



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 23, 2016 - James 1:16-18

Where Does Good Come From?—Real Faith for Real People Series

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Good Morning! My name is Jenny Sung and I serve several ministries here at First Prez: the Women's Ministry, Small Groups and Congregational Life.

It is no small task to deliver the message to you today. Pastors Dan, Tim, and Steve all work so hard to deliver God's message, and draw us closer to His truths, every single week. In fact, this month is *Pastors Appreciation Month*, so can we thank our pastors right now with clapping and cheer? To our pastors, whether they are here or at another church, we appreciate all that they do to serve our congregations.

I am a lay pastor and my father asked, "Huh? What is that?" And I told him, "Well, we are commissioned as lay pastors. We can perform the sacraments—communion and baptisms, funerals and weddings, but we are not ordained."

He paused and then replied, "Oh! You're a little pastor! *Koh-mah-mok-sah*." Translated from Korean, this means "little pastor"! *Koh-mah* means little, half-pint, like a teeny little kid. So yes, I am in training, as a little kid pastor.

I like to think of myself more like a Padawan learner, an apprentice to Jedi masters, but my dad keeps me humble. I am a tiny little kid pastor.

Please stand with me in honor of God's Word as I read today's passage. It is from the Book of James, chapter 1, verses 16-18:

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved. ¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

¹⁸ In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we give You thanks, we give You praise, for all good things come from You. You are faithful and steady and we turn our hearts towards You. Open up our minds, our hearts and show us Your truth. Draw us nearer to You and block out any other voice but Yours. We love You. In Christ's Name, Amen.

We've been in the sermon series called "Real Faith for Real People" from the Book of James, written by the brother of Jesus Christ. The Book of James is not lightweight. James addresses issues head on—inward issues like temptation and sin, and outward issues like trials and struggle.

Next week, we'll hear about dealing with anger.

James has a huge pastoral heart and he wants his readers to be aware and astute. He presents God's truth without dilution.

James is writing to those who are exiled, the people of Israel scattered in places like Syria and Babylon—those outside of Palestine.

This is not too far removed from our context today, where many would say that the Church is in a time of exile; the Church is on the margins and no longer in the center of society or relevant to the main culture in America. You may have heard of the phrase, "The fall of Christendom."

And the good Book of James continues to speak directly to us. Just like in the days of the early church, James tells followers to listen, to be wise, and know the truth...not to be tossed about, but firmly planted.

God sheds His truth on us. He is the One truth to turn to even when times are dark, in the struggles and the pain.

Today I'd like to share three points from the passage to bolster real faith, for us very real people.

1) God is source of all good.

Verse 16 starts with, “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above.”

We all love good things. For those of you who remember Martha Stewart, she had the catch phrase, “It’s a good thing”, showcasing neat and cool ways of organizing, cooking, and decorating on her show and magazine.

People went mad over Oprah’s “Favorite Things”. If Oprah thought they were good, then those products or books went flying off the shelves.

Or it’s like Click and Clack—that radio show called, “Car Talk” which talks about car repairs and often mentions what good car products to use.

People seem to love good things. Now, good things are indeed wonderful—when there’s a promotion, or a new home, getting a new car or having a tasty meal, those are all good things!

But the deception is when we think that good things come from any other source but God. Good and perfect gifts do not come from the world, from people, or even from ourselves. They come from God.

And all sources of human good come from our heavenly Father. The reason why all good gifts are from above is because they come from the good Father. But I think that at times we look toward other things or other people as the source of good things, even as Christians. Sometimes it’s useful to review, recalibrate, and find ways to go deeper in our relationship with God.

There is a new discipleship tool we’re launching in January church-wide called “Rooted”. (shows video of a testimony of someone sharing their story of how God changed her life through this program).

The Rooted experience redefines how people live life and view their relationship with God and others. People begin to see God in new ways and experience a different way of doing life in community, with authenticity and generosity. It’s done in groups, and you can find more details at the Rooted table on Sundays.

The point is that only good things come from God. We knowingly or unknowingly can fill our lives with seemingly good things that aren’t really from God. We can turn to all sorts of things searching for meaning, but transformation only happens through God.

Let’s go back to the rest of verse 17.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved.

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Now through these words, *lights* and *shifting shadows*, James uses what’s familiar to his audience: the sun, moon and stars. People would have known about the changing of the sun, moon and stars, changes in the length of daylight, and shifting

positions of the rising and the setting of the sun.

Also, the image of light is one commonly used, describing God as light. In Psalm 27:1 King David says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” Psalm 36:9 says, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”

The apostle John describes God as light in 1 John 1:5. “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”

So at the end of verse 17, we see the character of the source of every good thing—The Father of the heavenly lights—who does not change like shifting shadows. God’s character is one of constancy. This unchanging attribute of God is called Immutability, which simply means that God never changes.

2. God and His character never changes.

It is why the Bible says, “Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). And in Malachi 3:6, God says, “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

People change, things change, and the world changes, but God does not change.

I want to share a family story with you. Some of you know that my father was an ambassador representing South Korea. He’s now retired. The first time I preached, I shared a pretty dramatic story of my escape from Lebanon. Today, I have another story from Lebanon for you, this one involving my father.

Let me give you some background. I had moved every two to three years of my life until my junior year in high school. I went to six schools in twelve years. Every two to three years, it was a new country, new language, new culture, and new friends to make. But even in all the change, my parents were the constant variable. I saw them every day, we had dinner together. Growing up, I assumed they would always be there.

It was 1983, during the first Lebanon War. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had invaded southern Lebanon, and there were repeated attacks and counter-attacks between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the IDF.

One day, the embassy secretary called my father and advised him and the staff to work at the residence instead of the embassy. The Israel defense forces were seizing the city and the embassy was in the city.

That day, heavy firepower from tanks tore through my father's office, demolishing the desk and chair where he usually sits. Later, he told me that he would have surely died if he went into the office that day.

My environment had always changed, countries had changed, the landscape, but my dad was always there. From that instance, I learned that even my parents couldn't always be there. The constancy of their presence was lost. My reality changed.

Later on in college, as I joined a church and Bible studies, I began to learn more about the one true God, the Father of all lights, who does not change, where there is no turning or variability. God is constant, and in a world of shifting shadows and uncertainty, He is the

source of all that is good—the true Light of the world.

I know that many of us today feel so overwhelmed by life. Things are changing, stress is increasing. We face financial issues, health problems, grieving of the loss of a loved one, the tension in strained relationships. Life can be, like the war in Lebanon, filled with chaos and uncertainty. And now more than ever we need a light in the midst of our darkness.

“God,” remarks Bishop Wordsworth, “is the Father of all lights—the light of the natural world, the sun, the moon, and stars, shining in the heavens; the light of reason and conscience; the light of His Law; the light of prophecy, shining in a dark place; the light of the gospel shining throughout the world; the light of apostles, confessors, martyrs, priests, preaching that gospel to all nations; the light of the Holy Spirit shining in our hearts; the light of the heavenly city; God is the Father of them all. He is the everlasting Father of the everlasting Son, who is the Light of the world.”

We all need the one true light when life goes dark.

This takes me to my third point, which is:

3) You are perfectly safe in the hands of a loving relational God.

The last verse, 18, says that in fulfillment of his own purpose, He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. God the Creator brings light into the world through His Son Jesus, that we may be reborn into a new life. To become a Christian is to be

born spiritually. We are born again through the Word of truth, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The truth is that we were created in the image of God, in perfect peace and loving union with Him. But because of sin, that union was broken and in the greatest act of love and humility, God the Creator became the created, and took it upon Himself to enter into the depths of our work, our lives, and our reality.

Skye Jethani, a Christian writer and managing editor of the *Leadership Journal* discusses four postures people tend to take in life. I'll describe each one.

1) A life under God = As long as you obey God's instructions He will bless you; if you disobey Him He will curse you. Thus you can control your world through morality and ritual.

2) A life over God = You don't need God; just have direct control over your universe through science or principles. This is also called secular humanism.

3) A life from God = Consumer Christianity. God is a divine vending machine, for health, wealth and prosperity so that God will take away my fears.

4) A life for God = You need to accomplish great things for God's kingdom. Ex: how many wells have you dug? How many churches have you planted? The more you accomplish the more successful you are.

Now most people bounce between these four different postures. Jethani introduces a fifth posture, which is:

5) A life with God.

In this posture we don't use God to mitigate fear, control the world, get to heaven, or just transform the culture.

When we get a *vision* of God and who He truly is, and we experience his beauty and love, we don't want to use God, we want God. God is the answer. And this truth changes us from the inside out. We no longer have to live in fear or control the world around us.

In conclusion, I want to end with a video of my youngest son, Mitchell, when he was a baby. Mitchell and his godmother, Dawn, share a special bond, and she would always say this mantra to him, to affirm him and his identity in God. So I would usually repeat it to him at bedtime.

I would say, *"Who made you so special? God!*

Who made you wonderful? God!

Who loves you? God!"

When we truly understand this, that God is our treasure, that we bear His image and are loved by Him, we can live our lives in daily surrender. We see the world differently.

It makes sense to give generously, love abundantly, to make disciples, to sacrifice and trust, knowing that nothing, not even death can separate us from His love.

We come to realize that our lives are perfectly safe in the hands of a loving relational God who desires to know us and has adopted us as His children.

We are free to share with others and heal others and love others. We are not just consumers of the world, imitators of the world, or even condemners where we

point and accuse others of wrongdoing. We are restorers of the world, laboring in God kingdom on earth, just like when we pray, *"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* in the Lord's prayer.

In fact, I'd like for all of us to pray the Lord's prayer together at the end.

And after, if you need time to pray, if you sense God nudging you, the prayer team is in front of the stage and will be happy to pray with you.

Will you pray the Lord's prayer with me? Let's say it together:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

I would like to close with this lessing from Numbers 6:24-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁴ The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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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 visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com