



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### September 10, 2017

### “No Rival, No Equal” (How to Pray Series)

### The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

**W**e are on a series on How to Pray. We have talked about a variety of rationales as to why we need to pray, as well as methods for how to pray – like the acronyms GRAFT based on St. Ignatius’ Daily Examen; and LEAP BLT TO-GO for intercession.

My sermon today might seem a bit off-center of our sermon series on prayer, but actually it is at the very core of prayer.

Today’s talk is why Jesus Christ is the one, true God. If we don’t believe that, our prayers will always be off-target; won’t be as effective. We won’t really know whom we are talking to, what we are praying for, and what God can really do.

In our American society today, believing that Jesus is the ONLY true God and the ONLY way to salvation may sound arrogant, small-minded, narrow-minded, or having no mind at all. It’s generally referred to as being intolerant—the biggest no-no in our world today.

But as we have sung on previous Sundays the song *What a Beautiful Name*, there is a line there that says, “What a beautiful name it is, nothing compares to this; You have no rival, You have no equal.”

So I am going to tackle this topic head on that in Jesus Christ there is no rival, there is no equal. Unless we settle this in our hearts, unless we can say to Jesus that He has no rival, He has no equal, our prayers will be weakened.

To be honest, even if we claim to be a follower of Jesus, we can get caught up in other false gods, such as money, success, fame, power, sex. Today is a call to be all-in for Christ as the ONLY true God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords.

Soul Survivor Church pastor and friend Andy Croft helped me greatly in the template of this talk, so if the points are helpful, give him the credit, and if you don’t like them, blame me.

What does the Bible say about Jesus being the only God and the only way to salvation? Here is what Jesus said in the gospel of John in the New Testament to one of Jesus’ followers named Thomas, who doubted a lot:

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Jesus didn’t say “I am A way” or “I am A truth” or “I am A life.” Jesus said, “I’m it! The only way, the only truth, the only life.”

Later in the New Testament in the book of Acts, which is about the events of the early church, a thoughtful, intelligent Greek physician named Luke quotes Peter, the early leader of the church. Peter was a man who lived with Jesus for three years – day and night. He saw what Jesus was like. Luke wrote that according to Peter:

*“There is salvation in no one else [other than Jesus], for there is no other name*

*under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*

This sounds so exclusive. Christianity believes that its way is the only way. The reality is that it’s the nature of all beliefs – like for Buddhism, Islam, even atheism – all followers of those movements believe they are right and the others are wrong.

We could say, “How arrogant it is to say ours is the only way. Better to be more intellectual, just, and fair and say instead that all roads lead to God.”

No, all roads DON’T lead to God in the same way. Nor do all roads and religions teach how to live here on earth in the same way. When you delve into reading other religions, you will see that how the after-life looks, how we deal with revenge and pay back, and what counts in this life are not the same for all religions. They are drastically different. It’s like sailing out in the open ocean. It may look like we are all going in the same direction, but if you’re even just a few degrees off, you will end up in totally different places.

Some people think religion should be a PREFERENCE, like preferring Italian food over Chinese or over French food. Christianity works for you? Great! But it doesn’t work for me, so I will make my own personal religion. It’s just a preference since it all will be the same in the end anyway.

If we’ve come to think of Christianity as a preference, then we have a problem.

**A**ctually, Christianity is a serious statement of truth. There is no wiggle room. Jesus is saying I am The Only Way for salvation. Follow my Word and Spirit and Mission – My compass makes a difference in your life today.

But when we hear that, something in us may say, “No, it is a preference! It is not an absolute because there are no absolutes (or so we think). We are a free-thinking, western, sophisticated, developed-world people.”

But there ARE absolutes! People used to think that the earth was flat. If there are flat-world thinkers today, they can say, “You may say that the earth is round, but I prefer to say it is flat.” You can say it is a preference, but you are flat out wrong if you think the earth is flat.

We host blood drives here. The Blood Bank loves our church. (And thank you, Pat Wrath and Jeanne Holm for your many years of service in running the blood mobile operation for our church as they are stepping down this year.) Not only do we give a lot of pints of blood—like the astounding 46 pints we collected last Sunday from the 55 donors—but we also have what is called negative-type blood. The bank needs our blood because patients who need negative blood have to have negative blood type.

If you need negative type blood and a nurse or a doctor says, “Oh, that’s just your preference. But I think you could take a positive type blood for a transfusion.” Guess what? You could get really sick or die if you take that blood! Because blood type has to be matched. There is no gigantic wiggle room of what types you can take. Blood type is a statement of truth. It’s not a preference of flavor. There is only one way, one truth, one life to live.

When it comes to Jesus, it is a statement of truth. He says, “I am The only way.” When you take communion, what does Jesus say? “This is My blood of my covenant with you for the forgiveness of

sins.” He is saying, “When you drink the cup, that is My blood type in you. You need My blood type to go to heaven. You need my blood type to have an abundant life here on earth. It’s right now you need My blood for a fulfilled and transformed life, not just later for heaven.

But there may be a voice in you that says, “Come on, Dan, why can’t all the religions be equally true?” I say, “Then you really haven’t dug deep into each of the faiths and studied them!” I have read the Koran three times. I have some grasp of Buddhism, and the different religions are not the same and are not equally true.

When it comes to who is sitting on the throne of the universe, it is completely different. The Buddhist doesn’t think anyone is sitting on the throne. There is no personal God on the throne. In fact, Buddha never said he was the way or a God. Go to Hinduism and there are many gods sitting on the throne. Jews believe in God but not Jesus. Muslims believe in one God but not a trinity of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The agnostic isn’t sure if anyone is sitting on the throne. The atheist says, “What throne?”

For the atheist and the agnostic, they cannot agree on an ultimate hope for here on earth. Why it might be a President Trump or a President Obama or depending on what country a Putin or a Merkel or the Queen of England. In the sailing metaphor, the agnostic ship is not moving at all, and the atheist is moving in any direction the wind blows for there are no absolutes.

Religions are not all the same, any more than if I were to say to Pam, “Pam why does it have to be a statement of truth that you are the only woman in my life, the only way for happiness? There are many women I could choose. Pam, does it matter?” And Pam replies, “Oh yes, it matters, if you want to live.”

There are huge differences between women! Of course women may say, “But all you men are the same. All you can think about is....” Skip that.

When it comes to Christianity and other faiths, you can say you’re all wrong. Or one is right and the rest are wrong. But you can’t say they are all right cause they are critically and dramatically different. But IF Jesus is really God, IF God really came to earth in the form of a human, it would be massively important to check Him out.

Read Jesus’ words. Really study His actions. If you wanted a God, wouldn’t you want one that is like Jesus? Imagine if He were really fully God and yet fully human as He claims.

It would revolutionize your life if you followed the personal, relational, and tender Jesus and not some human philosophy or behavioral discipline.

The trouble is many so-called followers of Jesus are not living like He asked us to. And this leads to one of the toughest arguments against Christianity. People will say, “Look at the Christians. They claim they are right and others are wrong. Yet, they seem so hypocritical, judgmental, unloving, and at times fanatical and dangerous.

Look at the history of some of the horrors done in the name of the faith! This kind of Christian can lead to terrorism of other religions. How can Jesus be the only way?

Hear this: when there are inconsistencies of how the Church or Christians have acted, or where even Christianity has led to violence or hate, I am reminded of what Tim Keller says: “It is not because they are Christians. It is that they are not Christian enough.”

It’s dumb, stupid, sinful Christians who are the problem; not Jesus. I had a friend who was a real jerk, and then he became a Christian. But he had a hard time following Jesus.

One day a friend to me, said, "Great, before he was a jerk, now he is a Christian jerk!"

Yes, let's confess it. It's Christians who are not Christian enough who are the problem with a lot of bad public relations. It is NOT Jesus who is the problem. Jesus said, "You'll know if one is a true follower by the fruit the person bears."

Yes, there are Christian jerks in the world, but there are also a lot of Christians who have contributed much to improving our world. Look at all of the human relief agencies started by Christians: Compassion International, World Vision, Red Cross, Salvation Army, International Justice Mission, Prison Fellowship, and movements started by people like Mother Teresa, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther King Jr., and William Wilberforce. Think of all of the hospitals and schools started by followers of Christ.

This is when you have to go back to the teachings of Jesus. Where does it say Jesus led people to violence? Never. Where does it say Jesus was a leader of bigotry and prejudice. Nowhere.

Read the accounts of Jesus. Is He not kind and loving to all people, especially to those who are weak? Yes. He's a healer. Does He not have close tender loving experiences reaching out to lepers, adulterers, embezzlers like Zacchaeus, murderers and terrorists like the apostles Paul, liars like Peter, doubters like Thomas?

Jesus stuns the world when he says, love your enemies and be kind to those who you consider ungrateful and wicked? Sure, some religions might say this, but they might also say you have to be a monk or priest to have a shot at Nirvana.

Jesus is so inclusive. He is the One who says be kind to the outsider or the Samaritan of your culture. He says you are going to be in big trouble if you are not ACTIVELY working to help the widows, the imprisoned, the homeless, the

hungry, and the thirsty. And if you are not, then maybe your claim of following and loving Jesus is in question by the Lord Himself. Jesus says you will be known by your fruit.

Jesus is incredibly INCLUSIVE. In the Bible we see that He loved the leper, the sinner, the poor, the grieving, the morally corrupt, the outcast. And here we come to one of the biggest questions about the wrongfully labeled exclusive nature of Jesus: "What about those who have never heard about Jesus or have rejected Him? Are they all going to hell? God cannot be loving if there is a hell."

Well, God is a gentleman. If someone chooses to reject God, He gives them the free will to make that choice. But if God is love, and we want to go to a place away from God, then that would be hell, a place of no love. It's our choice. But what if they seemingly didn't have a choice?

When I hear such questions, I know that it often comes from a tender spot for themselves or their loved ones who are not Christians. I greatly empathize with those who ask such questions.

My father was not raised a Christian, and as far as I know he died not as a Christian. So this is not academic to me. This is a tender question. Know this is an important question. Who wants our loved ones to go to hell?

Our first concern is that it doesn't seem fair. Our friends, our loved ones were good people. And what about all of the other people? Why can't God accept everyone? Why can't we believe in universalism where everyone gets in to heaven? I would say, "Come on. Let's think deeper on that."

If God accepted everyone into Heaven, then that would mean He really doesn't care about justice and evil. Let all the Hitlers and the Osama Bin Ladens into heaven with your kind grandmother. Is that fair?

Okay, you mentioned "my kind grandmother." So why doesn't God, in His infinite wisdom, let in all of the good people into heaven and eternally kill of the bad?

Well, the foundation of the Christian faith is that you cannot be saved on the basis that you are good. This is a hard part of our faith for some people because we have in our mind who is good and who is bad. And also have this American mind that if I work hard and achieve certain things, then I am good.

But in the Bible, Jesus questions what is truly good in our society's eyes. Is it money, power, being sexy, being accomplished or popular? If we think we need to be good rule-keepers, know that Jesus never ever got mad at a sinner. Never! Search the gospels. He never got mad at those sick, whether spiritually or physically or emotionally sick. The only people He got mad at were those who thought they were good, who thought they were so good that they were better than others because they kept all the world's rules.

But when you really got down to people's souls as only Jesus could, under the paint, under the veneer of being good on the outside, you found they were judgmental, legalistic, and didn't really have a heart for those different than they – the poor, the culturally or ethnically different, the widows, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness.

In the Bible, these kinds of people were called the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were so into religion, that they did not have a relationship with Jesus. Jesus doesn't like religion. It's not about rules and regulations and rituals.

So the irony is that if you have evaluated yourself and think you are so good that you deserve heaven, then that puts you in the Pharisee class. Maybe you have a blind spot and you are not as good as you think.

**T**hat's why our church always tries to emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus. Know Him. Trust Him. Experience His tender kindness. And only when we love Him, then it is not a duty to keep the rules to help the downtrodden, the poor, the ungodly. We do it out of love for our Heavenly Father.

God will fairly judge people, especially depending on the knowledge they received. God is a God of grace, which means He chooses us, and it's not because we are good or smart. Heaven is not just for those with the highest test scores or the most sports trophies. Heaven is not for those with the best SAT scores. He chooses us out of grace. That is why the Bible talks about our being adopted by God the Father. He chooses us out of our poverty, lack of opportunity, lack of love, or lack of morality, and then floods us with His tender care. God is the God of grace. Grace means it is outside the rules of how we think life or He will act.

So let me go back to what about those who have never heard about Jesus or have died without knowing Him. The basis of our faith is that God is just, kind, providential and sovereign, meaning He is wise in love and in His care for us. He also always acts in grace. And it is really about you. You can worry about other people, but what are you going to do with the knowledge you have about Jesus?

If grace means it is God's love OUTSIDE of the rules of what humans might think is fair— let me say this. When I think about my late dad, I think of a great man, a good man, an honest man of tremendous integrity. I couldn't ask for a better, kinder father to me. His anniversary to my mom is in two days. He died unexpectedly in his bedroom one night. I can wonder, like many of you about your loved ones, is my dad in heaven?

For me personally, as I look at Jesus and know that grace is always outside of the so-called rules or outside of our knowledge, I hope that just before my

dad died that Jesus appeared and said, "Hey, it's Me. Let Me tell you about who I am. I would want You to acknowledge who I am and then trust and follow me. For I am the Lord, the way, the truth and the life. So take My hand."

I am hoping, based on what I know about my dad, that he would have said, "Oh yes. I will."

This is not universalism. No, it is still a faith based in the fact that we can only be saved by Jesus Christ. He is still the only way, not by being good or by good works but by the grace of Jesus.

I do know anecdotally that missionaries tell me how their Muslim friends have had whispers, dreams, and visions of Jesus coming to them and saying, "Follow me," and the people decide to follow Jesus.

You may say there's no example of that in the Bible. But in Chapter 9 of the Book of Acts in the Bible, Jesus appears in a vision to one of the greatest terrorists of the church of all time—a man named Saul. Jesus told him, "It's me Jesus. Stop persecuting Me by your violent acts." You can read about it in Acts chapter 9.

And what happened when Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision? Later Saul changed his name to Paul and this former terrorist became the early church's chief church planter, chief theologian and the most prolific writer we have in the New Testament in our Bible. That is what it means to be truly born again.

There are other vision stories throughout the Bible, like an angel telling Mary and then Joseph that she was going to give birth to Jesus and later to run to Egypt or else Jesus will be killed. Crazy acts of grace outside the rules.

While on earth, Jesus said He was God. That's why they killed Him. It was blasphemy. Buddha didn't claim he was God, nor Mohammed nor Joseph Smith. Jesus said, "I am the Messiah – The light

of the World, the way, the truth, the life." And because of His claims, He was crucified for His so-called blasphemy. Either He was crazy, a lunatic, or He knew better, which makes Him a deceiver, a liar. Or He was truly the Lord. Those are the only three options.: lunatic, liar, or Lord.

One has to come to grips with which one it is and if He is the Lord, then we need to really, authentically follow Him. And get this: He died and came back to life here on earth. No other major religion claims that. No one could find His body. Neither enemies nor friends. Lots of people claimed to have encountered Jesus after He died.

The Bible describes His followers as weak and timid, but after the resurrection they changed into bold and courageous people unto death. And the Bible has all these interesting accounts of the resurrection that make me want to believe the Bible more and that it is not propaganda. Why were women the main witnesses of the resurrection when it is a culture when women can't be witnesses? If I were to make up this story, I wouldn't use women.

If this is a fake story, then why have disciples who were so dumb? Why have two disciples on the road to Emmaus not even recognize Jesus after His resurrection? They could have written a better story.

Jesus could have been like Superman, who busts out of the tomb and then jumps up and flies around Israel. No, instead we get this seemingly pedestrian, boring resurrection appearance. After He is risen, Jesus cooks fish on a hibachi at the sea of Galilee to show Himself to His disciples for the first time. Come on! If you were going to make this fictitious, make it better – like He miraculously makes it the best Superb or Kozo Sushi combined with Gina's kalbi and CPK's barbecue chicken salad and a Ted's banana cream pie! But just fish on a hibachi?

**T**he disciples didn't even recognize Him at first as He stood on the beach. If fictitious, they could do better screenwriting than that. Why not a new feeding with 5,000 poké bowls?

As I am about to end my message, there may be some of you who might be saying, "I just don't know if Jesus is real, and that He can help me supernaturally more than if I were in a different religion that has more gods, or a behavioral practice of meditation."

I would just ask that in your deepest, darkest moments, is there not a time of wondering there has to be something better? The illness, the trauma, the loneliness is so great, there has to be something more.

And maybe the Christians who have strayed looking to other gods might need to get back to Jesus. There has to be something better than just dabbling in following Jesus.

Maybe today is the day we say, "I need to be all in for Jesus because He is really God, our Lord."

But if the abundant life that Jesus offers is for here and not just heaven, why is there so much suffering in my life? Here's my answer to that. Christ our Lord gives us strength in the midst of suffering, not apart from it. If Jesus suffered on this earth, why do we think as His servants would get a better life than our Lord? But the abundant life He offers us is that there can be TRUE joy and strength in the midst of pain and sorrow.

I just came back from the Philippines, and while there I met a recent graduate of the college program of Compassion International. (Our own church members have sponsored more than 20 of these college students but this one was not sponsored by our church member.) As I listened to her story, my heart broke but then got put back together.

She was raised in a Christian family. Her father was the pastor. When she was 15, a group of girls began to bully her in school. She was beat up often. And one day while she was at a party, two girls slipped something in her drink, and then got some boys to rape her.

Two months later her dad, the pastor of the church, had an affair with the worship leader. They not only left the church but the father abandoned his family too. As a result, her church split. She was devastated. Her so-called friends, her church, and the family she knew were no more. She understandably then became paranoid and had to take sleeping pills and anti depressants just to go to sleep. My heart broke as I listened to all this. How bad can it get for a 15-year old? What would her life turn out to be? She said she stopped loving God. She did not believe He loved her anymore, and I could understand why.

Some of you in this room may be going through this kind of pain or have gone through this.

I asked her, "What got you through it?" She said it was her devotional life. She eventually turned more towards Jesus. Every day she would read the Bible and pray. But how did she even begin to go in that direction?

She said she believed for a while that God stopped loving her. I would understand that, but then one night, supernaturally God whispered in her ear, "Turn your Bible to Romans 8:28." And so she got her Bible and turned to that verse. And she read: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose."

She realized that though she stopped loving God, God never stopped loving her. She said she still doesn't understand the specific reason why God allowed her to experience such a tragic event. She said, "All I knew was that God loves me

so much because even in my brokenness He still chose to pursue me."

She said after that night she decided to go to another school to get away from her perpetrators. She tried to pull herself up from drowning and to live normally. She told me that it was during that time when she realized that we always have two choices in every setback of our lives – either you choose to continue your life and live victorious or to stop from where you are and accept that you are defeated.

So I asked her, how did you get through those years to keep the faith? She said regularly prayed, read the Bible, and journaled to God her prayers. She said Compassion International's mentors also helped her. They gave her continual emotional and spiritual support, and practically, they got her a psychiatrist for her medication, a psychologist to help her cope, and a lawyer from the International Justice Mission to help her fight for her rights. Next year, she hopes to go to law school and someday work for a group like International Justice Mission to help other victims like her.

And I am thinking if Jesus is the only way, and is good, why did the Lord allow her to be raped? She said, and I quote: "Simple—because He is good. We cannot put Him in a box and measure His goodness according to our own perception and understanding. God is good in the way that we can never ever fathom."

You see, knowing that Jesus is the only true God, a loving God, does not mean in this sinful, hurtful, evil world that He will protect us from all pain. He is not an anesthesiologist who numbs our emotions or one who puts us in a plastic bubble. No, following the Lord Jesus means we still live in a painful world, and we will still be betrayed, but He will give us purpose and strength like no one other.

**J**esus was betrayed and suffered on this earth. Why should we, His servants, be more privileged than our Lord and live an easier life? This is real. This is straight talk.

It is no coincidence that you are here today. For some here today, like that 15-year old Compassion child who heard God whisper in her ear, this moment God whispers to you, "Trust me! Trust me for, yes, I am the one true God. There is no rival, no equal. And I have chosen you to love and help."

For some, today is the tipping point for you to say, "Okay, I want to be all in and follow you, Jesus, for you truly are God and I want you to be my Lord. I will trust you and follow you. No more running. No more hesitation. No more wandering."

If that is your prayer to be a follower of Jesus, then during this last song come up to the front and I and others will pray for you to ask God to seal that decision in your heart. Maybe God has been whispering in your ear for a while and now this is your way to respond.

And if you are the only one who comes forward, that is fine. Do what is right. It'll just be you and me praying. I know it will take courage, but join me in front of the stage. And if there is a friend with you with whom you want to walk up with you, then please do so.

And for others who just feel you need prayer, or you want to renew your faith, or you have some other issue that is pressing on your heart, maybe something emotional or a physical ailment that is concerning you or maybe scaring you, I am going to ask you to stand right now. I will ask those around them to quietly pray for them either silently, using the LEAP BLT TO GO to listen and pray with your eyes open and asking permission to lay a hand on that person for that blessing or need.

So let us sing, and while we sing people who want to make a commitment to Christ, please come forward.