



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### June 30, 2013

#### "Eh, Where You Stay" (God's Questions for Us Series)

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**M**ost of us may think that Christian prayer life is all about asking God questions—questions to know something or questions to get something from Him. Lord, will You do this or that for me? Why is this happening to me, Lord? Can You bless me with better health? Can You please take away my pain? Can I have the job I've been praying for? Can You please give me wisdom for this decision I need to make?

And it may never have occurred to us that God actually has questions to ask of us too.

All throughout the Bible, God asked profound questions, and though these questions were directed to people in the Bible thousands of years ago, they are questions that God may be asking us today.

For the next few months starting today, we will be doing a sermon series called God's Questions for You, which is a study on some of God's questions that can be found in the Bible. Questions like: "Where were you when I created the heavens," which was what God asked Job who, at one time, doubted God's goodness. Or the question Jesus asked an adulterous woman after he saved her from being stoned: "Where are your accusers now?" Or the question Jesus asked of a rich man: "Why do you call Me good?" Or the question Jesus asked of a sick man: "Do you really want to get well?"

These are profound questions that can make us reach deep into our souls as we search for the answers. And in dealing with these questions, we will find hope, healing, and wisdom.

So over the next three months, we will look at twelve questions from God to us. Not our questions for God, but God's questions for us. The tables will be turned. Are you ready? Here we go.

Today we start with this stunning question from Genesis chapter 3: Where are you? Or as we say in the pidgin vernacular here in Hawaii, "Eh, where you stay," which is a local way of asking the more formal question – Brother where art thou?

Here's the context. I'll read it for us in Genesis chapter 3 verse 1. It's God looking for Adam in the Garden of Eden:

Gen. 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Gen. 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;

Gen. 3:3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

Gen. 3:4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;

Gen. 3:5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Gen. 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Gen. 3:7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Gen. 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Gen. 3:9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

Gen. 3:10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Gen. 3:11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

**G**en. 3:Gen. 3:12 The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

Gen. 3:Gen. 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

May God bless the reading of His word and give us understanding.

We look back to verse 9 where God asked Adam the question “Where are you?”

Fascinating question. Quite existential. Quite profound and philosophical. Where are you, man, physically? Where are you in your head and in your heart in your relationship to God?

Here’s the setting to God’s question: God had created a beautiful world with clean air, clean water, blue skies during the day, and clear skies with twinkling stars at night and no city lights to blur them.

Then He created Adam and Eve, whom He put in a garden—called “Garden of Eden—somewhere on our unadulterated earth. The garden had lots of beautiful vegetation, trees bearing truly delectable, delicious, and organic fruits and vegetables that had not been tainted with insecticides. The Garden of Eden was Whole Foods Market to the max!

So God laid out this buffet for Adam and Eve and said, “You can eat of any fruit of the garden, except the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden.” Amazing! They could eat from any tree, any fruit of the millions and millions of trees and vines available except from one. But nooooo. Adam and Eve decided that they HAD TO eat of that one tree that was forbidden because they wanted more than what they had. Adam and Eve ate the

forbidden fruit. They knew immediately that they had done wrong by disobeying God and so they hid. So when God came down to visit them one day, He couldn’t find them.

God threw this question to Adam and Eve that has reverberated over the centuries all the way to us today: “Where are you? Where are you, humans, who are hiding from Me, your God?”

Adam came out from where he was and said, “We were hiding because we were naked, and so to cover ourselves, we used fig leaves that we’ve sewn together.”

God asked them, “Who told you that you were naked?” And Adam said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree and I ate.” (Genesis 3:12)

That’s a double whammy of a response from Adam because he blamed the woman and then he blamed God by saying the woman You gave me! Double excuse: blame Eve, then blame God. Talk about hiding what WE need to work in our life!

Don’t we do that when we don’t want to take responsibility for what we need to deal with in our lives? We blame God or we blame others, thereby, releasing ourselves of the responsibility to deal with that issue. We dodge the issue and become lazy to improve ourselves.

When God hears Adam’s answer to the question, God cuts to the quick and turns to the woman: Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” (Gen. 3:13)

So, great. Now the woman is blaming the serpent, which, in the narrative, is seen as Satan himself. So we blame others, we blame God, and

then we blame Satan. It’s like the old comedian Flip Wilson who would always say. “The devil made me do it! Wasn’t me!”

So now the pristine Garden of Eden has been corrupted by Adam and Eve’s blame game and polluted by the sins of disobedience and deception. And since that day, Satan, not God, has ruled the earth. The Bible says humankind for centuries has chosen to follow Satan over God; Satan, who is also known as the ruler of the power of the air, as noted in the book of Ephesians in the New Testament:

Eph. 2:1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins

Eph. 2:2 in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.

We have evil on one side with Satan, the prince of the air now at work, and God on the other side.

God’s question is profound. Where are you? Whose side are you working for? Where are you today with God? Are you hiding from Him? Eh, brah, sistah, where you stay? Where are you?

Let’s study God’s question by answering other questions starting with this one:

**1) Who are we in terms of ourselves?** Who are we really deep down inside without our masks?

One day, a middle-aged woman had a heart attack. An ambulance rushed her to the emergency room, and on the operating table she had a near-death experience. During that time, she saw God and got to ask Him if this was it. God said, “No, you have another 40 years, two months and ten days to live.”

**T**he woman then miraculously woke up, fully recovered, and right then and there decided to stay in the hospital. Why? She figured that since she knew she had so much life remaining, she might as well make the most of it. She had the doctors give her a face-lift, a tummy tuck, breast augmentation – the whole works. She sent for someone to color her hair and paint her nails.

Finally, she was discharged. But, lo and behold, while crossing the street outside the hospital, a speeding car struck her and killed her.

Now back in God's presence and fuming with anger, the woman told God, "I thought you said I had another 40+ years!"

God replied, "Sorry, dear, I didn't recognize you."

Who are we really on the inside? Is that who people see? Or are we creating and employing masks or—in Adam and Eve's case, fig leaves—to hide our real selves?

Are we using anything to anesthetize our pain—alcohol, drugs, porn, busyness—to hide our from others rather than dealing with the issues head on and asking for God's help and intervention?

When will we come to the point where we say to ourselves – I have to deal with this cover-up and get more healthy? I need to exercise. I need to eat better. I need to stop watching porn. I need to stop drinking so much. I need to stop smoking, or buying things to look cool to hide my insecurity when with others or by myself. I need to come to a healing service and be humble enough to ask for God's intervention and healing.

One hundred forty-one people came to the Healing Service last

Sunday. Many got miraculously healed: people with persistent coughs, people with long-term back pain, one from scoliosis and osteoporosis pain, some with pain in their limbs, they were all immediately healed.

When we have pain, eh where you stay? Where are you? Close to God or do you go farther from Him? We need to take off the masks and admit we need better health. And the only way we can do this is through one word: humility.

Humility says: I fully admit that I am not smart enough or strong enough to have all the answers in all areas of my life – not in how to make or save money in a healthy way, how to manage people, how to manage my family, how to have a great sex life, how to be physically healthy. I need help.

If we could only be humble enough to admit, that we don't know everything, then, I think, we can stop hiding from the Lord who is asking, "Where are you?"

God wants to help us. God has the answers. God has the power of the Holy Spirit to help us overcome, but if we are on the run or hiding behind our masks, then we cannot get better. It is who are we when no one is looking that we need to deal with. That is the person God really loves. That is the person God really accepts and forgives, so we need not run.

We should give God full access to the stage and behind the stage of our lives. He created us, so let us trust Him to lead us. He knows our faults, so let Him into those areas to help.

Jesus Christ is real. We can trust Him. Only He can help us go back to some of our old wounds and deal with them. Through prayer, through counseling, through talks with trusted

friends, we can get down to who we really are—beneath what is visible to others and down to the real issues we need to deal with.

You all know that I love Alcoholics Anonymous—also known as AA—because I believe its 12-step program is helpful to all people—even to non-alcoholics—in dealing with any kind of addiction; whether it's an addiction to drugs, porn, money, success, food, work, or even an addiction to pleasing people. The steps apply to all of us, if we really want to know where we are and how to deal with the real self.

The first seven steps of AA's 12-step program is steeped in the belief that we must, must stop hiding, come to God, and remove our mask.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (or our addiction) – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

It is that searching and fearless moral self-inventory that makes these AA members not hide from their problem with addiction and courageously face it instead and find out how to deal with it.

**G**oing back to God's question of "Where are you," we can study it by answering another question:

## **2) Where are we in terms of others?**

Is life really all about us or is it about others too?

I am amazed that Bill Gates as recently reported on the TV show 60 Minutes that he left Microsoft 5 years ago so he can work full-time to give away his money. He is truly devoting his life to the eradication of polio in the world by the year 2018, tuberculosis by 2019, and malaria in 15 to 20 years.

Can you imagine someone saying, "I am going to use my money to remove three disease that have plagued humankind"? That's for more than a century for polio and malaria and 9,000 years for tuberculosis. Bill Gates wants to completely eradicate these diseases through vaccines, the distribution of mosquito nets, and technology for the development of practical things, like easily produced toilets for poverty and rural areas that don't have a lot of water. He wants to help what he calls the bottom two billion, or the bottom one-third of the world of the population that is in extreme poverty.

We know Bill Gates as one of the richest men in the world. Now, we may say, "Oh, but if we were as rich as he, we would all be generous." And my response to that is —MAYBE. So often when we have a lot, the Adam and Eve sin in us says, "We want a lot more!" We don't know when enough is enough. We struggle with contentment. It is hard to be generous because it means sacrifice. It is hard to tithe because it means sacrifice. It's hard for the rich not to be devoted to just be richer.

Peter Marshall one of the most famous Presbyterian pastors who served as the US Senate Chaplain said,

"The measure of life is not in its duration, but in its donation."

Life is a lot like tennis: Those who don't serve well end up losing. Serving others, by the way, is actually partly self-serving, and that's not bad because you emotionally receive a lot in the process of helping others.

Most billionaires, most rich people are not devoting their lives to rid the world of poverty or disease like Bill Gates. Steve Jobs didn't. The Saudi princes as a whole didn't either. Yahoo!, which NETTED, not GROSSED, but NETTED ONE BILLION DOLLARS a few years ago closed down their charitable Office of Corporate Social Responsibility because they wanted to keep more of their profits and not donate as much to help others. If we can't be generous after one billion in profits, when can we be charitable?

But before we get too prideful and say, "Yeah, what's wrong with people like that," let's take a look at our own affluence. The fact is most of us in this room are in the top 5% of the world in terms of lifestyle and income – compared to the rest of the world. The top 5% of the entire world! Will we share what we own and have to help others? Again, are we Jesus fans in the stands or Jesus followers who play on the field for Him?

The deal is we can be a lot more generous and kinder than we have to be. Yes, we can be a lot more generous than we have to be. Generosity is more than just an obligation.

So far we've asked ourselves 2 questions to study God's question of "Where are you." We've asked (1) Where are we in terms of ourselves, (2) where are we in terms of others, and now we ask ourselves a third question:

## **3) Where are we in terms of God?**

The critical essence of the gospel is that Jesus died for you and for me. Think on this: if one of your friends gave his or her life for you, wouldn't you try to honor him or her because of the second chance in life we've been given?

We wouldn't coast through life being ungrateful, or live it without a purpose. Instead, every cell of our body should pulsate with thankfulness and a desire to make that person who died for us proud.

So we need to slow down, take a walk around Kapiolani Park or at Lanikai beach, and think about what Jesus Christ has done for us. Because if we really get that into our heads, it would refocus our lives in ALL we do in our homes, our work places, and in our city.

This leads to the final question that we need to ask ourselves related to God's question of "Where are you":

## **4) Where are you in terms of where you live?**

Meaning, where are we in terms of our country, our nation? We are celebrating this year the 237<sup>th</sup> year of independence of our nation. We are in America. What does it mean to be a patriot and to be grateful for our nation?

May we not be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. We are called to build up our cities and communities for the good of society and for the glory of God. Many, many years ago Presbyterians were into building hospitals and schools across the world – anything that would help society in the long run.

But then came a time when American churches thought the Gospel was all about getting people to heaven, and that was the main task. Forget social justice.

**B**ut we are not here to just wait around for heaven. God called us to do something here on earth. He is not going to snap His fingers to instantly make things better without us.

He has chosen us—you and me—to be His tools to be bring good in society. We are His Plan A, and there is no plan B apart from His followers! He wants us to build up our cities and make them be places of health and goodness and even prosperity.

That idea comes from the Bible. Let me read to you from the the Old Testament about a prophet named Jeremiah who had a word from God for his people who were living in a foreign land to make that place thrive. It's the land of their enemy, which makes this even more interesting. It's a spiritual version of bloom where you are planted.

If you have your Bibles turn with me to Jeremiah 29:4

Jer. 29:4 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Jer. 29:5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

Jer. 29:6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

Jer. 29:7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Did you hear that? Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, said the Lord. For in its welfare,

you will find your welfare. In the name of God, get involved in a community and seek its welfare.

What is First Presbyterian Church supposed to be doing? Seeking the welfare of the Windward side, and in the city of Honolulu and in Oahu and beyond as our church gives to the Kauai Food Bank. To be a patriot means to seek the welfare of your country, to not betray it, but to help build it up and defend it. We should seek the good or our country and be grateful for it. And if there is something not working in our country, we should seek to make it better.

Yes, we want God to bless America. And WE NEED Him to bless America, but hear this wake up call. The strategy God chooses to bless America is to use us, His people. He is depending on us to share His love and make this country great. He is counting on us to bring justice and the right family values to society. He is counting on us to help the disadvantaged.

So I say, make people hear you. Make them hear you talk about God's love and hope and justice especially for the oppressed and the weak. Let them hear you of God's love by your deeds and actions.

Let's pray. Lord, we come to you with a deep sense of gratitude for our country but also a deep sense of mission and call that you are expecting US to make the people hear you; to hear your words of love through us; to see your actions of love through us; to hear the good news because of us. May people hear us so that there we would be one nation Under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all. And all of God's people said, Amen!

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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).*