



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 2, 2017

"Space" - How to Pray Sermon Series

Jenny Sung

Good morning, my name is Jenny Sung, and I'm one of the lay pastors here on staff.

We're in our sermon series called, "How To Pray" and "Space" is the title of the sermon this morning. You might even say it refers to the "final frontier" in the expanse of time in our lives!

For those of you who may spend a lot of time with me, you'll know that I have a strange affinity for Star Trek, Star Wars, and many things science fiction and geeky. My husband, who is an instrumentation specialist, recently described to me of his attempts at researching gases that will dry out a breathalyzer bag for forensic analysis. It was so cool. I was "all ears"! (takes off Dr. Spock ears) :-)

Actually, when I refer to "Space", I'm not referring to outer space, or the galaxy—that kind of space. Rather, I'm referring to a different type. I am referring to the space we build into our lives for God—to the room, capacity, area, extent, and scope of the space we make for God.

How often do we make space, to slow down and pray, to slow down to listen for God's voice, to reflect on the way we're becoming more and more like Christ, examining our actions and exemplifying His character? Do

we make space to engage in the hardest of spaces of life with God's wisdom, forgiveness, truth and love? Are we making space for the things that matter most, for the greatest mission of our lives?

Making space is to boldly go where others may find irrelevant, but to believers in Christ, it is the greatest endeavor, not just any mission into the great frontier, but the Great Commission. There is no other worthy cause than to follow the Lord our Maker, and be with Him, our Abba, friend and Savior—and then, to invite and lead others into a relationship with God that brings wholeness, healing, purpose, joy and unconditional love.

It is a relationship that says you are beloved, treasured, of great worth, and that you have a purpose in life that's beyond what you ever imagined. It's a friendship—a life with Christ at the center.

Creating space for God would seem the antithesis, the opposite, contrary of what our culture may dictate. The world is really good at making space for all sorts of things.

I did some research on the use of social media and TV on a daily basis. These stats are based on time from the age of 13-79 years old, a total of 66 years.

It states that the average person will spend nearly two hours a day on social media, which translates to a total of five years and four months spent over a lifetime. Here's a breakdown of that timespan, the average time per day.

Teens now spend up to nine hours a day on social platforms, while 30% of all time spent online is now allocated to social media interaction.

And what about TV? Right now, the average person will spend seven years and eight months watching TV in a lifetime. And you'll see that in comparison to other things we do, like eating, doing laundry and grooming ourselves.

I've been hearing a lot about something called Meetup, which is an online social network that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world. Meetup allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest such as politics, books, games, movies, health, pets, careers or hobbies.

I was wondering how many different meet-ups there were. As of yesterday, there were a total of 288,726 Meetup Groups and 614,764 monthly Meetups.

Out of curiosity, I googled the words “weird” and “meetup” and got this list. The Tacky Places Social Club: 74 brave adventurers | Denver, CO; Strange Electric Phenomena: 82 sparks | Prague, Czech Republic; Socially Awkward Women: 135 members | Morrisville, PA; Brooklyn Twin Peaks Meetup: 36 members | Brooklyn, NY.

And lastly, I *had* to look up the Star Trek Meetup: 82,916 members!

So we don't really have a problem finding things to do in this day and age. The problem is *not* that we don't have enough to do. We can be involved in all sorts of things and be doing a ton of stuff, be surrounded by tons of people, and be very active. In fact, when you ask people how they are, the words you hear are, “Oh, I'm busy, really busy”. I confess I have said these words, too.

It seems like the minute we're out the door, we're busy, task and goal oriented, rushing to accomplish our own agendas. Rev. Steve Macchia, President of Leadership Transformations puts it this way:

“We wake up each day and maximize every moment before us: getting ready as fast as possible, eating a quick breakfast before running out the door, packing every possible moment with meetings, work, chores, children, exercise, driving, shopping, eating, e-mails, phone calls, errands, ministry, just to name a few.

Yes, our lives are stretched to the maximum; our days are full from the time we awaken to the time we drop into bed. And though we're living very full days, we often come to the realization that in fact

we're quite unfulfilled because there's no time to simply be.”

I would add that it's not only that we have no time to be, it's that we have not made the time to be with God. That's the key. That's where we begin to understand the intimacy with Christ, the deep connection of a close relationship.

Here is an illustration. Two of the greatest blessings in my life are my boys, Grant and Mitchell. I want to be so close to them. I love being with them, discussing things with them and hearing their insights, humor and conversation. I love the sound of their voices. Nobody has to persuade me to spend time with them because I enjoy being with them.

There was a time in my life though, when I lost that closeness. I had taken a new job opening up a church and community center, and it was a tremendous project from the ground up: constructing the buildings, choosing staff, and launching brand new departments and programs. I think I was working on average of 70 hours a week, and wasn't home very much.

One day I remember chatting with the kids, and my son says, “... 'cuz mama, you're never here, right? You are not with us.” He wasn't trying to be mean. He said it matter of fact, like an observation. It just about broke my heart, and I made some big decisions that changed that trajectory.

You see, it wasn't enough to talk about the kids, study the best parenting methods, and assume they knew I wanted to be with them. I had to make key deliberate conscious decisions to daily connect with, listen to and be with my kids.

In our relationship with God, we want to be near enough to feel what is going on in His heart. There's a difference between studying or talking about God and being with God. We want to experience His presence every day. As we practice making space to be with God, more and more we experience the joy in being with Him.

In examination of the life of Jesus, we see that He lived a life of making space. There was priority on time spent in communion with His Father.

Matthew 14: 23 – “*And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone...*”

Even amongst the demands and trials, Jesus made space for prayer and solitude.

Mark 1:35 – “*In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*”

Luke 5:16 – “*But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.*”

Creating space for God is the number one discipline of the soul, and the best place to do that is in: 1) Prayer; 2) Quiet reflection; and 3) Time with God.

Sometimes we need to make it a habit, and like any habit, it takes intention and consistency. Sometimes we need some help, a tool that helps us stay on track. I like to think of it as training wheels, or bowling with the guardrails up while I practice.

There's a tool called, “Pray As You Go”, which is an app, or you can do it off your computer also.

Pray as you go is a daily prayer session, designed to go with you wherever you go. It's about 9 to 14 minutes each time.

The aim is to help you to:

- Become more aware of God's presence in your life
- Listen to and reflect on God's Word
- Grow in your relationship with God

Now the first time I used this tool, I did have a hard time with it. It was so slow; there are pauses and gaps with no one talking. It literally gives you space to pray, reflect and journal.

At first, it felt like getting off a moving walkway—you know like when you're at the airport, and you use those moving walkways to get somewhere faster? You jump on those moving walkways and you're zipping along with your suitcase, going fast, and then when you get off, it's like you almost trip because you're so used to going fast.

But as I devoted more time to this practice, I could appreciate the space. I became aware of so much. It's like a new frontier opened where I could hear and experience things I couldn't before.

Now we, as a congregation, have been practicing spiritual practices in our sermon series together, like the Daily Examen, and times of Prayer and being silent. So, today we are going to try this Pray As You Go exercise together.

I've trimmed the time to about five minutes so you get a taste of the exercise. The time usually opens with song and time for prayer. It then goes into the scripture.

Today, we're going to start with the scripture and then you'll have

space to reflect and pray. You may want to grab a pen if you like to journal or write out your thoughts. Or you can just close your eyes.

The exercise starts off with these words: "Whatever activity and noise and distractions are around me, whatever worries and concerns are vying for my attention, I begin this prayer together by finding that center of stillness within me, settling into a moment of peace, asking for peace that only God can give." (the congregation does the exercise).

I hope you found this exercise helpful, and that you can finish the rest of it at home.

There is no wasted time in being silent before God. Time is needed for proper adjustment to Him. It's where our vision can be focused, our hearts aligned with His, our minds clarified. We can quietly wait in His presence.

Jesus practiced this regularly in His lifetime on earth, alone and with His disciples. There was actually community in prayer, sometimes alone and sometimes amongst a group.

Luke 9:18 says, "*Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him.*"

Those who regularly travelled with Jesus saw the regular times of prayer and reflection. In fact, one good way to learn to practice prayer and silence is within the support of community.

Just like when we work out with another person or a group of people, it helps keep us keep on track. Similarly, we can find others to go through spiritual disciplines together, in community.

At the beginning of this year, we had over 200 people go through a life group experience called Rooted. For 11 weeks, Rooted small groups went through scripture, disciplines and practices together. One of them was a prayer experience.

The point of Rooted was not just to go through the program. It was to transform lives into a deeper connection and purpose with God, others, and the communities around us. It was to form communities on mission for God together. Our next Rooted session will start in September, and you'll see online and Sunday signups next month.

Joy Yoshida, our elder for Youth ministry and one of our worship leaders, went through Rooted and shared her insights on the power of prayer. She not only found community with her Rooted group in learning the power of prayer, but also got her students to pray together for one another. That is amazing!

As we engage more and more in the world, we change and impact the communities we live in.

Our involvement in this world should lead to a deepening of our relationship with and dependence on God, and the deepening of this relationship should lead to increasing involvement in the world.

The cross is a sign of total identification with the world, and a radical separation from the world. Jesus was never worldlier than on the cross. In another sense, it is a sign of radical separation from the world. Jesus never stood over against the world more clearly than here.

We live in the tension of both, giving ourselves to full surrender and service, and yet at the same time enjoying the peace and presence of the Lord. This peace and presence comes through intimacy and time spent with Him.

This peace and presence of intimate communion is what gives meaning to the song we sang earlier today, "In The Garden".

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the
roses
And the voice I hear, falling on
my ear
The Son of God discloses
And He walks with me
And He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we
tarry there
None other has ever known*

[Congregation takes part in the Lord's Supper].

And now, please receive this blessing before we depart: May the Lord bless you and keep you, May His face shine upon you and be gracious onto you. May you always know the love of Christ deep in your hearts and be filled with His presence daily. In Christ's name, 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