



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 26, 2018

"Give Me a Sign" - Hope Restored Series

The Rev. Dan Chun

It's good to be together for worship and be in our community, our church family, to gather strength and remember where the North Star of our faith is.

What a tough year for Hawaii! In January, there was a False Missile Alert.

Then, a volcano and its lava destroyed homes.

Then, there was a hurricane and tropical storm alert with major flooding, more homes endangered or destroyed...and simultaneous brush fires in Maui covering more than 2,000 acres, and a brush fire on Oahu covering hundreds of acres and again endangering and destroying homes.

Four big events in eight months can seem too much. Plus, the loss of our church members who have passed away and one of our members getting shot recently in the line of duty as a police officer. Fortunately, Pete Jones is recovering well.

All too much. It's time to hear a word from Papa Bear. Today is a sermon about how to trust God in the midst of the storms in our lives.

First, I am going to tell you some stories, and set up a metaphor, then we'll read the Bible passage for today, and then I'll give

you some truths and perspectives that will hopefully give you strength that will last a lifetime-no matter what the storm is you are going through or will go through.

First some stories. As you may know this last month, I was a busy traveler. Last weekend, I attended my niece's wedding in Carmel, California. Her name is Punky Chun and she married Tucker Witt.

Prior to that wedding some of the staff and I, and some church members, went to Stafford, England for the Soul Survivor festivals led by our church friend Mike Pilavachi who has preached here several times and led conferences. By God's grace, two donors paid for all of the staff travel as we wanted to learn more about the Holy Spirit and the gifts of healing and prophecy, as well as worship and evangelism.

The Soul Survivor festivals are six-day events in a row, each averaging 3,000 to 10,000 people. You'll hear more about it on another Sunday.

It's always interesting to be in another country. You notice the various signs on buildings and the street. Signs tell us a lot about a country. While in England, I noticed this sign in a pub: "Awesomely Accessible Toilet!"

That's fun. Whimsical. Ironically, one of our team got food poisoning at that restaurant, so had to use the bathroom often. If you have to go to a bathroom, I say go to an awesome one!

I went to a play in London called, "The Play That Goes Wrong". Normally, theaters tell you if the featured actors will have understudies taking their place, or if they have a certain star in it.

When I got to the theater I saw a sign with a picture of Tom Cruise and got all excited...until I read the fine print that Tom Cruise will *NOT* be performing at the event. And in fact, he *NEVER* was in the cast. Hence, as the sign said, "Tom Cruise is *NOT* performing this evening." It *IS* the play that goes wrong.

If you go to the train station and to the Knightsbridge station, (where Harry Potter, Hermione and Ron would go to Hogwarts), you actually see a sign that says, "Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ - the magical doorway that transports you to Hogwarts the Wizard." Rosella Shishido who is in a photo we took is not in town right now, so maybe she *IS* in Hogwarts.

We all like signs. They help us find a destination, or guide us, or as you can see in some cases, make us laugh.

But when it comes to Jesus and the Christian faith we are tempted to always want a sign from God that He is with us, that He loves us, that He won't give up on us—that He is there.

In today's Bible passage we shall see that the Lord is saying, "Don't have a faith that is always based on looking for signs from God."

Actually, He would say, "You already have more than enough signs, if you have the awareness to see them. There are always signs out there if you have your antenna out."

If you constantly need a sign that God is with you and loves you, Jesus says, "Stop it...and just have faith in Me that I am always with you and that I am for you. Once you fully trust Me, you won't need to always look for signs."

So, let me read just a bit of our passage for this morning as we continue in our Gospel of Mark Series – Hope Restored.

Mark 8:11 - The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test Him, they asked Him for a sign from heaven. 12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it."

Jesus warns His disciples not to ask for signs to test God. And here, I think Jesus means: don't keep asking for a sign that proves God loves you and is for you. He is *NOT* saying to not ask God for wisdom or comfort in your prayers. Those things—yes, ask in faith.

But when we Christians keep asking for a specific sign from God to test Him wondering, "Do You really love me? Are you really for me?"...Jesus is saying that is not good. It shows a lack of trust and

maybe it indicates that you have not fully committed your life to Jesus and have a personal relationship with Him.

In our passage, the Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven. They don't trust Jesus. They are tempting Him, trying to trap Him. They want to show that He is not really the Messiah.

Jesus responds further in our Bible passage, Mark 8:12, "*Jesus sighed deeply and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.'*"

Jesus sighs deeply. The word "sigh" in the original Bible language means deeply grieving. "Why do you ask for a sign?" Asking for a sign is not evidence of true faith. He's not going to give you superstitious signs here and there...like because the leaf fell a certain way, it means to marry someone or take the job. I know of someone who felt that if the rubber band on his morning newspaper was a certain way it would be a sign from God.

Rather, Jesus says, "Just trust Me."

You see, the Pharisees knew all about the religious law. They even created religious laws, *BUT* they didn't have a true relationship with God. They knew the rules, the rituals, the religion, but they didn't have a relationship with Jesus.

Hence, in their analytical mind they were saying, "Give us signs that You are God. Show us why we should trust You."

This passage is really for the Christian—the one who has supposedly made a commitment to Christ. If you are a seeker, a non-Christian, then yes, keep

asking God questions to discover if HE is to be trusted.

But for those who have supposedly made a commitment to follow Christ, you have to get to a point where you stop asking for signs from Jesus that you are loved by Him.

How annoying would it be for a spouse or a boyfriend or girlfriend, or just a platonic friend to keep asking you *EVERY DAY*, "Do you love me? Do you care for me? Give me a sign. Give me a sign." If you do that, then something is wrong in the relationship.

As I said, my niece Punky Chun just got married last weekend in Carmel. She married a wonderful Christian guy named Tucker Witt, a Naval Academy graduate. All you Navy people can cheer. And you Marines, Air Force, Army and Coast Guard people can politely clap.

I have prayed for Punky on average every single week of her life, since the day she was born. I am thrilled she married Tucker.

But it will be a bad marriage if every single day Tucker and Punky have to ask each other, "Do you really love me? Do you really care for me? Can I trust you? Give me a sign."

They made a commitment to be loyal to each other and love each other no matter what...in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, in want and in plenty. The ring was the only sign they needed of their vow. Done. Depend on it. Trust that vow.

You see, for important decisions you only make them once. Don't try to make them over and over again.

speak with our former associate pastor Sim Fulcher, who now lives in Atlanta, Georgia about once a month. He was with us for 15-plus years. I miss him and his wife Mimi, so we talk a lot.

He taught me the principle to: "Make important decisions only once." Here's what he meant. Sim retired at 80 years of age. As long as I have known him, he was committed to go to the gym to exercise. He taught me that if you are going to exercise, you should make that decision only once. Once you have decided to do that, then don't revisit that every day asking, "Shall I exercise or not? Hmmm, maybe I shouldn't go down to the gym; maybe I shouldn't lift weights or stretch today. I'm feeling tired."

Sim taught me that you make the decision once: to exercise every week for the rest of your life. Then you don't have to waiver and wonder every day, "Shall I exercise or not?" He said, "If you didn't truly make that decision once, it will mean you won't exercise because it will be up for a *DAILY DEBATE*."

The same would be true for worship attendance, dieting, tithing, devotionals: make that decision once and stick to it.

Same for marriage—decide you will love that person for the rest of your life. As Tucker said at the end of his vows to Punky, "Let's do it!" Make the vow and then say to yourself, "Okay, let's do it."

You either pay the price of discipline or pay the price of regret.

For good friendships—decide to hang in there with that person even though that friend might let you down. Everyone is human. People will let you down. So, work at it with the commitment to be a friend no matter what.

The Pharisees knew *ABOUT* God. They knew the rules, but they didn't really *KNOW* God. And so they wanted a sign from Jesus.

Why is it bad for Christians to keep asking for signs from God on whether He loves us and is trustworthy? There are three reasons. Asking for signs means:

1. We have not accepted the evidence we have seen so far.
2. It is toxic.
3. It never ends.

First two points: we have not accepted the evidence we have seen so far, and our asking for signs is toxic.

Notice in our passage that Jesus asks the disciples to think about what He has shown them so far in their time together. We are halfway through the Gospel of Mark and they have seen a lot: many healings, exorcisms, reconciliations. But then He makes His strongest point in talking about bread and yeast and miracles. Check this out. Let's look at the rest of our Bible passage.

Mark 8:13 Then Jesus left them got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. 14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.

15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?"

19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many

basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied.

20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven."

21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

A few things: First, this is like a Seinfeld episode! Jesus is talking about bread as a metaphor. The disciples think literally, "Why is He talking about bread? Do you think He is upset that we forgot the bread! Are we in trouble because we only have one loaf?"

Jesus was actually linking the most recent conversation with the Pharisees to a great spiritual point and they didn't get it. And here's the point. When you keep doubting Jesus on whether He is to be trusted, when you know a lot about religion but you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, then it can be as toxic as having too much yeast in bread.

Jesus says having an "*ASKING-FOR-SIGNS-FAITH*" like the Pharisees is like yeast in bread. Here's a quick lesson on yeast.

The ancient word for yeast is leaven. When we have Communion, we have unleavened bread due to the Passover tradition but also for the reason I am about to talk about. But right now, we will go with the word "yeast" to be consistent with the scripture. Yeast is what makes the dough in bread rise. It leavens or lifts it up.

Here is what the first-century people knew. If you put a tiny, little lump of yeast into the dough, it will eventually spread through the entire dough. If you let it sit the correct amount of time, the dough will rise to a sufficient level and the bread will be good.

But here's the deal about yeast. Yeast eats up the sweetness of the bread. The longer the yeast is in there, the more sour the bread will get. And if you leave the yeast in there too long, it will take out *ALL* of the sweetness, and eventually it will be yucky—inedible.

Yeast is actually a living cell and what it is doing it is eating up the sugar in the dough, breaking it down into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Eventually, there's no more alcohol. The carbon dioxide gets into the bread and it indeed rises. But if you allow the yeast to get in there *TOO LONG*, it will take out all of the sugar and then it becomes not good bread but rather yucky tasting bummer bread.

This is the profound truth Jesus was saying. If you live a life of always asking for signs—always doubting whether Jesus loves you and is to be trusted—it will be like yeast eating up the insides of your life until you become bitter and have no sweetness. This will be toxic and ruin your faith and life.

While the Pharisees were all about the external behavior, the external appearance, the external rituals, Jesus is wanting us to have this deep, central, internal core trust in Him.

You see, we can go to church every week, Bible studies every week, go to conferences every year...but those are all external things. What is our heart like? Do we firmly trust Jesus so we don't need to continually ask for signs that He loves us?

Some people say, "I am going to flip my Bible pages and wherever I stop and put my finger on that verse, that will be a sign from Jesus on what to do." Don't do that. When Gideon, in the Old Testament, put a literal sheep's

fleece on the ground and asked God for a sign on whether He was with him, that was a *NARRATIVE* of what Gideon did. But let's not take that as a *NORMATIVE* of how we should live every day—by putting out a fleece and if it is wet, then God is with me and if it is dry then He is not with me—which is what Gideon was initially asking.

Like Pastor Sim would say, "Make your decision to trust God once...and then don't ask for signs."

How can we possibly counter this yeast in our faith that can make our life go sour? Part of the answer is to look back at your life at all of the miracles that God has brought about for you. Make a list tonight.

Miracles are called "signs and wonders" in the Bible. They are *signs* to the *wonder* of God. That is why Jesus talks about the miracles of feeding of the 7,000 and the 4,000 and asks us to remember them!

Jesus said to His disciples in our Bible passage, "When I fed five thousand people with just five loaves of bread, everyone was fed and so I ask, how many baskets of loaves were left?" And the disciples said, "Uh, twelve."

And Jesus said, "Right! And when I once fed four thousand people with just *SEVEN* loaves, all were fed and how many baskets of left overs did we have?" And the disciples said, "Uh seven."

And Jesus said, "Don't you get it?!! If you know about those incredible miracles of My love and grace and see what I have done, then don't live a life of always asking for more signs on whether I love you or whether I can be trusted. That should be enough!"

And this leads to my next point which is point three: Once you start asking for signs, it never ends!

Asking for signs means:

1. We have not accepted the evidence we have seen so far.
2. It is toxic.
3. It never ends.

If you decide to want to see signs from Jesus that He loves you...and again, I am not saying you shouldn't ask for wisdom for things...asking for wisdom is good and healthy prayer.

But if we *ALWAYS* want a sign from God on whether He loves us and is for us, then the bad thing about wanting signs is that it never ends!!! You may always feel that God owes you. It goes on and on.

Imagine a Christian young adult woman saying, "God, I haven't had a date for a long time. If You really love me, give me a sign that You are with me. Give me a man."

Then she meets a man and they marry. But then one day she says, "Lord, I want a child. We have tried for years. Do you really love me? Give me a sign, give me a sign that I can trust You and You love me."

Then she gets pregnant. And on it goes. "Lord, I want my child to get into a certain pre-school. If You love me You would give me a sign."

Then it's, "Lord, give me a sign if You love me because I want my child to go to a certain college." Then it's, "Lord give me a sign about a certain profession." Then it's buying a certain house at a reasonable mortgage. Give me a sign of Your love. Give me a sign that I can trust You. It never ends.

Jesus is saying to us, “Stop! Look at the times I have already shown you I love you. Look at the times you have seen your own feeding of the 4,000 or 7,000 in your life.”

If you say, “I don’t have any of those miracles in my life,” then you need to really stop and think because they are right there—evidence of His hand—and we should be grateful. We just need to be aware. Take time tonight or this week and think and make a list of the miracles in your life that Jesus has already shown you.

Once you have committed your life to Christ, make it stick. We can make it stick.

There once was a boy about 12 years old. He made a commitment to God to follow Jesus all his life, but strangely he also had a heart to help the local church. And that is church with a capital “C” meaning the church at large. No matter what profession he would be in, he promised God he would help the local church and he wanted to help pastors. He sensed how hard the job could be.

As Pastor Sim said, he made the decision once; he did not have to revisit his promise again.

Sometimes people make promises but they say, “Oh, when I retire I will do this...or if I make a bit more money I will do this.” But this young man remembered his childhood promise throughout his whole life and he would do what he could whether poor or wealthy.

He wanted to help the local church and pastors. As a businessman, he could really see that pastors needed more tools. By God’s grace, he became very successful in business. He became a multi-millionaire.

His name was Lowell Berry. He made his fortune in a product called Best Fertilizer. He could have changed his mind and kept his millions just for himself. But no. Lowell Berry funded the Billy Graham School of Evangelism to help pastors learn how to grow their church. Thousands were helped. He helped Robert Schuller and funded his leadership conference to help pastors. He became a trustee of Fuller Seminary that trains church leaders and supported it financially.

He was raised a Presbyterian, but married a Catholic woman. Then in 1979 he had an idea of bringing Protestant and Catholic churches together to be inspired and equipped. He started a conference called The National Convocation of Religious Leaders.

The first conference was at Stanford University. In attendance was the former senior pastor of this church, Bob Owens...and a young recent Fuller Seminary graduate named Dan Chun who was attending USC Film School at that time.

In 1980, Lowell Berry did the second annual Convocation. But then in 1981, tragically, Lowell Berry died. After only two years, the conferences ended.

In 1981, another Presbyterian and Catholic, Pam and I, got married and in 1983 we had a dream that was confirmed in, of all places, Israel. What if we were to put on the conferences like Lowell Berry wanted...but have them in Hawaii instead?

Taking models like the Urbana Missions Conferences, what if we brought the best Christian communicators in the world here and had both Protestant and Catholic churches together?

In 1983, Hawaiian Islands Ministries started, and the very first gift of seed money came from none other than Lowell Berry’s daughter, Pat Berry Conklin who used to be a resident here. And for the last 35 years (!), the Lowell Berry Foundation has supported Hawaiian Islands Ministries which, for ten years, also did a conference in the Bay Area where Lowell Berry was from.

The dream of a 12-year old teenager endured through business and even after his passing away. He made the decision once...and never looked back, nor needed to have signs about Jesus’ goodness and trustworthiness.

A young adult, named Bill Bright committed his life to Christ and went into business, and then later started an enduring college ministry called Campus Crusade for Christ, which today is known as Cru. Its first full-time worker from Hawaii was a young adult named Wendy Chun, who led her 15-year old younger brother named Dan to Christ. After that commitment, Dan was involved in ministry while a journalist for KGMB-TV, then became a filmmaker in Southern California.

And then God called him to be a pastor here for five years as an associate, and is now starting his 24th year as senior pastor. In fact, tomorrow to the day is my 40th anniversary of my ordination: a life-long decision to follow Christ and serve His church.

Whether in the marketplace, as a teenager, or as an adult in business, it is never too early or too soon or too late to make that one-time decision to follow Jesus, trust Him and not have to have a life asking for signs over and over again to see if Jesus really loves us.

Once you make that kind of decision, it will endure through good and difficult times. It will sustain you through hurricanes. You will trust and not doubt that God will be with you in any storm. It will give you peace. Make the decision that Jesus can be trusted but don't revisit that again and again asking for signs.

But you say, "Dan, I am going through tremendous suffering. It's really hard. You need signs that God is with you."

Yes, we need reassurances that God is with us...but sometimes the best reassurance comes from a deep-seated commitment that, "God I will trust you, whether my circumstances that I see are bad or not, I will stand firm. "

I close with this story. When I was in England a few weeks ago I listened to a couple named Neil and Janet Young, the pastors of Causeway Coast Vineyard Church in Ireland. Sadly, they lost their daughter at the age of 16 days. Their pain was immense. While their daughter was sick, they prayed to God for healing and many others did too, but their daughter still died.

Well-meaning people tried to give them advice saying, "Well, at least she's in a good place," or other things that were supposed to be helpful. They realized that even if God gave them an email of the exact ten reasons why their daughter died it would not have helped. Their suffering was excruciating.

They finally came up with an answer to their pain. An answer that didn't ask for signs but trusted God in the midst of the storm.

They said this: "We decided to Embrace the Mystery."

I think that is a good line to remember when we go through a painful time and we can't figure out exactly what is happening... and yet we will still trust God.

They said, "We will never know why she died so young." They said, "The big question for us was: How do we push in? How do we not lose sight of what we need to do in our community?"

They debated, even as pastors, if they would go back to church because of all the people there. They said, "In Community you find the awesome and the awkward. We didn't want to go to church and have another hug or have that look of people's eyes that asked, 'Why didn't she get healed? She was supposed to be a world changer, wasn't she?'"

"But we decided we just have to go to church. We chose hope and it doesn't come instantly at your doorstep. There will be a better ending."

They came up with this saying that they would say to themselves over and over again which I think is good for us all to remember in a season of suffering: "God is really good and He didn't do this to us."

They said, "Then our grief could be in a safer place and go through the process. It is wrong that she died. It will NEVER be okay. Well-meaning people said, 'God must really trust you to have Him take your daughter.'

"But we don't believe He took her from us. We must face suffering while believing in a God who heals. We must still pursue God passionately."

I would like to ask the worship team to come up now.

Friends, I believe there are some people here who are struggling in life...maybe in their faith. There are some who have hit a hard time. And I believe God, whether you have asked for it or not, wants to show you His tender love in a new way.

There are people here who might have lost a loved one...or a job...or got a bad health report...or are going through a horrible breakdown of a relationship...or maybe a sense of losing hope...and now is a time to receive God's love and strength in a new way.

It's not a superstitious asking for a sign, but it's more of a confession saying, "I need help. I need hope."

And if you are in that situation of generally a real tough time, I am going to ask you to do something that might be difficult. It's not to embarrass you. I am going to ask you to stand up where you are for prayer and God will feel honored that you are coming to Him like a child going to a perfect loving Father.

And I am going to ask maybe two people who are near those who are standing up to ask for permission to put a hand on that person—and then don't say anything. Just silently pray for that person and ask the Holy Spirit to minister to them.

Come Holy Spirit. Come and minister to these people as Jesus said You are the Comforter—and the Counselor.

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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