



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 29, 2018

“Stop Counting Gumdrops and See the Gorilla” - Hope Restored Series
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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 with Jesus, verse by verse through the entire Gospel of Mark, seeing how Jesus restores hope to a world in need.

We have reached Chapter 7 in the book of Mark, where Jesus has a long, confrontational teaching interaction with the Pharisees about defilement.

So, this is your lucky day! Because today we are going to delve deep into the fascinating intricacies of first-century Jewish hand-washing techniques! The proper and improper ways to wash hands! The correct amount of water to use, the correct position of the hands, the correct type of water jar!

Are you are still here? No one got up to leave? Good! Because we aren't actually going to do that. You can breathe a sigh of relief, settle in. Instead, we are going to take a test!

Yes, an actual test! I'm going to show you a video, based on the research of Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons. The video shows two teams of people passing basketballs, one team in white

shirts, the other team in black shirts. Here's the test: FOCUS and count the number of passes between players wearing WHITE shirts. Count (silently, in your head) the number of times players wearing white pass the ball.

Here is the video link:
https://youtu.be/IGQmdoK_ZfY

How many people counted 14 passes? 15? 16? 17? 18 or more? The correct answer is 16 passes.

How many people saw the gorilla? Who didn't see the gorilla? There is a gorilla that walks across the screen, from right to left, right through the middle of the game.

About 50% of the people who take this test the first time do not see the gorilla. They are so focused on counting passes, paying attention to the white shirts, that they miss the gorilla. When I first took this test, I missed the gorilla.

This research has been out for almost 20 years, so there is a possibility that you are familiar with this video, and you would have spotted the gorilla. But there may be other things you missed.

Raise your hand if you noticed the player on the black team, leaving the game, walking right off the stage?

Now, raise your hand if you noticed that the color of the curtain in the background changed in the middle of the video, changing from red to gold?

Let's watch it again. [Replay video]

A gorilla, a missing player, changing curtain colors. Sometimes, when we focus intently on the little things like counting passes, we miss the big things that are right there in front of us. We don't see the gorilla.

Our sermon title today is, "Gumdrops and Gorillas." I promise this will make sense by the end.

The Pharisees in our Bible passage today are so focused on the little things, that they miss the big things. They are so focused counting passes that they don't see the gorilla. Or more accurately, the Pharisees are so focused on the violations of their ceremonial hand washing traditions, that they don't see Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

And sometimes we are so focused on the little things, or our traditions, or the violations of our rules, that we don't see Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

Our Bible passage for today is Mark, Chapter 7, verses 1 through 23. It is a long passage, so settle in, and put yourself into this scene. Imagine what it is like to be there, as Jesus speaks with the Pharisees, and the crowd, and the disciples.

As we go through the text and the sermon, ask yourself these two questions: "What is God saying to me? And what does He want me to do about it?"

Before I read the text, let's pray. Jesus, we pray that we might see You clearly in this passage, and in this sermon. You are the Savior and Redeemer of the world. Open our eyes. We invite Your Holy Spirit to teach us and transform us now. In Your powerful name we pray, and all God's people say, Amen!

Mark, Chapter 7:1-23 **1** Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around [Jesus], **2** they noticed that some of His disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. **3** (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; **4** and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

6 [Jesus] said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me; **7** in vain do they worship Me,

teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

9 Then He said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!"

10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' **11** But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God) — **12** then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, **13** thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."

14 Then He called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: **15** there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

17 When He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about the parable. **18** He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, **19** since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

20 And He said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. **21** For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, **22** adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,

pride, folly. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

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

Jesus is with His disciples in the area around the Sea of Galilee. Last week, we heard about how Jesus is actually ON the Sea of Galilee, walking on the water to the disciples in their boat.

The Pharisees have come from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. Jerusalem is over 100 miles away. You may remember this from the last time the Pharisees made this trip to confront Jesus, back in Chapter 3, when the Pharisees came to say the Jesus was possessed by the devil.

So, the Pharisees have made this long trip again to confront Jesus with their particular agenda. And their agenda is HYGIENE. Can we all agree that you really should wash your hands before you eat? Does anyone disagree?

Of course, the Pharisees concern isn't hygiene. This isn't a confrontation about hygiene. The Pharisees are concerned with CEREMONIAL PURITY. Their concern was the ceremonial hand washing rituals that the Pharisees engaged in before meals and in between courses of meals.

I joked earlier that we'd delve into the intricacies of first-century Jewish hand washing techniques, but all those things I mentioned were actually regulated for the ceremonial washing of hands before meals and in between courses of meals: the amount of water, how much of the hand gets wet, the position of the hands, if your fingers point upward or downward, the type of water jar used.

I think it's easy to tease the Pharisees and say, "Oh, they got it all wrong." But I think we need to empathize with the Pharisees as deeply religious people who sincerely believed that what they were doing mattered for the proper worship of God. They were doing their best to worship God and to apply God's law to everyday life, just like us.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 96: "Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!"

And the Pharisees went from "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" to creating rules about where your fingers point when you wash your hands, because they were trying to protect purity and reverence.

And so the Pharisees built barriers between them and the "unclean," creating rules about Sabbath, and food, and hand washing. We, on the inside of this barrier, who follow these rules and traditions are doing it right, and you, on the outside, who don't conform, are impure, unclean, defiled—you're not properly worshiping God.

I feel for the Pharisees, because I think sometimes I'm just like them. I try to protect reverence and holiness with a wall of rules and traditions.

I grew up in a very Chinese home, where public displays of affection were not just very rare, they actually created panic and anxiety. My wife grew up in Hawaii, which is a very warm and affectionate place. So it is very normal for her, while we're in church, to try hold my hand, or give me a hug, or lean against me. And I find that *terribly* inappropriate and stressful! Because you are not supposed to hold hands in church!

In my head, I'm just showing the proper reverence to God in church, but really, it's just a rule I made up and a custom I'm following, like hand washing for the Pharisees.

I grew up and was taught that when you pray, you close your eyes, and fold your hands, and wait until it's quiet. If you've spent time in our church, you know that we encourage everyone to pray, and to pray for other people. And Pastor Dan has taught that when you pray for other people, keep your eyes open, so you can see what's going on. When we pray before meals, I'll tell my kids, "Close your eyes." And my wife will say, "They can keep their eyes open." And I think, "No! You must close your eyes when you pray. It's the only right way to pray and show reverence to God!" Of course, it's just my custom and tradition that I'm following, like ceremonial hand washing.

Maybe you have some customs or traditions that are like ceremonial hand washing. Maybe it's holding hands in church or closing your eyes when you pray. Maybe it's how someone should be dressed when they come to church. Or...when they preach. Maybe it's the music in church. Maybe it's something else.

Jesus and His disciples know the hand washing customs. And they *intentionally* violate them, because Jesus shifts the focus from external compliance with rituals and customs to the HEART.

Jesus focuses on inward purity, intent and motive. The Pharisees think they can get holy by washing their hands but Jesus says, "Show Me YOUR HEART."

And so, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and their way of dividing

the world into clean and unclean. He confronts their way of classifying THINGS like cups and pots and bronze kettles into the categories of clean and unclean. He confronts their way of classifying FOOD into clean and unclean. In Chapter 3, Jesus intentionally heals a man on the Sabbath to intentionally confront their way of classifying TIME into clean and unclean. And most importantly, Jesus confronts the Pharisees way of classifying PEOPLE into clean and unclean.

In these past chapters in the gospel of Mark, Jesus reaches out, touches and heals the "unclean" leper. He heals the "unclean" bleeding woman. He touches the "unclean" dead body of a little girl, raising her from the dead.

Next week, Jesus journeys into Gentile territory and heals a Greek woman's daughter. He reaches out to "unclean" Gentiles like you and me.

Jesus redefines what clean and unclean mean. He redefines what it means to be a religious person dedicated to God. And He continues to do that today.

To Pharisees, the essence of religion was rules and regulations. Follow the rules and please God. Break the rules or tradition and that is sin.

However, Jesus's concern wasn't customs or tradition, but God's commandments to Love God and Love Your Neighbor. Jesus said those were the two greatest commandments: Love God and Love Your Neighbor.

And so, Jesus calls out the Pharisees for elevating their own traditions and rules above God's command to Love. He calls them out regarding "Corban."

The fifth Commandment is honor and love your father and mother, but the Pharisees said that if you dedicated money to the temple, or “Corban,” that was more important than using the money to care for your parents. So, you couldn’t use that money to care for your parents, you had to give it to the temple.

It is as though you made a pledge to give money to our church’s Capital Campaign, but later, your parents become ill and need you to spend money to care for and support them. And it would be like us saying, “Nope, you promised that money to the Capital Campaign, so you are forbidden to use it to care for your sick parents. You have to give the money to us. Our rule is more important than God’s command to love.”

The Pharisees were concentrating so hard on the little things, their rules, and their traditions, that they didn’t see the big things.

Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.”* [Matthew 23:23]

The Apostle Paul, writing in his letter to Christians in Rome, writes: *“17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* [Romans 14:17]

Justice, Mercy, Faithfulness. Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit. That’s what the Kingdom of God is about.

Can I share with you an article that I read last week that I found fascinating? The article was in the

Washington Post, titled “Judgment Days”. The article interviews a number of people in a small evangelical church in Alabama grappling with the meaning of morality in the interesting political times we’re living in. There is one quote that really jumped out at me near the end of the article.

The quote is from a 67-year-old Sunday School teacher named Sheila: “Love thy neighbor,” she said, meant “love thy American neighbor.” Welcome the stranger, she said, meant the “legal immigrant stranger.” “The Bible says, ‘If you do this to the least of these, you do it to me,’” Sheila said, quoting Jesus. “But the least of these are Americans, not the ones crossing the border.”

I sincerely don’t want to offend anyone. Which makes me different from Jesus, because He had no problem offending people.

But we have to be true to the text. And we have to hear what Jesus is saying. I am sure that Sheila is sincerely doing her best to be a religious person dedicated to God. I am sure that she loves Jesus. But when someone asked Jesus about loving their neighbor, He answered with a story about the Good Samaritan. Not the Good Jew or the Good American, but the Good Samaritan, the “other” in their culture. And when I read Sheila’s re-interpretation of the words of Jesus, I can’t help but hear Jesus’ words from our passage today. And they are words for us, not just Sheila, because we are the church, the universal church, the one body of Christ.

“This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

8 *“You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.” “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!”*

Are we okay? No one is too offended? Even though I’m wearing jeans and sneakers?

So now, I think we’re ready for a retest? I want to show you another video. Because I think this second video really illustrates the point of not focusing on the little things, and seeing the big things. I think we’re all going to do a much better job in this test.

In this video, there is a woman eating gumdrops. And the test is to count how many gumdrops she eats. And I want you all to succeed, so I’ll give you a hint: There is a gorilla in this video also. [Video is shown; photo shot of video captured below]



Did you see the gorilla in this video?

Of course you saw the gorilla! The gorilla is sitting right there! And that’s the point. The gorilla is right there. But I feel like the Pharisees would take this test and say, “The correct answer is six gumdrops, because she drops that fifth one. What gorilla?”

The Pharisees came 100 miles to nitpick Jesus on how his disciples wash their hands. They do a great job watching hand washing, but they DON’T SEE JESUS. And Jesus is right there!

He's right there! The Savior and Redeemer of the world! This is not like our first video, where you might miss the gorilla because of all the other stuff going on. In this video, the gorilla is right there! And the Pharisees are counting gumdrops and they don't see the gorilla.

The long version of our sermon title today is, "Stop Counting Gumdrops and See the Gorilla."

Jesus just fed miraculously feed more than 5000 people, He's healing people, driving out demons, raising a girl from the dead. Other people notice! But not the Pharisees. The passage immediately before this, which we read last week, Jesus arrives by boat and people at once recognize Him.

Mark 6:54 - *When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized [Jesus], 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.*

"People at once recognized Him."

Jesus is right there, the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior and Redeemer of the world! Bringing with Him Justice, Mercy, Faithfulness, Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit.

And the Pharisees are watching His disciples wash hands. They don't see Jesus because they are too busy counting gumdrops.

Stop Counting Gumdrops and See the Gorilla.

This is not just the Pharisees problem, this is my problem, maybe our problem. We get caught up focusing on things and we forget that Jesus is right here. I focus on closing eyes when I pray and I don't see Jesus. I get mad at my kids for misbehaving and miss the miracles that they are, God's presence with them. I get frustrated by what other people are doing, and miss the fact that Jesus is right there also. Just like the Pharisees, I miss my opportunity to worship and enjoy the presence of Jesus.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says to the church in Laodicea: *"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with Me."*

He says that to us today and every day. He invites us to see Him and be in His presence.

As we end today, I want to rewind way back to the beginning of the gospel of Mark. Because I want us to remember one thing as we try to Stop Counting Gumdrops and See the Gorilla—as we think about not focusing in on the little things, and seeing Jesus.

I want us to remember that even if and when we miss seeing Jesus, Jesus sees us. Jesus always has and always will see us first.

Mark 1:16 *As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he SAW Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me and I will make you fish for people."*

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus calls His first disciples. And the first thing the text tells us is that Jesus SEES Simon and Andrew. And I'm sure

Jesus wasn't nitpicking their net casting technique. He SEES them—in all their fishermanly ordinariness and all their potential—and then He calls them, to follow Him and be a disciple.

And so it is with us. Jesus sees us. He sees us—all our ordinariness and all our potential, and He calls us. He invites us to see Him, to follow Him, to be His disciple and enjoy being in His presence.

"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with Me."

Let's take a few moments to respond in prayer. What is God saying to you? What does He want you to do about it?

Close your eyes and fold your hands, because that is the only correct way to pray! I'm kidding. Pray however you want, and see and respond to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, we see You. You are the Savior and Redeemer of the world. We invite You into our lives. In Your name we pray, and all God's people say, Amen!

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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 contacting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com