



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 21, 2015

"Kneeling Before the One Who Kneels"

(WORTHY Sermon Series)

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Last weekend, 11 of us returned from a week in California where we served alongside City Impact in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. The Tenderloin has the highest percentage of poor in the city. It has a significantly higher crime rate than the rest of San Francisco and yet, you know what? God is at work in the streets of the Tenderloin! Jesus Christ is alive and on the move in the Tenderloin.

What an incredible privilege it was to learn from the staff and volunteers at City Impact. They showed us the love of Christ with every encounter we had on the streets with the residents of the TL. They showed us the compassion of Jesus with every meal we hand delivered to people locked away in tiny fear-filled apartments. They showed us how the gospel of Jesus Christ brings hope, even to those whose lives seem completely shattered.

City Impact showed us, once again, that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not lead us to retreat and live our lives in some protective bunker. Jesus Christ is out in the world on a mission to reach the broken, the lost, the hurting, the poor, the rejected, the marginalized and Jesus Christ is calling you and me to go with him into that world. Jesus is on a mission in the world and our mission as individuals, families, couples, small groups, is to be on mission with Jesus.

John Stetzer, in an interview in Christianity Today in 2014, said this about the mission of Jesus in the world, "Mission is rooted in the identity of God Himself. God is on a mission, and Jesus is the embodiment of that mission."

Think about that. Do you want to know what is at the heart of the mission that God is on in our world? Look at Jesus Christ. He embodies that mission. He lives that mission. He shows the purposes of God and those purposes are about restoration and healing and transformation and hope and new beginnings and freedom, and forgiveness and love.

"Jesus identifies Himself as being sent more than forty times in the gospel of John. Then, near the end of the gospel of John, He says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21)." Friends, God sent his One and Only Son into our shattered world. God emptied himself and entered humanity's broken, fractured, hurting story. He became one of us so that he might lift us to himself. He did not come to condemn but to save. He did not come to be served but to serve. He did not come to our earth in anger but in love and grace and mercy. And you know what, we are called to follow Christ into our world with that same heart of love and mercy.

OK. Let's get ready to have our worlds rocked by what Stetzer says next. "The church is sent on mission by Jesus. It's not that the church has a mission, but rather that the mission (of Jesus Christ) has a church." Did you catch that?

"It's not that the church has a

mission, but rather that the mission (of Jesus Christ) has a church." It's not that our church has a missions department, though it does. I'm the pastor working with local and international impact ministries. We do have a missions department but did you hear what Ed Stetzer said? It's not that First Prez has a mission but rather that the mission of Christ has a church and one of those churches is the First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu. Jesus is on a mission and we are part of the way Jesus wants to live out that mission in the world.

Mission is not just part of what we do as a church. The mission of Jesus is EVERYTHING we are to be and to do as his church. His mission is who we are to be.

"We join Jesus on His mission. To be missional means that a church realizes it exists to join Jesus in God's mission in the power of the Spirit." That's Ed Stetzer in a 2014 interview with Christianity Today.

C.S. Lewis agrees when he writes, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men (and women) into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they (that is, churches) are not doing that, then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose (than to turn people like you in me into little Christs)."

**C**ity Impact has a conference coming up in San Francisco at the end of July that they're calling "Reimagine Church". City Impact understands and is living out a lot of what I just said and they are helping other churches rethink what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ. What they're doing is not really something new. It's a capturing of what the church was always meant to be in every generation from the moment Jesus first poured out his Spirit on his first followers to this very moment on the Island of Oahu in 2015.

I want to show you a brief video that City Impact is currently using to tell people about this upcoming conference. Here's one young man who has begun to understand what it means to be the church. Let's listen to Oscar Ko, a Boeing Engineer who volunteers with City Impact in the Tenderloin as he explains what happened to him when he came to City Impact's conference and joined Jesus in his mission in the world. (City Impact video was shown.)

Unplanned by us, three teams from three different churches in Hawaii, two from Oahu and one from Kauai, came together in San Francisco to serve with City Impact for a week. We were Team Hawaii and it was a privilege and a joy to serve with these sisters and brothers in Christ. We worked in nearly all of the ministries of City Impact during the week. One of the ministries that had the biggest impact on me personally was their Adopt-A-Building program. After assembling hot, nutritious meals we carried boxes of them to one of the residential hotels where many of the poor live, many of them alone.

I was serving with young woman by the name of Catey. We knocked on one door and when the door open we were greeted by a woman, probably in her 70s, who was living by herself in a 20' by 20' room.

We talked with her for at least 15 minutes as she told us the story of the sexual abuse she suffered when she was a child. She told the story of other pain-filled encounters with other people in her life that left her pursuing a strategy of isolation. Her only friend she said was her television. She told us that when she's tried to make conversation with people on the bus they just look at her like she's some weirdo so she's just given up on people. So, she lives alone with her only friend, the TV.

And yet she talked with us for 15 minutes. We told her about City Impact and that there were people there who could care for her needs and would love to be her friend. She told us that she knew Jesus and in spite of all that had happened to her in her life, she still trusted him and his love for her. Because she knew Christ, because City Impact is present in her neighborhood, I had hope for her, in this life. That she would find a place of safety and community and love right now, today, through the ministries of City Impact.

My hope for her was that she would experience today that as Steve Peich mentioned in his sermon last week, that eternity is in session today and that there is hope for her today. And it gave me great hope knowing that one day God would fully shower her with his love in a place where there would be no more suffering, no more pain, no more injustice and abuse.

Catey and I prayed for her and she gave us big hugs as we said goodbye and she closed and locked her door.

Our experience in the Tenderloin has everything to do with today's text from Ephesians chapter 3. In fact, the entire message of Ephesians speaks a word of hope to the residents of the Tenderloin and it can speak a word of hope and a word of challenge to you and me.

The main goal that we have for one another in this church is that each of

us would become little Christs in our world. At the center of the process of forming Christ in one another is prayer. Paul knew that so he starts praying in his letter to the Ephesians.

Today we're continuing our study of the apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus. When the New Testament was written in the first century A.D., Ephesus was a major port at the western end of the Silk and Spice Road that ran from there to Arabia and Asia. Ephesus was a big, cosmopolitan city when Paul wrote this letter. Ephesus was on a major trade route, just like San Francisco and Honolulu are.

You can still walk through the ruins of Ephesus. The harbor is now filled with silt. When you're there on the west coast of modern-day Turkey, it is easy to imagine the glory of this city that once exerted its influence on the Roman world.

I preached the first sermon in this series on the book of Ephesians. I called that sermon, The God Who Kneels. We talked about this painting by Ford Maddox Brown of Jesus washing Peter's feet. Whoever heard of a God who stoops down to wash the dirty feet of one of his followers? And yet, here Jesus is, washing Peter's big, dirty, stinky feet.

What kind of God is this? It simply doesn't make sense to many of us that the one who created atomic particles and fashioned the universe would be willing to get on his knees and clean the crusty old feet of a fisherman.

Look at Peter's face. He's baffled, maybe a little embarrassed that his leader is doing this thing that not even slaves were required to do. And yet, that is who our God is.

Take a look at the guy on the left. He's already taking off his slippers. He may not know what in the world is going on but he wants in.

I said it a few weeks ago; some of you are ready to have Christ wash your feet because you know that ONLY, ONLY, ONLY Jesus Christ can cleanse and heal and restore your heart, your mind, your emotions, your relationships. ONLY, ONLY, ONLY Jesus Christ can make you worthy to be in a relationship with God.

Listen to what Paul writes as he begins to pray in verse 14 of chapter 3. "14 For this reason I bow MY knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." Paul is now on his knees before the one who got down on his knees to forgive him. People in Paul's day usually prayed standing up. But Paul is on his knees and probably on his face before the One who made a new life possible for him.

The only appropriate response to the one who has knelt before us is to kneel before him. That is the appropriate posture towards One who has served us so completely as Jesus Christ has. God has given us the gift of life itself. Every gift, every ability, every skill, every single capacity that we have is a gift from God. Every dollar in our bank accounts is a gift from God. He is the one who made it possible for us to work and earn an income. Where we were born, the opportunities of this nation, the academic freedom on our university campuses, all of it was given to us as a gift.

AND if that were not enough, Jesus Christ ALONE has made us worthy to be in the presence of a holy, perfect God. What I'm about to say is so incredibly important I can't understate its significance. The gospel of Jesus Christ is first bad news before it is good news. Here's the bad news: we can't make ourselves right with God. God himself must make you and me right with God. We've got an enormous problem with sin that we can't solve.

But even the bad news of the gospel is the best news anyone will ever

hear. Apart from Christ, you and I have a problem that we can't fix. But God has a fix and he's got a fixer and that fixer is his son, Jesus Christ. If you and I can accept that bad news, we'll be on the road to freedom. We'll no longer be trying to earn our relationship with God. We'll no longer need to do that because Jesus Christ has makes us worthy when we entrust our lives to him.

Do you understand how revolutionary that is? Do you understand how that can transform your relationships? If you know that you and your spouse are equally in need of God's grace do you understand how, in a very helpful way, it undermines any sense of superiority or inferiority? This is the genius of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The bad news of the gospel is a doorway to freedom. The gospel of Jesus Christ is first bad news before it is good news. We've got a problem we can't do anything about. Only Jesus Christ can fix it. And that is exactly what he has done for the world on his cross.

For all that God has done for us in creating us, gifting us with all that we have and for saving us, the only appropriate response is to kneel before God and say thank you. Prayer is the appropriate response to what God has done and is doing for us.

Paul wants his friends in Ephesus to understand what has been done for them. And I want you and me to grow in our understanding of what has been and is being done for us in Christ. One of the main ways we grow in our capacity to understand, and grasp, and hold onto what God has done in Christ is to pray. So, Paul prays.

Verse 16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth

and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

God wants you and me to know and trust his love for us. He wants us to experience the power of his Holy Spirit so that we might settle down into his strong arms of love and be at peace.

But you know what? I've asked you that a number of times in this sermon. You know what? There's more. There's much more. One of the weaknesses of the English language is that we've lost the second person plural from American English. Except in some parts of our country we don't have a word for you-all. So when you read the Bible in English we think that every time we read the word "you" we think the writer is talking about me and only me or primarily me. That is simply not what is happening in the original language.

I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of occurrences of the word "you" in the New Testament, the word is not "you" meaning "you an individual." It means "you-all". So while Paul wants every single individual person to whom he is writing to know that God loves them, he's saying something much more than that.

He's praying that the community of Christ-followers will be strengthened with power and might, that the community will be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, that together as sisters and brothers they will know and experience the incredible love of Christ that passes all understanding and that the church in Ephesus and the church in San Francisco and the church right here on Oahu will be filled up with the fullness of God; filled up to the full and even overflowing with God's Spirit.

**T**hat's what Paul is praying about. He wants us to be confident in God's power that is at work in us and among us.

But you know what, that's not all Paul is praying about. He wants us as individuals and as a community to be so filled with the love of Christ that we will share God's love for the world. Jesus has a mission in the world and the mission of Jesus Christ has a church and we are part of that church. He wants us to be confident in God's power that is at work in us and He wants us to be confident in God's power to pull down barriers that divide us, to bring to an end racism, to heal broken people who otherwise end up abusing others, to heal us and our world. God wants us to know his love so that we might show that love to the world.

It may not be in the Tenderloin or Kakaako, though it might be. It may be in your family, in your community group, in your work place that God wants you to join his mission of love and healing in the world. I can guarantee you that he is calling you on mission wherever he has you deployed. I'm absolutely confident of that.

So how can we possibly be these kinds of people? Listen to Paul's benediction at the end of his prayer.

Verse 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Courageous, generous living is possible because it's God's power that is at work within us. It's his power that is able to accomplish so much more than we could ever ask or imagine.

The church doesn't have a mission. Jesus has a mission and the

mission of Jesus has a church. And as we go and join Jesus in his mission in the world we will discover the same thing a young Boeing engineer discovered on the streets of San Francisco. Jesus will be right there beside us. Let's pray.