



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"That's As Green As It Gets" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

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We're continuing our sermon series through the Gospel According to Mark that we've entitled "Hope Restored". Jesus is the ultimate source of my hope but how, exactly, can hope be restored in our lives? Sometimes, maybe frequently, you and I need to do something to actually activate the hope of the gospel and see real change for the better in our lives. That's what I want to talk with you about today.

Throughout our lives we experience lots of what I'm going to call intersections, exit ramps, road closures and detours that will require us to make decisions about what to do, which way to go. How do I go forward? Do I take the detour, pull over and consult my GPS?

Some of these intersections are quite small and mundane but nevertheless important and others seem quite large and monumental. Whether it feels like we're clearing a simple controlled intersection with a four-way stop or navigating the maze that leads to the H1, H201 and H3 freeways it matters how we make our way through all these intersections

no matter whether those intersection points are small and simple or big and complex. The decisions we make at these crossroads can have an impact for good in our lives.

If you've been around this church for the past few years and heard me speak you'll know that I've learned a lot from my training as a private pilot. It seems to me that being a pilot has a lot to do with sizing up the situation in front of you, making a decision, understanding its potential impact on the next couple of decisions and then just going for it. Here's what I mean.

When you're the pilot-in-command, even if the aircraft you're piloting is a four-seat Cessna, to fly out of airport with a control tower, you'll eventually find yourself waiting at an intersection. You taxi your aircraft from the ramp to the hold short lines at the edge of the runway. You've finished your run-up. You've gone through all the items on your checklist and everything is ready to go. You tell the air traffic controller you're ready to go flying. They give you permission to taxi onto the runway. You turn on your lights

so you can be as visible as possible to other pilots. You taxi into position and wait. And finally, the air traffic controller clears you for takeoff.

When they do that, they're expecting you to push the throttle to the firewall and go. Being cleared for takeoff is not permission to sit there and think about it some more. They want you off the runway and in the air. You can always abort a takeoff but once you're cleared to go, they want you to go. That few seconds between being cleared for takeoff and pushing the throttle to the firewall is an extremely interesting moment in the life of a pilot and it is that moment and moments like that one that I want to talk about today. In today's text, there are decision points for the disciples of Jesus and there are decisions to be made by the people of a community Jesus goes to visit. I want to look at what we can learn from them as we consider the intersections, the decision points we find ourselves at today.

Jesus and His disciples had just fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish, Pastor Dan talked about that miracle last week.

Our story continues in and around the Sea of Galilee. I just spent two weeks in the Holy Land with a group of 50 people from our church. Before I read today's text here's a brief video that will introduce you to the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 6:45 *Immediately (Jesus) made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After saying farewell to them, He went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and He was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ When He saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, He came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. ⁴⁹ But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; ⁵⁰ for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*

⁵¹ Then He got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. ⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized Him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. ⁵⁶ And wherever He went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the

marketplaces, and begged Him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

I'll never forget the time a good friend of mine, who was an Air Force Pilot and owned an open cockpit biplane, taught me how to do what's called an Aileron Roll. This is a picture of that airplane and my buddy Craig at the controls. (Showed picture of plane)

My friend is an outstanding pilot, one of the best I've ever seen. It is true that his wife has referred to the two of us when we're doing something together as "Dumb and Dumber". I'm not exactly sure who's who, who's Dumb and who's Dumber. It may be a function of what we're doing.

On the day he taught me how to do an Aileron Roll, he sat me in the front seat directly in front of him. He showed me how to put on the six-point harness. As I put on this elaborate seatbelt, I asked him what the red strap was for. He told me: "That's the one that's going to hold you inside the plane if all the others fail when we're upside down." I said, "Right!" He looked me in the eye, probably patted me on the shoulder and said, "You'll be fine."

"Let me see if I've got this straight, since my head is actually sticking outside the airplane, since I'm not inside an enclosed cockpit, if the seatbelts fail while we're upside down that means I'll come out of the plane?" "Yes, in theory

that could happen but it's not. You'll be fine."

He flew the plane up to about 3500 feet. It was awesome. I actually loved having my head outside of the aircraft. After we flew around for a while he decided it was time to demonstrate an Aileron Roll, which is a simple, 1-g maneuver where the plane rotates 360 degrees around its longitudinal axis. That means you start out straight and level, you begin a gradual descent to build up speed and when you get to 150 knots you gently pull the nose up and push the stick over to the right and the plane will flip upside down and then come all the way around until you're right-side up again. (Showed video of Aileron Roll)

Before it was my turn to fly the airplane, he told me it was super important that I not hesitate in the middle of the maneuver. Don't change your mind halfway through. If you start the maneuver, finish it. Since it's a one-g maneuver there should not be any real noticeable forces on your body and everything is going to stay inside the airplane, including the two pilots, if you keep the maneuver going.

He did it first. I liked it. Then it was my turn. He talked me through it one more time and then asked me, "Are you ready?" I thought about it for a second and said, "Yes!" He then said, "It's your airplane." That next moment is the moment I want to talk with you about today. This is the cleared for takeoff moment.

I've received all the information I'm going to get. It's time to make a decision. Will I trust what I've been told? Will I trust the guy sitting behind me? He's shown me that it works. It's now my turn.

This is like the moment when a little kid heads off to kindergarten for the first time with her little backpack slung over her shoulders. She looks at her parents in the eye. Her parents know this is big. She has some sense that this is big. She's off on a new adventure. There will be new kids to meet, a new teacher to get used to, new freedoms to figure out, new challenges. She doesn't really understand what's happening but she senses that something brand new is ahead. She's excited but probably a little nervous.

This is like the moment when a guy asks his girlfriend to marry him. Yes, they've talked about getting married. Yes, they've even dreamed about it together but there comes that moment when he actually asks her.

This is a moment like the one I've had many times at the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Each time I've crossed that frontier there was a moment when I consciously called to mind that we'd prayed and planned, and sought answers to every question we had. We'd travelled for three days and now we're at the border. What will happen on the other side of that frontier? The main part of our mission trip story is going to

take place on the other side of that intersection in that conflicted nation. It's not going to take place on this side of the border. We flew all that way to be in the DR Congo, so with the border in front of us, there comes a time when it's time to cross.

So, back to the Aileron Roll. It was my turn. I pushed the stick forward, accelerated to 150 knots, pulled the stick back and pushed it to the right. I didn't change my mind and get us stuck upside down. The airplane turned around it's longitudinal axis. And we ended right-side up.

The next chapter in the stories we're living often lies on the other side of a crossroads. That's true in this text from Mark chapter six. In today's passage there comes a point as Jesus is eyeball to eyeball with his disciples. He tells them to get in their boat and sail to the other side of the lake. His followers will have to decide whether they're going to trust the word of Jesus or not. So, in that moment, they might have considered their options and then decide to do what he tells them to do.

They're going to discover that doing what Jesus tells them to do doesn't guarantee smooth sailing. They will discover that it's only by saying yes to Jesus that they will learn more about who he is and what he can do. Because they do what he tells them to do, a new chapter opens for them on the other side of that one decision and they're not the only people in

this story who face a crossroads. There are people in a community Jesus and his disciples visit whose lives are healed and forever changed because they boldly acted to come to Jesus with their needs.

I've entitled this sermon, "That's As Green As It Gets". I've called it that because, to be honest that is what I say sometimes when I'm behind someone at a stop light who does not move when the light turns green. As I sit there waiting for them to return to the important task of driving a car and accelerate through the intersection I think to myself, "That's as green as that light gets. That's all the information you're going to get. Green means go."

People get distracted, they're texting or checking their email on their smart phone at a stoplight, which they shouldn't be doing. They're busy changing the station on their radio or reaching for their phone. Some are shaving and others are putting on makeup.

Some are reading the newspaper. Others are busy telling their kids to get back in their seats or stop fighting with one another. Some are lost in their thoughts about the day that is about to begin or lost in thought about the day that is ending, but green lights are not suggestions. They're more commands than permissions. A green light at an intersection is not telling us that we may go forward if we like.

If you're done with that text message you may now proceed through the intersection. That is not what a green light means. If you're in a lane of traffic and the light turns green, it's time to move. It's not going to get any greener. That's all you're going to get. If you're not ready to move, it's time to pull over and park the car. If you're in the lane and the light turns green, it's time to move. It's not a suggestion or permission. It's a command. Move through the intersection.

Think about that moment when Jesus tells his disciples to get in a boat and sail to the other side of the lake. Jesus gives his disciples a green light. It's not an invitation in this story. It's a command. It's time to get in the boat and go. If I had been there, I would have had some questions. I always have more questions.

Where are we supposed to go? Where on the other side of the lake? What are we going to do there? Who are we going to meet? Will they like us? Will there be food? Will we have to feed them? Where will we stay? How long are we going over there? Why can't we stay here? Those are some of the questions I would have had. If they asked questions like that it appears that they don't get many answers to their questions. Jesus just tells them, it's time to move.

They did not insist on more information. They just did what he told them to do. I think they knew that even if what was ahead would be enormously challenging, they knew the

word of Jesus could be trusted. So, they accelerated through the intersection.

You may have seen the story this week about two high school baseball players from Minnesota. They are childhood friends who now play for two rival high schools. One of these guys strikes out his best friend, sending his team to the state championships. When he does, he's at one of those intersections. What will he do now that he has struck out his buddy? Instead of celebrating with his team, watch what he does.

(Showed video clip from Good Morning America <https://goo.gl/TRPe7i>)

What will we do at the next set of decision points in our lives? No matter how big or small that intersection might be? What will we do? Will we trust Jesus with our relationships, with our children, with our church, with our careers?

To be honest, the answer to those questions is sometimes, "No." At least not until I get the full solution to the problem, or the complete plan. Then I might trust the word of Jesus. But that's not who I want to be. The disciples took Jesus at his word and departed. They put one foot in front of another, boarded a boat and headed across the lake. Men, women and children with tremendous needs gathered their friends and family members who were suffering because of various illnesses and brought them to Jesus.

Will we take Jesus at his word? Will we go when he says go? Will we admit our need for what only he can do and come to him?

Crossroads. Roundabouts. Detours. Intersections. Our lives are filled with them. The good news of the gospel of Christ is that Jesus meets us at these decision points. When Jesus saw our need as a human race, he did not hesitate. He stepped out of His heavenly glory and became a man who died for us that we might have life to the full. There was no hesitation. And at great cost to Himself He made it possible for us to be forgiven for all our mistakes, to experience healing in our bodies, our relationships, our emotions. He has given us life that will last forever.

These two stories in this passage are ultimately about what unfolds on the other side of an intersection. These are stories of what begins on the other side of the decision point. The disciples discover more about facing their fears because they discover that when they obey his word, Jesus is with them. As they struggle against the wind, Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. He is not limited by what limits us. In the middle of their struggles, He encouraged them to take heart, don't be afraid. Why, because God Himself is with them. The literal translation of "It is I," is Ego Eimi. "I AM". That's the name of God given to Moses when he talked with God at the burning bush way back in the book of Exodus. I AM is with you. Take heart. Don't be afraid.

The people of Gennesaret pack away their hesitations, admitting their need for what Jesus could do for them and their friends and family, and together, they come to Jesus. They begged him for his help and he gave it.

What intersection in your life are you at today? It doesn't matter whether those intersection points are small and simple or big and complex, do what Jesus tells you to do. Get in the boat and go. What's on the other side of that intersection may be very challenging, but take heart, you are not alone. Jesus is coming to you. Or come to Jesus with your needs, your wounds, your fears, your failures. Bring your friends and family with you. He is a good and compassionate God who can bring healing and restore the hope you have lost.

If your heart is hard today, come to Jesus and talk with him about how that happened. It is often by saying Yes to Jesus, it is often by crossing the intersection that the Holy Spirit begins to soften our hard hearts. On the other side of these intersections in this passage his disciples and the people of Gennesaret discover more about who Jesus is and what he can do.

As I conclude this sermon I want to thank you for what so many of you are teaching me about God's faithfulness. Thank you for showing me again and again how good it is to trust the word of Jesus. Thank you for challenging me and giving me opportunities again and again

to move through intersections in my life, trusting the word of Jesus.

As we consider the intersections in our lives, will we trust the word of Jesus and move through the intersection and on into the new life God has prepared for us? Let us act on the word of Jesus and when he says, "Go", let us go in his strength. Let us go in his wisdom and with his heart. Let us go, loving one another and the people of this world.

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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