



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

September 24, 2017

**"Do Justice Monday: People of Blessings" - How to Pray Series**  
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**G**ood morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff here at the church. As always, thanks for the opportunity to speak today, and to serve this church.

We continue in our How to Pray sermon series and the title of the sermon today is "Do Justice Monday: People of Blessing". That might make no sense to you right now, but hopefully it will by the end.

As we go through the sermon, ask yourself two questions: 1) What is God saying to me? And, 2) What does He want me to do about it?

Our passage for today is from the gospel of John, chapter 13. Jesus, the night before His crucifixion, has a final dinner with His disciples, a last supper. He washes their feet and He speaks to them, teaching them at length. In this midst of teaching, Jesus says this:

*34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

As you heard during announcements, yesterday, as a church, we had our Third Annual

Do Justice Saturday, in which about 200 people from our church served at 14 sites around the island.

We walked the streets and administered basic wound care for our houseless friends. We worked with a residential facility for underage survivors of human trafficking. We hosted a reunion party for siblings who live with different foster families. Just like Jesus, we washed the feet of the residents of the IHS shelter.

My family and I served at Linapuni Elementary School, which is located in the heart of the Kuhio Park public housing project, where we helped Lauren Stein put on a health and wellness fair.

A huge thank you to organizer Carolyn Grossnickle and all the site leaders and volunteers.

Do Justice Saturday gets its name from a verse in the Old Testament of the Bible, where the prophet Micah says: *"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

If you missed the opportunity to serve on Do Justice Saturday yesterday, you're in luck because

the point of Do Justice Saturday isn't that we served one day yesterday. It's that it is a catalyst for service and engagement the other 364 days of the year. The point is that tomorrow is Do Justice Monday. And the day after that is Do Justice Tuesday. And the day after that is Do Justice Wednesday. We all get to serve and bless our city all throughout the week, every day.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Tim instead of saying 200 people serving at 14 sites, said 200 sites. And I love that! Because that is actually more true. Tomorrow, and every day this week, this church will be sending 1,000 people to their jobs, and schools, and apartments and neighborhoods. That's 1,000 different sites. And our call is to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God in each of those places.

We have been exploring two themes recently in our prayer sermons: being empowered by the Holy Spirit and being a church on a mission...and they are intimately connected.

Pastor Mike Pilavachi, a friend of our church who will be speaking at the HIM conference in the spring, has said that the Holy Spirit comes to the church on His way to the world. God's Spirit comes to the church on His way to the world.

**W**e as a community are growing in prayer, talking and listening to God, recognizing His voice, and seeing Him at work in the world—not only for our meetings on Sunday morning but for God’s world out there. Because God is at work in His world.

We had a great sermon and service last week, where Pastor Dan taught about healing. We are hearing amazing stories about how God is answering prayers. If you have a story, please email or call or drop us a note.

Some weeks, our sermons focus on the gift of prayer, like last week and in the next few weeks. This week, we take a step back to remember the gift itself isn’t the only focus. There is the gift of prayer, but more importantly, there is the Giver and the recipient. God is the gift-giver, for His glory, that He may be praised. And the recipient of the gift of prayer isn’t just sitting in this room. In fact, the recipients are also out there, in the city, and in the world.

As we’ve said before, we’re not in the church business; we’re in the Kingdom business. The Holy Spirit comes to the church, on His way to the world. We are called and sent to be People of Blessing.

The phrase, People of Blessing, comes from Abraham, from whom our faith descends. Abraham is introduced in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, chapter 12. At the time, his name is still Abram and this is how his story, and our story begins. He is *called*, and *sent* to be a person of blessing:

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. **2** “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name

*great, and YOU WILL BE A BLESSING. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; AND ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU.”*

Do you know who carries that promise of blessing today? Us! As the old Sunday School song goes, Father Abraham had many sons and daughters, and I am one of them and so are you. We are the descendants of that call to Abraham and like Abraham, we are called and we are sent to be people of blessing. And all the peoples on earth are supposed to be blessed through us.

There is a story from Houston, after the Hurricane. It captures this call on us to live lives as people of blessing.

During the Hurricane in Houston, some of the roads flooded fast, and became lakes and rivers. And at one point, someone standing by one of the roads noticed a man, wading into the neck-deep water, and swimming from submerged car to submerged call, looking to rescue anyone who might be trapped in the cars.

And they called to him, “Come back, it’s too dangerous”. And the man yelled back, “I’m not coming back until I check every car twice!” Here’s a picture someone took of the man.



When he came out of the water, people praised him and

thanked him, and he turned out to be a faithful Christian, who said that because church service was canceled due to the storm, he decided to go out and help people who might be in need.

He was just standing, looking at the flooding, when a woman next to him said that there was someone trapped in one of the submerged cars. And no one else was doing anything. So he decided to go. So he called his wife to tell her what he was going to do, then he waded into the water.

Days later, a reporter tracked the man down. His name is Dale Carter, and he said this to the newspaper:

“God always has a purpose and a mission for you. I didn’t know I was going over there on a mission. I was just going over there for my own sake to look.”

“God always has a purpose and a mission for you.” We as a church remember that God always has a purpose and mission for us. We are called and sent to be people of blessing.

We talked a few weeks ago how we are the fragrance of Christ to a world in need, looking at this passage in the second letter to the Corinthian church:

**14** *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.*

**15** *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*

**A** member of the congregation came up to me a few weeks after we looked at that passage, and she shared that she had gone to her hairdresser. And she just went in like normal, said hello to everyone with a smile, and sat down. And at one point her hairdresser said to her, "When you came in, you brought this incredible light and love with you. The shop just filled up with light." And our member replied, "That's not me! That's Jesus!"

The Holy Spirit comes to the church, on His way to the world. We are called and sent to be a people of blessing.

Another member of the congregation shared a great story about how he is being transformed by this How to Pray sermon series. This gentleman shared that he was visiting an 80-year-old friend of his. And as he was leaving his friend said, "You know, I'm going to have a surgical procedure on my throat tomorrow."

So our member said, "Oh, okay, I'll pray for you." And he started walking out of his friend's house. And after he had taken a few steps, he heard a voice in his head say, "Don't say I'll pray for you later, pray for people right now." And that voice, was either the Holy Spirit, or it was Pastor Dan, who actually preached that exact sentence a few weeks ago!

Remember the sermon on LEAP BLT TO GO?

So our member, stopped, turned around and went back to his friend and asked, "You know, can I pray for you right now?" And his friend looked a little surprised, but said, "Sure." So our member asked, "Is it all right if I put my hand on your shoulder?" (which Pastor Dan also taught) and his friend said,

"Yes." And our member prayed, a short simple prayer: "God, be with my friend during his surgery tomorrow, guide his doctors, heal him. In Jesus' name, Amen." That's it. And at the end of the prayer, the friend said, "You know, no one has ever prayed for me before. Thank you."

Our member had the privilege of being able to bless this 80 year-old-man for perhaps the first time in his life. That's the B in BLT: BLESS.

We are called and sent to be people of blessing. And there is this gift of prayer that we are growing in, learning about, and we point people to God the gift-Giver, and we remember that the recipients aren't just in here, but also out there.

Let me tell you my own story. A few weeks ago, I had a call with someone from the Road Runner's club, because they were holding a race on the Old Pali Road. And we had to talk about logistics—parking restrictions, Port-a-Potty locations, race route. And talking to the organizer, she learned that I work at the church, and I learned that she has a variety of physical ailments, so she couldn't race anymore, which is why she did the organizing.

At the end of our call, she said, "Okay, now that I know you're at a church, please say a prayer for me!" And in my head, I heard this voice: "Don't say a prayer later, say a prayer right then." So I said, "Okay. Have a nice race." And I hung up. Because they're not all going to be success stories.

We are all just beginners, learning, stepping out in faith. Sometimes. But God is full of

grace, all the time, and we are being transformed as a community.

Our verse again for today: John 13:34 *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

You know, the Christian church transformed the world by being people of blessing, by loving one another, and loving the desperate world around them.

And that early Roman world where Jesus was born was desperate and brutal. The ancient writer Cicero, citing Roman law, wrote: "Deformed infants should be killed." Seneca wrote, "We drown children who are at birth weakly and abnormal."

The ancient writer Plutarch, discussing the casual acceptance of child sacrifice, wrote, "The people of Carthage offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds while the mother stood by without tear or moan."

In that brutal world, the early Christian church became known for their selfless acts of kindness. They actually loved their enemies and forgave their persecutors. They cared for the poor and fed the hungry. They went to the garbage dumps in places like Ephesus and took home the babies that were left there to die.

Christians were the most stunningly different people anyone had seen in the brutal Roman Empire.

In the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, famine and plague hit the Romans cities and Romans fled the disease and death of the cities for the country. But one group stayed behind: people of blessing, who understood that the Holy Spirit has come to the church on His way to the world.

The historian Eusebius wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> century: "All day long [the Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all."

The fourth century Roman Emperor Julian wrote in dismay to his pagan priests because he was horrified by how Christian compassion had transformed a tiny religious sect on the outskirts of the empire, into a cultural force that was threatening to overtake the belief in the Roman gods.

Emperor Julian wrote, "When it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the priests [of the Roman gods], then I think the impious Galileans [that is, Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. They support not only their poor but ours as well, so that all men see that our people lack aid from us.

In fact, Emperor Julian proposed that the pagan Roman priests imitate the Christians' charity in order to bring about a revival of belief in the pagan Roman gods in the empire.

That effort failed because the Roman pagan religion couldn't sustain self-sacrificial love and compassion. And you know what? We can't sustain it on our own effort either.

Our verse again: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. *Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*"

There are two truths that sustained those early Christians, and must sustain us. **One:** the God of Jesus Christ is a God worth dying for, because He first demonstrated His love for us, by sending His Son, to die for us!

**Two:** We love with God's heart. Just like those pagan Roman priests, we can't generate enough love on our own. We are loved by God and we redistribute His love to the world.

We see the truth that God has bestowed all people with special dignity, and all people are worthy of being shown compassion, and mercy and love. That truth of God's love transformed the Roman Empire, and transformed our world, and it still has the power to transform our world. Amen? Amen!

The disciple John writes this in the letter 1 John 3: **16** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.*

**17** *If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18* *Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

One of our church's ongoing partnerships is Laundry Love, where we wash laundry for our houseless neighbors in Waimanalo. And someone there last month, as his clothes were being washed, kept walking around in

utter confusion, asking again and again, "Wait, Who are you? What are you doing? Why are you doing this?" He couldn't understand why people would be washing his laundry for free. Just like in ancient Rome, Christians today can still be the most stunningly different people anyone has seen, through our demonstration of God's love.

Some of you might be thinking, great, now I feel terrible for not helping more, or serving more. And that's not the point because we aren't the heroes of this story. We're not supposed to be the heroes. The hero of the story is God. God has been, is, and always will be the hero of the story.

Remember that story of the man in Houston, swimming from car to car. That is a picture of God—it's God searching from car to car, looking for us. It's Jesus' great love for us, His willingness to sacrifice everything for us, including His own life, to search for us, to seek and find us, no matter how desperate or difficult or dangerous. It Jesus who says as He searches for us, "I'm not coming back until I check every car twice." It's been God's story all along.

"Just as I have loved you... Jesus says". We are people of blessing only because we have experienced being found by a loving and seeking God, being a recipient of His great love for us. "Just as I have loved you," Jesus says, "Love one another".

Can I tell you one last story, about what I think it means to be people of blessing, people that love with a love that always reaches out, what I dream that our church looks like? From Florida, a few months ago, before the Hurricane hit, I read this story.

**A** family was at the beach. And two brothers, ages 8 and 11 years old, got caught out in the undertow, 100 yards from shore. And they were struggling to get back to shore, and started yelling for help. A couple on the beach heard them, and swam out to help the two boys, but they also got caught in the current. At that point the mother of the two boys swam out, but she got caught in the waves, too. In quick succession, the boys' uncle, grandmother, father, and another couple all swim out to help. And all of them, ten people now, are caught out in the ocean, barely treading water, struggling to stay alive.

This is where this story turns from a tragedy into a perfect picture of God's church, called and sent to be people of blessing.

On the beach, five strangers waded into the water, holding hands, shouting, "Form a human chain!" Five people quickly becomes 15 people, which quickly becomes 50 people, which became 80 people. All holding hands, reaching out to help those in need.

Here's a picture of the scene: Do you see that chain of people in the photo?



That chain reached the stranded swimmers. And they started handing each person back along the chain, until they made it back to the beach.

You want to hear an amazing thing? Some of the people in that

chain didn't know how to swim, but they were out there anyway, holding hands with stronger swimmers.

An hour after the boys first got caught, all ten swimmers were back safely on the beach. The mother of the boys said this later: "[That chain of people], they linked up wrists, legs, arms. If they were there, they were helping. It was beachgoers and the grace of God's will. That why we're here today."

Isn't this the perfect picture of God's church? What you want the church to be? Called and sent to be people of blessing? Reaching out, hand in hand, to a world in desperate need. Holding hands with each other, some stronger swimmers, some not swimmers at all, but all helping. Passing people along, back to God, who holds hands with us, who anchors that chain.

Time for Lab: It's the How to Pray Sermon Series, where we don't just talk about How to Pray, but we actually pray. The Holy Spirit comes to us, on His way to the world. We're called to be people of blessing. In a few moments, can we stand, and hold hands, and pray silently for whatever God is putting on your heart. That we, as a community, might reach out, now, and all week, to a world in desperate need of rescue.

This might be new, or uncomfortable for some of you, that's okay, you'll be holding hands with stronger swimmers. Some of you might not like holding hands and that's okay too— we've got a big vat of Purell hand sanitizer by the door.

Let's stand now, hold hands with your neighbor, and let's pray.

God, we are your people, holding hands with each other, and with You. You have called us to be people of blessing, to reach out to a world in need. We invite Your Spirit to fall upon us, on His way to the World. And now, we each pray, silently, for whatever You are putting on our hearts. Maybe it is a friend, a family member, a neighbor, a colleague, our government leaders, or children and people in the most desperate need. We lift whatever it is on our hearts to You now; we pass them as a community back to You and to Your care. [Silent Prayer]

Lord, hear our prayers. In Jesus's most powerful and loving name, all God's people say, Amen.

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*Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) and the audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by emailing: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*