



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 28, 2016

"Dover, Dunkirk, and Jesus" (Acts 1:8 Sermon Series)

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As your pastor and friend, I know that many of us in this room need hope. Many of us here are going through tough times. We need strength, comfort, protection, and a sense of reassurance that there is someone greater than we who can help us.

If that is you, then you are at the right place! For I have a word of hope and encouragement for you. God knows all of us need a safe and secure place, like a fortress, to go to for protection. We need a place of refuge. The Bible uses many words to describe God, and often it's a metaphor of a place of strength and protection, like a **STRONG TOWER**:

Psalm 61:3 - For you (God) are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Proverbs 18:10 - The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.

Another word in the Bible for God is **FORTRESS**:

Psalm 18:2 - The LORD is my rock, my FORTRESS, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 31:2 - Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong FORTRESS to save me.

Another word to describe God is **STRONGHOLD**:

Psalm 27:1 - The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the STRONGHOLD of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 94:22 - But the LORD has become my STRONGHOLD, and my God the rock of my refuge.

When we think of words like fortress, stronghold, and strong tower, we get the sense that there is a guard watching over us. The word "guard" is also used in the Bible as a verb for what God does:

1 Samuel 2:9 - He (God) will GUARD the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.

Psalm 12:7 - You, O LORD, will protect us; you will GUARD us from this generation forever.

Psalm 17:8 - GUARD me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...

Let me tell you about a real life stronghold, a historical fortress and use it as a metaphor for us today. And that is Dover Castle in England. Let me give a short history lesson and then I will explain why it is incredibly important to us today for our church.

Dover is in the southeast corner of England. If you wanted to invade England from Europe, the quickest way was through Dover, just 21 miles across the English Channel from Europe. From the Middle Ages to World War II and the Cold War, Dover

was the strategic point to protect all of England.

Even as far back as the ancient Romans, Dover was of strategic importance as early as 43 B.C. To protect England from the Saxons, William the Conqueror rebuilt Dover Castle to make it bigger. Then Henry the Second made more changes to make the castle even stronger, and so did the evil King John in 1199.

In 1804, Napoleon had his eyes on Dover Castle. He had 130,000 men in 2,000 barges in France, just 60 miles from Dover, ready to attack. Remember, Dover is just across the English Channel from France. The English always knew that any attack on their kingdom would come through Dover.

The castle was built on the famous White Cliffs of Dover rising 300 feet high above a beach. To protect it from Napoleon who would most likely land on its beaches 300 feet below, a British engineer named Twiss figured out a way to dig a series of tunnels below the castle to house and hide British troops.

Twiss also ingeniously figured out a way to construct a spiral staircase with three stairwells so the British could move 1000 men simultaneously from the castle down to the beach in just 12.5 minutes to face the enemy.

It turned out that Napoleon couldn't control the English channel due to the British Navy so he canceled his attack on Dover.

One hundred thirty six years later Dover was again key to the British survival.

In May of 1940 during World War II, the 500,000-man Allied Army of the British, Belgium and French Armies were about to be completely annihilated. The Nazis had trapped them on the beaches of Dunkirk in France.

In fact, this historic moment is the new Christopher Nolan movie coming out next year, called *Dunkirk*. In case you don't know, Nolan directed the popular movies, *The Dark Knight*, *Interstellar* and *Inception*. He's one of my favorite movie directors.

In 1940, Winston Churchill needed an effective rescue mission. The entire war would be lost if the country lost that many men. So Churchill appointed Vice Admiral Bertram Ramsey to start a rescue operation called *Operation Dynamo* with its headquarters at none other than Dover, which was close as possible to Dunkirk across the waters.

Those ancient tunnels of Dover Castle became their secret headquarters and command center. Ramsey and his staff lived in a tremendous sacrificial way. They lived in those tunnels 24 hours a day! It was claustrophobic, and no daylight. But they did it because they knew the lives of a half million men were at stake.

Churchill decided to send nearly 2,000 carriers and destroyers to pick up the trapped men at Dunkirk. But that would mean at most only 30 to 40 thousand would be rescued. The rest would be taken prisoners or killed unless they could figure out a plan.

To make matters worse the English Channel was littered with mines. Whoever went out to save those men on the beaches would be putting their own lives at risk. But 35 destroyers and carriers were sent out just the same. And since they were deep-water vessels, they had to use landing craft to ferry out the soldiers from the beach to the carriers and back and forth.

It would be too slow using the Navy's landing craft, but what else could they do? Time was running out. Hitler had sent his huge armies coming from three different directions to destroy the trapped Allied Armies.

But on went the brave destroyers and carriers. The German positions on the coasts near Dunkirk fired at the British ships. And when the ships came, the trapped Allied soldiers queued up to be rescued.

On the first day only 7,000 men were saved. After three days 70,000 men were rescued. That's good news, but they would never get all of them out in time.

But back in Dover Castle, Ramsey and his team then unleashed a new but desperate plan. The *only* way more men could be saved more quickly was if *every single* British citizen in Southern England who had a boat would enter the English channel that was filled with mines and sail to Dunkirk to pick up the soldiers, even though they would be targets for Nazi artillery.

And so for the salvation of England, the cry went out for citizens with any kind of ferry, dinghy, speedboat, lifeboat or even expensive yacht. The call was to enter the dangerous water on May 28, 1940 to save the trapped soldiers.

And so it happened! Seven hundred owners of speedboats, fishing boats, yachts, ferries, merchant marine crafts, motorized lifeboats, any small boats answered the call and they all sailed as a huge brave civilian armada to Dunkirk beach to save their brothers in trouble.

To make matters worse, as they sailed in their rescue mission trying to dodge the mines lurking below the water surface, waves of Nazi fighter planes came and started shooting and bombing them.

Enemy U-boats and submarines closed in like ferocious sharks and shot torpedoes at them.

But onward they sailed on their rescue mission, these brave civilians and military. More than 200 British and allied sea crafts were sunk and another 200 damaged, but on they went to save the men at Dunkirk. The Royal Air Force lost 145 aircraft trying to defend the nine-day evacuation.

Vice Admiral Ramsey hoped to save another 45,000 at most. But by the end of the first day 68,000 British soldiers were saved! The next day another 68,000 were saved. In the end, Vice Admiral Ramsey's call to civilians helped save 338,000 soldiers. But unfortunately 40,000 soldiers were not rescued and became prisoners of war.

In military terms, Dunkirk was embarrassing and tragic for England because the Nazis defeated them. But what happened between Dover and Dunkirk turned the tide of the war. The Allied forces were in enemy occupied territory and yet they were saved by the courage and boldness of the average English civilians who got in their boats to brave enemy fire and lines in the channel to save their fellow man.

It inspired and galvanized England! It caused Winston Churchill to say his famous speech several days after the Dunkirk rescue when he proclaimed on June 4, 1940:

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end.

"We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be.

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

And if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

Friends, what is my point with this Dover story? I believe God in His providence and sovereignty and His will, has established First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu to be a key castle like Dover—to be one of the key gateways to Hawaii. We have and will continue to save people from the clutches of Satan, who is a real enemy.

We have tried to give hope to those in despair who are depressed, sick, who fight addictions. We have led many to the safety of a personal friendship with Christ. We have released more than a thousand children from poverty in Jesus' name. We have tried our best to minister to those in need of a home, to those who have been imprisoned, to those who have lost loved ones.

This church has been key as a light in the darkness. We have tried to be a church of what Malcolm Gladwell calls "generous orthodoxy". We are orthodox in our beliefs about God and Jesus, but we are generous with those who do not believe the way we do—whether in lifestyle or in doctrine. All are to be welcomed and helped regardless. We have the opportunity to be a stronghold of Generous Orthodoxy to protect those in need of help, a gateway to grace.

Satan is real. Spiritual warfare is real. We truly believe what the Bible says in Ephesians 6:12 - *"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

The cause to fight evil is great. The cause to fight injustice is just. It is necessary for everyone to heed the

call, whether big or small, to help those who fall, just as those British citizens got into their boats to help.

Some were rich and had yachts. Others were not as rich and only had speedboats, or maybe sailboats or fishing boats or ferries, or maybe just lifeboats. But the important thing was all of them heard the CALL and they responded to save the trapped soldiers. They were all in. In fact, they were called "the little ships of Dunkirk."

Hear this: Our cause is just as great as Dunkirk. There are people who have been stranded or wounded by the Evil One. We ALL need to hear the CALL to help them. We have the choice to just sit back and watch the professionals help, or we can be like the many British civilians who joined in the rescue at Dunkirk. Or more rightly we can see that unless everyone, and I mean EVERYONE joins in, we will NOT succeed in saving all the people who are asking to be saved. If you think everyone is not needed, then you don't know Dunkirk.

It will mean equal sacrifice, though not equal giving. Some may have a lot and will be contributing their yacht to save maybe 100 or 200. Some may say, but I just have a rowboat. But to those 3 or 5 you save, you mean the world to them.

If you say, "but I'm just one person," remember Dunkirk needed 700 people saying, "I'm just one person." If you think it will not take sacrifice for the safety of our church and its future, then you don't know Dunkirk

If by chance, you don't think there is a horrible enemy out there, then you don't know Dunkirk or you don't know our enemy is far greater than any Napoleon or Adolf Hitler or Osama Ben Laden.

Satan is real and he is, says the Bible, like a prowling lion hoping to devour us. He is out to get us and our loved ones and he doesn't play fair

and he is banking on, hoping many will not answer the call.

God has called First Presbyterian to be a stronghold, to be a fortress, to be a strong tower, to be a refuge, to be a castle, to be a key church to protect Hawaii, to be a power projection platform to save the world.

We ALL have to be involved. Perish the thought if we choose to be just watching in the stands while others sacrifice and get in their boats and try their best to cross a channel to save those who desperately need the love of God....while we sit in our lounge chairs and be content at being spectators.

As the Bible says, the fact of the matter is that: *Unless the LORD guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain.* (Psalm 127: 1)

We ask the Lord to guard and guide this church. And what does He require of us but to be fully involved in making this castle strong....and active in helping those in need. He gave His life for us. He is asking to give our lives for others.

So today or tonight we hand in our pledge cards to give beyond or normal tithes and offerings. Unless we are as BOLD and COURAGEOUS as the people of Dover where all participate and all do their part, many will die eternally without God.

At this time, I am grateful to announce that we have received nearly \$600,000 in pledges, a fifth of that in cash! That is nearly 119 people or families so far, who are SACRIFICIALLY putting their boats in the water to save others. Hallelujah! Still a long way to go to reach \$1.8M, but this is a great start!

But we all need to all be a part of it. The soldiers and civilians at Dover Castle sacrificed greatly living in underground tunnels for years monitoring the communication of the Nazis. For Dunkirk, everyone used his or her boat to sacrifice. They used what they already had.

They sailed with danger above them, below them, and in the water itself.

Have we not said that First Prez is a hospital for sinners and not a museum of saints? And if a hospital, we all need to be part of the restoration to health and not part of the problem.

Know today that if you feel like a soldier on the beach of Dunkirk who is trapped, afraid, in danger, and in need of help or protection, God offers you His help. He will guard you. For the Lord makes His promise in the Bible:

1 Sam 2:9 - He will GUARD the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.

Psalm 12:7 - You, O LORD, will protect us; you will GUARD us from this generation forever.

Psalm 17:8 - GUARD me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings,

Psalm 25:20 - O GUARD my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

I close with this thought of the allies who saw their comrades get rescued. They were left alone to fight the huge machine of Hitler. France was enemy-occupied territory, and civilians there had to be known as the French Resistance to battle in whatever method they could to keep the good fight. They didn't have the advanced weapons the Nazis had.

But they had faith that somewhere across the English Channel one day, a kingdom would send an armada back with even greater force to save them. So they fought on in faith and with a desperate hope that a King might send help. As Churchill said an empire from across the waters might save them. And in reality that day came. It is known as D-Day when the Allied Forces returned on June 6, 1944 landing in France in Normandy, this

time with the United States as an ally.

And likewise today, if you are going through a tough time, you might think, I know this world is not our own but I am fighting my struggles all on my own, but I will try to fight the good fight and keep the faith.

But one day a KING will return with a mighty Army of angels, and He will come back and vanquish the foe of Evil and He will restore peace and joy once again. We believe that one day Jesus the true King of kings will return with His angelic army and He will restore the world and bring justice and peace to the land once again.

For now, He asks you to join Him and his Resistance fighting force in this spiritual Dunkirk, and make a pledge not just to a Capital Appeal but a pledge to build a strong tower, and to help save others in the name of our Lord, to be in His Majesty's service, the true Royal forces for the true King Jesus Christ.

So may we man our boats whether big or small and let us launch them all into the waters however troubled they may be, that we may be courageous and generous in the name of our Lord.

Amen? Amen! Let's pray. Tonight we celebrate 10 years in our castle here in Ko'olau. Thank You Lord Jesus for Your provision and providence. May we be faithful in response to your faithfulness. In Christ's name. Amen.

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Note: Sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by emailing: fpchkoolau@gmail.com