



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Living In Community With One Another"

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**F**or those of you who are new to First Prez, I am not related to Dan Chun, although during the 12 years I worked at Hawaiian Islands Ministries, I was mistaken for his daughter Noelle Chun on more than one occasion. You know, "Chun", "Sung" - kinda rhymes. But over the years the Chun's have become family to me, and likewise First Prez has become my church family. It's been over a year since I came on staff serving the Women's ministry, Small Groups and Congregational life, and I love the life of our church community!

Last week we just finished the King David series, "Facing the Giants", with Nick Love giving a wonderful message about leaving a legacy of a heart after God. Today we launch a new series called "How to have Healthy Relationships". Over the next few weeks we are going to cover some really good topics like "Listening", "Sharing", "Gossip" and "How to Deal with Irritating People".

As we embark on this series on having healthy relationships, we begin by examining the life of a church community, a community of brothers and sisters in Christ, doing life together. What does it mean to live in community with one another?

When I first started to think about the context of a community, what came to mind was one of the

most dramatic memories of my life. People who come to know me realize I'm not a dramatic person...I can't stand drama. In fact, I'm pretty even keeled, some might say I'm flatline. That may be because I've had a lot of drama happen to me.

In 1981 my family moved to Beirut Lebanon. I was nine at the time. My sister was 13. My father was posted in Lebanon, serving his first assignment as Ambassador representing South Korea. There was just a handful of embassy staff. What started out as strangers and colleagues working together in a foreign country became a very close community of fellowship. I have memories of the staff coming over to the residence and sharing meals, singing karaoke, and laughing together. No, you can't take the karaoke out of Koreans no matter what country they go to.

Two years later, the suicide bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in April of 1983 became one of the deadliest attacks on a U.S. diplomatic mission. The blast killed 63 people, 17 of whom were Americans. It was not the safest place to live at the time, and as a child, I knew little except that it was not normal to hear bombings throughout the night and feel the earth tremble and shake. Finding shell casings on the

street, and drills at school of what to do when hearing gunfire, were commonplace at my school. It became very dangerous and orders were given to evacuate the South Korean embassy and residence. But my parents were out of the country on a business trip, and my sister and I were alone with no means to leave. We were stuck and stranded.

I'll never forget the next series of events, when one of the embassy men came to rescue us. It was early morning when he came. He told us to go into the back seat of the car and throw a blanket over us. He told us to be very quiet.

I recall peeking out as the light of dawn started to brighten the streets, and I could see barricades blocking roads, men with guns posted with on the streets. It's all a blur, but we were then driven to a beach, loaded onto a helicopter and dropped onto an Italian battleship. Our parents were waiting for our arrival in Cyprus.

Years later, when I asked my sister Dorothy why we had to hide under blankets, she said that foreign officials and family were being kidnapped for ransom, and that's why he hid us. This man, a colleague and friend, had taken great risk and overcame many obstacles to rescue us.

**W**ell this is a dramatic story, quite unusual I know, but this is the story that came to mind in the context of community. Today we examine what it means to be a church community, and as we go through the story in Mark chapter 2, I ask you to think about the ones who need rescue, the friends who help and ultimately bring them to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, open our minds and hearts to receive your Word and your truth. May you increase as we decrease. In Christ's name, Amen.

Our scripture today is found in Mark, Chapter 2. It is the story of the paralytic and his four friends who bring him to Jesus.

Let me set up the accounts in chapter one. Jesus begins His ministry; He goes out and preaches the good news, teaching at the synagogues of Galilee. He's not only teaching, but healing people and casting out evil spirits, and the things He's doing is attracting a lot of attention. He returns to Capernaum and the news of His coming immediately spreads around. The people are flocking to Jesus!

See what happens in chapter 2, verses 1-4:

*1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.*

*3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let*

*down the mat on which the paralytic lay.*

Get the picture here. Four men attempt to bring their paralytic friend to Jesus. But they can't get to Jesus because people have packed the house. In those days life in Palestine was very public. In the morning, the door of the house was open to anyone who wished to come in and out. The open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. So in no time, the crowd had filled the house to the max and even around the door. All were eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say. So what do the friends do? See verse four:

*Mark 2:4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.*

They go up to the roof, dig through it, and let down the mat! Let me describe the roof: The roof of a Palestinian house was flat with an outside staircase that went up to it. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, about three feet apart. The space between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tightly with clay and soil. Another account I read said that a first century home in Palestine had large stone tiles which were easy to remove and easy to replace. The tiles were sometimes covered with dirt or sod for insulation.

So this was a bit different than if the roof of this Grand Ballroom was torn up, or our houses. The roof was not completely destroyed—more like temporarily opened up. Still, it took a strong commitment from these determined four who

decided to bring the paralytic to Jesus. Do you think there were obstacles?

The most obvious obstacle was that their friend couldn't walk. He was paralyzed. But the fact that he couldn't walk didn't stop them—they went to him, picked up the mat, each friend to a corner, and carried him to Jesus.

They go all the way to the house and even there they have obstacles. The house was packed, people even spilling out the sides of the door. They could have said, "Hey guys, this isn't gonna work out. Forget about it!" But did the four friends call it quits? NO! They persisted! They were not giving up. So they go up to the roof.

I flash back to when it was me and my sister were stranded and I think of those at the embassy who went to great lengths save us. The man who came had to figure out how to get us out; he had to figure out what to pack; he got a car and a blanket for us to hide under; he figured how what route to take to avoid suspicion; he contacted the people who negotiated with other countries and lined up a helicopter for emergency transport to take us to the Italian battleship ready to receive us on landing, and reunite us with our parents in Cyprus. But when you're in a community, when you're in this fellowship, you do that for one another at all costs, at all risks. You use every ounce of creative and entrepreneurial spirit to help one another in need, especially for those who might be paralyzed or helpless with no way out.

Now remember I asked you, in the context of community, to think about the ones who need rescue, the friends who help and ultimately bring people to Jesus.

**W**hen we examine these four friends, we see some key things begin to emerge. We see that:

**1. There was community among the four friends.**

**2. They felt a burden for their friend in need.**

**3. They had the determination and faith to bring their friend to Jesus.**

Now let's break this down. What is community? Community is defined as the feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. The word "fellowship" means "communion, sharing in common".

In this community the four friends had this fellowship with one another, so much so that in this fellowship, they all felt the burden for their paralyzed friend, empathized with the pain, and wanted him to be healed. They did whatever it took to bring their friend to Jesus because they knew Jesus was the answer.

We began this series on having healthy relationships to lay down a foundation on community, the big base, and examine what it means to really be there for one another.

Now when we become believers in Christ, we learn to walk with Him and develop an intimate relationship with Him. And it's wonderful! But then, we're called into this community, into a fellowship with other believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're not meant to do it alone.

That means that we rejoice and celebrate with one another during great blessings. But in doing

life, there will be times when storms come, the winds will blow, and we might be down and out, unable to move forward, stuck, maybe even feeling paralyzed.

Maybe you've been there, or chances are you know someone who is there. My personal story of paralysis came when I experienced severe joint pain a few months after giving birth. For years I had yearned and prayed for a child, and after 14 years of marriage I gave birth to a baby boy. At first, when the joint pain came, I thought it was lack of sleep or exhaustion.

My husband went back to work and I was alone with the baby in the day. But when I could barely go down the staircase and each step sent shooting pain into my ankles and feet, when the pain in my knuckles and wrists kept me from opening a box of diapers, when my left shoulder froze and I lost range of motion, when I could no longer nurse or hold him, I remember sobbing on the floor of my living room, staring at my baby in his Boppy pillow. I felt unworthy to be a mother, and as a woman I felt I had utterly failed. I slumped into a depression.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe it was something physical, maybe emotional, something that hit you and left you feeling paralyzed—a diagnosis or illness, an accident, unemployment, a failed marriage, a betrayal, death of a loved one, or the shock of a financial loss.

But look at the four friends. Just as the four saw their friend paralyzed, recognized his need and brought him to Jesus, in this community we can also bring each other to Christ. It's during these times when the church community is needed most. Just as each friend took one corner of

that mat and carried their friend through the obstacles and barriers, we can be used by God to love one another to Christ.

God may not be calling you to grab the whole mat or grab the whole village. It might be one person, one corner. Maybe your corner is that prayer, a phone call, bringing them to the healing service, or taking a meal to someone. Maybe it's the invitation to church, or starting a small group in your neighborhood. Maybe it's telling them about Celebrate Recovery, Grief Share, or Alpha.

Ultimately, for me, it was the band of Christian brothers and sisters who kept carrying me back to Jesus, when I was frozen in depression, pain, and fear. It was the best friend who watched my child more times than I can count, to the point where people thought she had adopted a small Korean child.

It was the weekly Mighty Moms group, and my women's Small Group where we studied the book of Daniel, and I was strengthened in my faith. This church community nurtured me and were my source of encouragement and hope.

Let's read how this story ends:

**Mark 2:5** - *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

**6** *Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?"*

**9** Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? **10** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—

**11** "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." **12** And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

When Jesus observed the situation, it says He saw their FAITH. Everything about this situation points to the faith of these friends. They truly believed that if they could get this man to Jesus he would be healed. Then Jesus not only healed the man but proved His deity and authority to forgive sin. And the result? Everyone was amazed and glorified God. The idea from the Greek word translated "amazed" in verse twelve, is "out of their minds". Those who observed this miracle were literally beside themselves with astonishment.

So, what does a healthy church community look like? A healthy church community brings you into fellowship with one another, where we are authentic and where with faith and determination we can bring one another to Christ. It might be back to Christ, or to Christ for the first time. Let me emphasize that it's not going to be by our saving, or our talents, or "if I can just fix their problem." I'm not encouraging codependent relationships or unhealthy boundaries.

But being a believer in Christ means being in the body of Christ. Is this always easy? No, not

necessarily. There may be obstacles or we may feel like we don't have it all together, like "I don't have the faith and determination like those friends". The truth is, none of us are perfect or have it all together. I saw this at my last Alpha class and loved it so much I wanted to share it with you.

*Abraham -Was old.*

*Elijah – Was suicidal.*

*Joseph – Was abused.*

*Job – Went bankrupt.*

*Moses – Had a speech problem.*

*Gideon – Was afraid.*

*Samson – Was a womanizer.*

*Rahab – Was a prostitute.*

*Noah – Was a drunk.*

*Jacob – Was a cheater.*

*Jonah – Ran from God.*

*Peter – Denied Christ 3 times*

*Martha – Worried about*

*everything.*

*Zacchaeus – Was small and money hungry.*

*The Disciples – Fell asleep while praying.*

*Paul – A Pharisee who persecuted Christians before becoming one.*

If God can use them, do you think God can use you? Yes. Living in community with one another is sometimes going to be hard. But God is in the business of using imperfect people, like you and me, to bring us to a closer relationship with Him.

On the night of his betrayal Jesus says in John 13:1: "Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

He then washes the disciples feet and later in verse 34 we see a new commandment in John

13:34-35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

That night he was betrayed, flogged, stripped and beaten, pierced with nails then hung on a cross. Why? Because of LOVE. Because of His love for you and me. He loves you so much. He loves all of us so much that He made the greatest sacrifice, His life, because of His great love for you. He loves us to the end, then calls us to love each other. By this all will know that you are mine, if you love one another. Can we be that kind of community? Can we afford to not be that kind of community? Let us pray.

Lord, we may not have it all together, but we know that You are the one that calls us, to You and to each other. Thank you for Your sacrifice and Your unconditional love. Help us to go deeper, fill us with Your love and help us to carry one another in times of need and struggle. Help us understand what it means to be a church community, and how to develop the healthy relationships as You intended. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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