



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"You Are Amazing!" - Hope Restored Series

Christopher Pan

Good morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

We're continuing today in our sermon series called, "Hope Restored". We are walking through the Gospel of Mark, passage by passage, verse by verse, looking at the life and ministry of Jesus, and how God restores hope to a world in need.

We have reached Chapter 6 in the book of Mark, when Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth. Our sermon title today is, "You Are Amazing!" Exclamation Point! We're going to explore the idea: "You Are Amazing!"

As we go through our passage and our sermon today, ask yourself these two questions: What is God saying to me? What does He want me to do about it? What is God saying to me? What does he want me to do about it?

Will you please stand if you are able and join me as we all, together, read our Bible passage for today?

Mark 1:1-6: *1 Jesus left there and went to His hometown, accompanied by His disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were amazed.*

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given Him? What are these remarkable miracles He is performing? 3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.

4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.

This is the Word of the Lord!
Thanks be to God!

Please be seated and join me in prayer. Lord Jesus, may we see You clearly and hear You clearly now. We invite Your Holy Spirit to transform us. Jesus, You are amazing. May we draw close to You now. In Your powerful name we pray. And all God's people say, Amen.

Jesus walks into His hometown synagogue in Nazareth with His disciples, and teaches. And the people of Nazareth reject Him and take offense at Him. But that happens later in the passage.

What is their first reaction? They are amazed by Jesus.

Mark 6:2: *"Many who heard him were AMAZED."*

Our sermon title today is, "You Are Amazing!" And we're going to look at that same phrase in three parts.

Part 1: We say to Jesus, "You Are Amazing!"

That's the nature of worship. We say to God, "You Are Amazing! You are beautiful, compassionate, worthy of our praise. God, You restore hope to the hopeless. You Are Amazing!"

Can we slow down this morning, and be amazed by God? Because we're going passage by passage through the gospel of Mark, we've seen for the last month, in the four passages right before this, that Jesus is amazing.

At the end of Chapter 4, Jesus is out on the lake with His disciples, and a storm comes up. The disciples think they are going to die, but Jesus calms the storm, and His disciples ask in amazement, *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"* (Mark 4:41)

They are amazed!

Then in Chapter 5, Jesus casts out a legion of demons out of a man, into a herd of pigs, and the man is restored to his right mind.

At the end of that account, it says, *“²⁰ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were AMAZED.”* (Mark 5:20)

Then a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years is healed, just by touching Jesus’ coat. That’s amazing! And THAT healing happened as Jesus was walking to Jairus’ house, to restore Jairus’ sick and dead daughter to life!

As we heard last week: *“And immediately Jairus’ daughter got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with AMAZEMENT.”* (Mark 5:42)

That brings us to our passage today where Jesus teaches in the town of Nazareth and, “Many who heard him were AMAZED.”

Clearly, the people of Nazareth end up rejecting Jesus. But I want us to slow down, and recognize, that the people in that synagogue in Nazareth, were initially amazed by Jesus. They were amazed by Jesus, just like the disciples in the storm, and the people of the Decapolis, and the bleeding woman, and Jairus’ family, and us.

I want us to slow down, and see Jesus, say to Jesus, “You Are Amazing!” Because Jesus is amazing, but sometimes our busyness or familiarity with Him gets in the way and we forget that.

When I was a senior in high school, I had this great after-school job. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I tutored this freshman, who was a recent immigrant from Korea. His

dad hired me to tutor him in English. You know, I grew up in Connecticut, so I think the dad just wanted his son to spend some time with the other Asian kid in the state. I’m kidding. I have two sisters, so there were four of us.

So, really, I was paid to just hang out with this kid and make sure his English got better. So, I had this great idea that we’d listen to Bob Dylan songs, because I figured, if this kid could understand Bob Dylan mumbling his way through a song, this kid could understand English. *“Once upon a time you dressed so fine. You threw the folks a dime in your prime, didn’t you?”* What? What is he saying?

But you know, I also decided that I’d have the kid read the Bible. ‘Cause you know, it’s written in English. So on a Thursday, I gave him a Bible and assigned him to read the first Chapter of the Gospel of Mark. This kid had never been to church. He’d never seen a Bible.

The next Tuesday, we talked, we listened to some more Bob Dylan, and then I asked, “Did you read the Bible, that chapter in the book of Mark?” And he said, “No. I didn’t read the chapter....I read the whole book of Mark, and then started reading the next one, the book of Luke.” And so I asked, “So, what do you think?”

And he said, “This Jesus...is powerful.”

This Jesus is powerful. And I was blown away, because this Jesus IS powerful. And at that time, I’d been in church for 17 years. And now I’ve been in even longer, and I needed a reminder then, and I need a reminder now, that this Jesus IS powerful. This Jesus is Amazing. People who are new

to church, new to the Bible, encounter Jesus and say, “This Jesus is powerful, this Jesus is amazing.” But sometimes we, who may be familiar with these stories, are like the people in Nazareth who have known Jesus a long time, and we may have been initially amazed, but now we just shrug and say, “Eh.”

Can we renew our sense of wonder today? Can we say to God, to Jesus today, “You are Amazing! Exclamation Point!” You are worthy of our praise and worship.

What’s amazing about today’s passage is that almost exactly the same thing happened in Chapter 1, in a different town. Remember way back in Chapter 1 of the gospel of Mark? It is the very beginning of Jesus ministry: He gets baptized; He calls His disciples; and then He walks into a synagogue in Capernaum.

Mark 1:21-22 ²¹ *They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.* ²² *The people were AMAZED at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”*

In Chapter 1, Jesus, on the Sabbath, walks into the synagogue in Capernaum. He teaches, and people are amazed.

In Chapter 6, Jesus, on the Sabbath, walks into the synagogue in Nazareth. He teaches, and people are amazed.

Same set-up, but very different responses.

Do you remember how the people of Capernaum reacted to Jesus?

Mark 1:32-34: **32** *That evening after sunset the people [of Capernaum] brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33 The WHOLE TOWN gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases and drove out many demons.*

In Capernaum, the WHOLE TOWN bring their sick and demon-possessed to Jesus and He heals them late into the night.

In Nazareth, the people say, "This guy!?" "Isn't this the carpenter, Mary's Son?!" They TAKE OFFENSE at Him, and "[Jesus] could not do ANY miracles [in Nazareth], except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them."

You know, so clearly the author Mark has a different definition of "could not do ANY miracles" than we do. But I love Mark's faith here—because Mark knows how amazing Jesus is, and Mark knows what Jesus could have done in Nazareth. He did it in Capernaum! So comparatively, a few people getting healed doesn't compare to what Jesus could have done.

And so for us, individually, are we like Nazareth? Do we see Jesus and does our familiarity or busyness lead us to say, "Who's this guy?" Or can we be like Capernaum? Can we be amazed by Jesus and take to Him all that we have, all our problems, believing that He'll work miracles in our life.

What about as a church? Are we as a church, like Nazareth, where Jesus could not do ANY miracles? Or can we be like Capernaum, where we see how amazing Jesus is, and believe in what Jesus can truly do. Can we be an environment of faith, so that our entire town, our entire island, comes to Jesus, to be healed and delivered late into the night?

Can we take a moment, to pause, and silently pray, that we be an environment of faith. Take a moment now, to silently pray, and say to Jesus, "You are Amazing!" and pray for our families, and workplaces, and neighborhoods and island, to come to Jesus.

God, may it be so!

Part 1: We say to Jesus, "You Are Amazing!"

Part 2: We say to Each Other: "You Are Amazing!"

Because the church, the community of faith, is called to encourage each other. Jesus walks into the synagogue in Nazareth, and the people there belittle Him and take offense at Him.

Have you ever seen a sulky child? Arms crossed, frowny face.



I picture the people of Nazareth making this face at Jesus as He teaches in their synagogue. First, they are amazed, then they make the sulky face. They insult Him, put Him down. I'm not entirely sure why they react this way. Maybe they're jealous of Jesus? Maybe it's just "familiarity breeds contempt"?

But their reaction reminds me of myself, and how I react sometimes to situations or people in my life, and it reminds me of the story of the prodigal son. The prodigal son is a parable Jesus tells in the gospel of Luke. A younger son goes away and squanders his inheritance, but when he comes home, his father runs out to greet him, welcomes him home, and

throws him a big party. That's the story of the prodigal son. But the parable continues, with the older brother. The older brother, the Bible says, hears that his younger brother is home, he sees the big party, and the older brother reaction is?

Luke 15:28: *"Then he became angry and refused to go in."*

Sulky face. "Why does he get a party? I'm not going to his party!" The older brother, the people of Nazareth, sometimes us: we behave this way, react this way. And this behavior is the opposite of how the church is called to behave. The church is called to encourage and celebrate each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:11: *ENCOURAGE one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

Hebrews 10:24-25: *²⁴ Let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but ENCOURAGING one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 3:13-14: *¹³ ENCOURAGE one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," ¹⁴ so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

Proverbs 12:25: *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.*

Can I tell you a story that I love, which highlights these two themes we explored so far: Appreciating God, and saying to God, "You are Amazing!" and encouraging each other, saying to each other, "You Are Amazing!"

I know that there are many people going through difficult times in our congregation today. Illness, grief, hard life situations.

There is a woman in our congregation who shared her story with me, and I have her permission to share it with you. But first, some background. In 1983, 35 years ago, there was a comedian, who had a bit about making breakfast for his kids. Long story short, he ends up giving them chocolate cake for breakfast. And his kids are delighted, and start singing, "Dad is great! Gives us chocolate cake!"

That's the background. Back to present day.

This woman was going through a particularly difficult time in her life. And in the midst of this heart-breaking difficult time, totally randomly, out of the blue, that 35-year-old song kept coming through her brain: "Dad is great! Gives us chocolate cake!" But as it came through her brain, it was "God is great! Gives us chocolate cake!"

And for two weeks, that song just kept coming back as she went through this difficult time. "God is great! Gives us chocolate cake!" And it made no sense to her, because the ridiculousness of the song made the contrast with the sadness, and hopelessness, and despair in her life feel all the more stark. And that sadness was deepening as the calendar got closer to Valentine's Day. Because this woman realized, that for the first time in decades, she would be on her own for Valentine's Day. And she felt profoundly alone and unloved. But she didn't share that sadness, or those feelings with anyone.

The evening of February 13, there is a knock on her door at

home. And when she opens it, there's another woman from our church standing there. And this second woman says: "You know, we don't really know each other that well, but I've had the profound, unshakeable sense today, that I was supposed to make you a cake. So, I spent all day making this cake, and it took much longer than expected. And everything kept going wrong, so I kept trying to quit, but I really felt like I had to make you this cake. So, happy Valentine's Day! Here's a Valentine's Day card, and here's a chocolate cake."

Here's a picture of the card and the chocolate cake:



God is great. Gives us chocolate cake. The second woman knew nothing about that song or the first woman's struggles. But our God is Amazing. Our God is a Father to the broken-hearted. And He loves us, and uses us to encourage each other.

Can we say to God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You are Amazing. And can we encourage each other, say to our friends, and family and neighbor, "You Are Amazing!"

The second woman, who made the cake, said to me, "It was such a small thing to do." It was such a small thing. But a kind word cheers the heart. And a kind word might be exactly what someone needs to hear to cheer their heart today. It may be a small

thing to you, but huge to the person you are encouraging.

Real practical application: today and every day this week, can you be an encouragement to someone? Can you say a kind word (maybe to the staff in Ko'olau Kitchen), make a call to an old friend, send a card or email. A kind word cheers the heart.

Let's take a moment, to pause and pray. Let God speak to you about someone you can encourage now. Think of that person, lift that person to God in prayer, and resolve to say a kind word to them this week.

God, may it be so.

Part 1: Say to Jesus, "You are Amazing!"

Part 2: Say to Each Other: "You are Amazing!"

Now, Part 3. Jesus walks into the synagogue. The people take offense at Him. They insult Him and diminish Him. They say, "This guy! Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Isn't this the carpenter? There may be a certain snobbery in that phrase, looking down at someone who works with his hands. Since there is no mention of Joseph, there may be an insult, referring to the illegitimate birth of Jesus, or it may signal that Joseph has already died. In any case, the people of Nazareth are belittling Jesus, diminishing Him.

You know, I imagine that there are some of us here today, that know what it feels like to be spoken of, or spoken to, in this way. Some of us have had the same experience as Jesus. People saying, "Who do you think you are? Isn't this the carpenter?"

Being overlooked, or slighted because of your gender, or your age, or what you look like, or where you go to school, or what kind of work you do or don't do. "Isn't this the carpenter?"

I've had people very close to me, say some variation of this: "Who are you? You're no one." "Isn't this the carpenter?"

And you know what Jesus does, when the people say, "Isn't this the carpenter?" He says, "You know what, you're right. I am just the carpenter. What was I thinking?!" And Jesus takes His things, says goodbye to His disciples, and goes home to make cabinets. Really nice cabinets.

Of course, Jesus doesn't do that. Because Jesus knows who He is and He knows His mission and purpose. And so the slights from the people around Him do not deter Him. The negative voices around Him don't stop him. He remembers from Chapter 1, at His baptism, the voice of God the father coming from heaven, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" (Mark 1:11)

Jesus knows who He is and knows the purpose that God the Father has for Him. Next week, we'll hear about the next passage in Mark: Jesus commissions and sends His disciples out to preach the good news in the surrounding towns. Jesus knows who He is and knows the purpose that God the Father has for Him.

So hear this, and believe the good news of the gospel:

Part 3: God says to US: "You are Amazing!"

God says to you right now: "You are Amazing!"

A lot of times, I think God is vaguely disappointed with me. Or at best, God tolerates me. That Jesus kind of reluctantly loves me, but doesn't really like me.

But that's not what the Bible says. That's me believing the people who say, "Isn't this the carpenter?" instead of believing what God says.

What does God say about what He thinks about you and me?

We are the apple of God's eye. Psalm 17:8: *Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.*

We are chosen and we are God's treasured possession. Deuteronomy 7:6 says to the people of Israel, and to us: *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be His people, His treasured possession.*

We are God's handiwork: Ephesians 2:10: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

We are created a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory. Psalm 8:4-5: *4 What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? 5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.*

I could go on and on with these verses. So, I will! Because God doesn't just tolerate us. God loves us, and likes us. God says to us, "You are Amazing!"

God rejoices in us. God takes pleasure in us.

Psalm 149:4: *The Lord takes pleasure in his people; He adorns the humble with salvation.*

Psalm 147:10-11: **10** *His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; 11 but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

God takes pleasure in us. God delights in us. God rejoices over you.

Isaiah 62:3-5: **3** *You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

God delights in you. God rejoices over you. God says to you, "You Are Amazing!" Exclamation point!

We could stop here, but I want to come back to our passage today because we have to be true to the passage. In the last verse of our passage today, Jesus is amazed at the lack faith of the people in Nazareth. Mark 6:6: *He was amazed at their lack of faith.*

And you know, that's kind of a bummer way to end the sermon. Jesus says, "You are amazing" – for your lack of faith. And so, we might walk out of here, trying harder to have faith, trying to please Jesus; trying to be like Capernaum and not Nazareth.

But the reason I want to end here, is because the end of our passage today is not the end of the story. The gospel of Mark doesn't end with Jesus being amazed at their lack of faith.

And the gospel of Mark doesn't end with Jesus dying on the cross, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, except for those jerks in Nazareth, who were mean to Me and rejected Me. I was amazed by their lack of faith, so don't forgive them. They're on their own."

That's not the gospel. The gospel, the good news is: Jesus is rejected at Nazareth. And He is amazed by their lack of faith. And Jesus dies for them anyway.

And Jesus dies for us, and our lack of faith, too. Because sometimes we're Capernaum, and sometimes we're Nazareth. And Jesus still loves us and still dies for us.

God doesn't rejoice over us because of our goodness or because we are amazing. God rejoices over us because of His goodness, because He is amazing.

Here's the good news: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. (1 John 3:16)

So we come full circle, back to Part 1. God is Amazing. And we worship Him, and say to Him, "You Are Amazing!"

The prophet Zephaniah writes: *The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.* (Zephaniah 3:17)

That is amazing grace. That is an Amazing God.

Let's pray: God, You are amazing. We worship You and declare that You are worthy of our praise. We thank You that You are a mighty one who will save. You rejoice over us with gladness. You quiet us by Your love. You exult over us with loud singing. You are amazing. We pray in Jesus' name, and all God's people say, Amen!

Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com