimately came to the conclusion that there is no God. In his mind, if there

were a God, He would immediately answer his prayers for protection and healing when he wants Him to. You may think that is crazy but I think for many Christians they have that expectation.

Recently I had a dinner with “exiles.” They call themselves exiles because they have left a church because they were either disappointed on how their churches acted, or for some how they thought God acted.

Two weeks ago Jenny preached on the disciples and Jesus in a boat on the Lake of Galilee. Her sermon title was “Don’t You Care If...?” In her sermon, a huge storm came upon the disciples and they thought they were going to drown and they yelled to a sleeping Jesus while waves were raging and crashing into their boat, “Don’t you care that we are perishing?” Who wants to follow God when literally it seems Jesus is asleep and not at the wheel.

Hear this: I think for many Christians and others who are in a boat of suffering they think, “Wait a minute. As a follower of Jesus, I shouldn’t even be in a storm! But if I am in a storm, I should never be sinking. I should never flirt with death and danger. If Jesus is in my boat, I will forever be protected from suffering and betrayal or any other storms of life.”

But if Jesus suffered physical and emotional and spiritual turmoil and betrayal, why do we think we should be exempt? He is the Lord. Since when does the servant live a better life than the powerful Lord?

Somewhere in our heart, we may think, “I should never have a heartache. That’s for the Gentiles, the non believers.”

The woman waited 12 long painful years before Jesus healed her. But when we are in pain, we may think there’s no way are we going to wait 12 years. Jesus, if you are the God of the Universe, then why aren’t you taking away the pain right now?”

The lie is this: “Everything I pray for I get answers on my time line.” And if you buy into the culture of expectation of the immediate, a microwave faith, a worldview of “if I follow God I can get it now,” then it will just be a matter of time before you become an exile. You will leave the faith because the God you say you follow is not the real God.

If you are disappointed in how long it has taken to correct racial wrongs, sexual abuse in society, that it has taken so long to start a *MeToo* movement, or a *Black Lives Matter* movement, or a Civil Rights movement, that there is so much injustice and unfairness going on, then know that this is not a God problem but a human problem.

Human injustice is bred and propagated by humans. But God tries to raise up men and women and students and boys and girls to fight evil and injustice.

So this is crucial: Can you have the faith that God is looking at things from a heavenly 30,000-foot level and that there is no way, no way you will ever understand fully the wisdom and sovereignty and providence of God?

We will never fully understand His timing. He is always working for our best, but because we are puny humans, we won't be able to fully understand His timing. We just need to trust Him. We are like 5-year olds and He is a nuclear scientist. We just can't fathom the reality of how atoms work. He is like a physician and we as 3-year olds who don't understand why He's injecting us with a disease using a syringe with a long needle and then says He's doing that so we don't get the disease. Why is that is for our best?

When Moses died on Mt. Nebo and didn't get to go to the Promised Land, we say – that is so unfair of God! After spending more than 40 years in the wilderness and putting up with the Israelites' whining and complaining and running away from an Egyptian Army, you tell Moses that he's going to die? “Hey Moses, you can see

the Promised Land across the Jordan but sorry you aren't going. You gonna die here. So close and yet so far. It's Joshua who will take the your people to the Promised Land.” Our human mind says, “No fair! No fair! Moses deserves to get there.”

But who got the rawer deal? Moses who dies and goes to heaven, or Joshua who goes to the Promised Land of milk and honey and now has to fight 35 kings and their armies? When our loved ones die ahead of our schedule, we miss them greatly, but they are with God.

We can ask, “Why didn't you save them, God,” but they are with God in heaven, which is a good place to be. And I say that as one who has lost both parents (one parent to cancer), a cousin in the World Trade Center, and as one who had to bury 12 friends last year in funeral services. I have buried babies and adults – both young and older. All hard and a big loss, but we have to trust God.

If we are going through something really hard, can we trust Jesus enough that He does offer us strength to carry the burden we have? Can we have endurance and hope? Know that life is a marathon and not a sprint, and so things rarely get resolved on our time line. So don't put Jesus on your timeline. Let Him be the Lord of His. His time is the best time.

And be careful if our thinking goes to “If I were God, I would have acted this way.” Or worse yet thinking “God owes me, especially for all I have done for Him.” You're not God. We don't control Him.

I like what Tim Keller once said of how Jesus views our prayers from His sovereign place on the throne. When we pray to Jesus, can we know that Jesus' response almost always is this?

“I will always give you what you would have asked for, if you knew everything I know. [But] How could you possibly know everything I know?” Keller, T. J. (2013).

[The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#). New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

Is there something in your life right now where you are impatient? Would you be willing to take a step of faith like the woman who was hemorrhaging and step out? For days, weeks, maybe years there is something you have been so impatient for God to intervene. Will you reach out like that woman reached out, and say, “Jesus, please intervene. I ask You, and I trust you to act on my behalf in all of Your wisdom and timing.”

He will hear your prayer and, like the woman, feel His love, maybe His power, and His kindness. He and the Holy Spirit are tender in responding.

In a moment, I am going to ask you to step out in faith, like the woman in our story. I am going to ask those who want prayer to please stand up, and I will pray that God and His loving Holy Spirit will gently light down near and around you. I will pray for a miracle to answer your prayer. Let's give a prayer a chance by bringing it to the Lord.

It might be something physical or spiritual or emotional. It's not to embarrass you but to let you feel God's tender grace. And I will also ask those around you to pray for you. So if you want prayer (and you probably have been feeling during this sermon that you need to respond, to reach out), please stand now.

And now, I am going to ask those around you to please stand now and ask your permission if they might gently place a hand on your shoulder. I am going to ask people to silently pray for you and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you for God knows exactly what your issue is, and then I will close with a prayer.

Everyone please look around to see if anyone is standing in the need of prayer and please go up to them and pray and make sure there is no one here who is standing alone without prayer