



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Boldness" - How to Pray Sermon Series

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Good morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at First Prez. Thanks for the opportunity to speak and serve this church.

We continue today in our How to Pray sermon series, and my topic today is "BOLDNESS". What we'll explore is not just a boldness of words, but a boldness of AVAILABILITY.

We have been immersed in prayer these last few months. Learning different ways to pray: silence, solitude, healing prayer, intercessory prayer, prophetic words to strengthen, encourage and comfort others; learning the intended results of prayer, like mercy and transformation and wisdom.

Today, I want to look at one actual prayer in the Bible, the prayer of the early Christian church in Acts, Chapter 4. It is a prayer for boldness.

I want to explore this today, because if you have heard me preach before, you know that I'm not always the boldest person. I love Jesus, I love prayer, but sometimes I get a little nervous when I have to step outside my comfort zone and pray for other people. Maybe you can relate.

The last time I preached I shared about a phone conversation I had

with a woman who was organizing a road race that went past our campus. And at the end of our conversation she said, "Oh, now that I know you work at a church, please keep me in your prayers." That's the perfect opportunity to step out in faith and offer to pray for her. But in response, I did not say, "Oh, can I pray for you right now?" or "Is there something specific I can pray for?" No, I said, "Have a nice race!" and hung up the phone.

So, clearly, God is still working on me and in me. I need to grow in boldness; I need more of God's transformation in my life. Maybe you do, too. So thank goodness that following Jesus is not for perfect people. It's for normal people, ordinary, broken people. Thank goodness that God is loving and gracious. He is kind and gentle...because we are all on a journey of faith. Wherever you are on that journey today, I hope that we take the next step in that journey together.

All that we are learning about prayer actually needs to be lived out in the real world. The Holy Spirit comes to the Church on His way to the world.

God is calling us to stretch and grow, so let's explore boldness today. And as we go through the sermon, ask yourself

two questions: One, what is God saying to me? And two, what does He want me to do about it?

Again, what is God saying to me? What does He want me to do about it?

Will you join me in prayer? God, may You speak to us now. We invite Your Spirit to move powerfully in us and among us. May we see You clearly, and may we be transformed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The prayer I'd like to look at is in the Book of Acts, Chapter 4:29-30. It's a prayer of the early Christian church. But before we get there, I want to give you the backstory of pretty much the whole book of Acts up to this point in Chapter 4.

The book of Acts tells us about the birth of the Christian church. In Acts Chapter 1, Jesus spends time with the disciples after His resurrection, and then He ascends to heaven. The believers meet and are "joined together constantly in prayer." At that point, there are 120 followers of Jesus.

A few weeks later, in Acts Chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon the followers of Jesus and they speak in different languages.

The apostle Peter gets up and explains to the huge crowd that gathers about the life-transforming power of Jesus the Savior and 3,000 people become Christians that day. That group of people shares their possessions, devotes themselves to prayer, eats together and meets at the temple courts.

That brings us to Acts 3, and what happens immediately after Pentecost. You know, some people never get *to* Pentecost, and some people never get *past* Pentecost. But we remember that the Holy Spirit comes to the church on His way to the world. That's true in Acts and that's true for us, too.

I'm going to give you some selected highlights from Acts, Chapters 3 and 4. In Acts Chapter 3, the apostles Peter and John are walking to the temple after Pentecost. And a disabled man who can't walk is sitting at the temple gates, and he asks them for money. And Peter, says this to him in Acts 3:6: *"I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."*

And then God miraculously heals this man, and he starts jumping around, praising God. And all the people at the temple are amazed, so Peter explains to that crowd about the life-transforming power of Jesus the Savior. And 2,000 more people become Christians. From 12 people to 120 to 3,000 to 5,000 people in a few weeks.

But the chief priests and religious council and elders at the temple are not happy that Peter and John are speaking about the life-transforming power of Jesus. They arrest Peter and John, and throw them in jail for the night.

The next morning, Peter and

John go on trial before Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests. Do those names sound familiar? Those are the same high priests, who a few weeks earlier, interrogated and led the trial of Jesus, which ended in Jesus' crucifixion.

I'm pretty sure Peter and John remember these high priests, and Jesus' trial. And I'm pretty sure they're thinking this might play out for them the same way it did for Jesus. If there is ever a time to be scared, it's now. But Peter is not scared. Peter is bold.

The priests ask Peter this question in Acts 4:7: *"By what power or by what name did you do this?"*

"This" meaning, healing the disabled man.

In Acts 4:8 Peter replies: *⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.*

There are a few things to note. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. It's not Peter's smarts, or seminary training, or holiness that enables him to answer this way—it's being filled with the Holy Spirit. Remember, this is the same Peter, who a few weeks earlier was so scared he denied Jesus three times, including to a little girl. But now, weeks later, Peter has been transformed. Peter is bold because he has seen and walked with the resurrected Jesus and he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are transformed and are bold, when we see and walk with the resurrected Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

How bold is Peter? Look at that last line in verse 10. Peter doesn't pull any punches. He could have said the man was healed by the name of Jesus, who WAS crucified. Who happened to be crucified in what was probably an unfortunate misunderstanding. No, Peter says, the man was healed by the name of Jesus, whom YOU crucified. That is bold.

And Peter points to Jesus. The man is healed by name of Jesus. Not Peter's skill, or holiness, but by the name of Jesus. Peter points to Jesus, and ultimately, that's all we do, too. We just point to Jesus.

Peter continues in Acts 4:12: *¹² "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." ¹³ Now when they [the temple priests and elders] saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.*

The priests saw the boldness of Peter and John, uneducated and ordinary people. Can we embrace the reality that we all are just uneducated and ordinary people, and hope that people might be amazed and recognize us as "companions of Jesus"?

Acts 4:18: *¹⁸ So they [the priests] called them [Peter and John] and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;*

20 *For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

"We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." I love that from Peter. The same Peter, who weeks ago, denied he even knew Jesus after being His disciple for three years. That Peter, after encountering the resurrected Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit, that Peter says, in the face of death: "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

The priests threaten Peter and John again, but then let them go. Acts 4:21: ²¹*"After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old."*

This is totally an aside, but as someone who is now more than 40 years old myself, I think this is hilarious. Because what if the healed man was 20 years old? Oh yeah, that's not so miraculous, but this guy is over 40! That must be a miracle! For all of you under 40, live it up now, because even the Bible is telling you it gets grim after 40! I'm just kidding. I'm sure all of your best days are ahead of you.

Okay, so finally, we've arrived at the prayer. Peter and John are released from prison and they return to their friends, and they all pray this prayer in Acts Chapter 4. And to think they have just narrowly escaped death! Maybe they'll pray for protection, for safety. "God, protect us from the schemes of evil men, give us a safe hiding place."

If I go on a long drive with my family to the North Shore, we pray for safety. We go on a trip and we pray for protection. I walk around at night and I pray for safety. But these guys don't pray for safety, or protection. They pray for **boldness!**

Acts 4:23: ²³*After [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, You made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant.*

²⁷*For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.*

Here it is: ²⁹*And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."* ³¹*When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."*

Doesn't that capture all the themes of prayer that we've been exploring and growing in these past few months?

Again, Acts 4:29-30: *"And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

Boldness. If the early church was bold, the worst that could happen is that it might end in their death! And still they were bold and prayed for more boldness! When we are bold, the worst that could happen is a little embarrassment.

We would never be here today if the early Christian church prayed for safety instead of boldness. There are actually Christians in our world today, in Syria, Afghanistan, all kinds of places who face death for their boldness. And like Peter and John, they cannot keep from speaking about what they have seen and heard about the life-transforming power of Jesus.

So we likewise, step out in faith. Because again, really, the worst thing that happens to us in America if we're a little bold, and offer to pray for someone, and step out in faith, is that we might get embarrassed. But the best thing that can happen is that someone might be profoundly blessed by God. We get to partner with God and see His Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

So, let me tell you two stories: the worst-case scenario and best-case scenario if we are bold. Let's start with the worst. You might get embarrassed if you take a risk.

The boldest person I know is my wife, Alia. She has a very high threshold for embarrassment, so she'll offer to pray for people all the time, or tell people, "I think God is saying this. Does it mean anything to you?"

Last year, we were at the Life in the Spirit Conference. (A reminder, this year's conference is two weeks away and you have two more days to get \$25 tickets.)

The speaker last year was Mike Pilavachi, whom we talk about a lot because he is a great teacher and humble servant. During the first day of the conference, he was teaching about hearing God's voice, and speaking words to strengthen, comfort and encourage others—just like Dan preached a few weeks ago.

Before the second day of the conference, my wife is at the car wash. And she gets the sense that God is telling her that she should tell someone named Mike that, "Jesus loves you." And she sees a guy leaning against the wall at the car wash, so she walks up to him and says, "Is your name Mike?" The man turns and looks at her and shakes his head, "No." So Alia spends the rest of the day wondering who Mike is.

It is the third and last day of the conference and it occurs to her that maybe the Mike is Mike Pilavachi. The speaker. The guy who wrote the book, "Naturally Supernatural". And she thinks, "I'm not going to do that."

So she tells a friend, "I think I'm supposed to tell Mike Pilavachi, 'Jesus loves you.' The friend says, "That's great! You have to do it!" Alia says, "No, I don't want to." But the friend says, "I'll go with you." So they go to Mike Pilavachi right at the end of the conference, while he's in front of the stage, surrounded by people. And Alia says to Mike, "I think I'm supposed to tell you that Jesus loves you."

And Mike looks at her blankly and says, "Thank you." And Alia and her friend run off.

I think that's worst that can happen. You're a little bold, and you get embarrassed. We're not like the apostles Peter and John, where someone will throw us in jail, or

kill us. If you're wrong, maybe you're a little embarrassed, but nobody dies. But if you are right, and it is God leading you, someone gets blessed. Alia was little embarrassed, but maybe Mike was blessed.

Ten minutes later, Mike Piliavachi is in Pastor Dan's office, resting and waiting for a ride to town with Pastor Dan. My office is next to Pastor Dan's, so I'm there making small talk with Mike, thanking him, when I notice Alia in the lobby outside the office. I have no idea about what happened between her and Mike ten minutes earlier. So I say, "Oh, Alia, come on in. Have you met Mike Pilavachi?"

And she stands there, eyes big, shaking her head. But she comes and says hello, and Mike is very gracious.

We go to my office, I pack up my stuff, and she tells me, "I actually met Mike ten minutes ago and told him that Jesus loves him." She tells me the story and we both think it's hilarious. Because it's okay, it's a little embarrassing, but no one died, and maybe he was blessed.

We're walking to our car in the parking lot, and Pastor Dan and Mike Pilavachi are standing at their car. And as we walk past, Pastor Dan says, "Oh, Alia, have you met Mike Pilavachi?"

That's the worst that can happen if you're a little bold. You get to meet Mike Pilavachi three times in a row. You get a little embarrassed. Can we agree that the worst-case scenario for being bold isn't that bad?

And now here's the best-case scenario. This summer I heard Sam

Miller speak at a conference. Sam was walking through a park, when he noticed a man sitting alone on a bench. As he was passing, Sam sensed God say to him, "That man's name is Daniel and he feels as though he is in a prison he can't escape from. I want you to tell him that I love him and want to rescue him from his prison."

Sam is an uneducated and ordinary person, just like Peter and John, and you and me, so he's nervous. He doesn't want to do it. But he figures, why not? I'll be bold; if I'm wrong, I'll be a little embarrassed. But if this sense actually is God, then maybe someone will be blessed.

Sam walks over, introduces himself and asks, "Is your name Daniel?" And the man on the park bench aggressively says, "No." So Sam is kind of embarrassed and deflated, but figures well, I might as well tell him the second part anyway. So Sam says, "Sorry, I just had this sense that maybe God wanted to tell you that He loves you and wants to rescue you from your prison. Don't know if that means anything to you."

At that, the man begins weeping. He says, "My name is Daniel. I just said no, because I was freaked out that you knew my name." Daniel tells Sam that he was sitting on that park bench preparing to commit suicide.

So Sam sits with Daniel for hours, reassures him that God loves him, that *God knows his name*, and Sam introduces Daniel to the life-transforming power of Jesus the Savior.

Be bold and worst-case scenario, you might get embarrassed.

But best-case scenario, you get to partner with God in what He is doing in the world, and someone might be blessed, in little or in very huge ways.

God is already at work in the world. Will we walk with the resurrected Jesus, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and listen and see what God is doing? Will we join Him in what He is doing?

We recently attended our Presbytery meeting in the Bay Area. One of the speakers said that every time he goes to a restaurant, he says to the waiter or waitress when he orders, "In a few minutes, we're going to pray for our food. Is there anything that we can pray for you for?"

I'm sitting next to Pastor Dan and we both say, "Oh man, that's a great line." So we're at dinner that night, and we're going back and forth, both of us: "Are you going to ask?" "I don't know." "I don't want to." "You want to do it?" Remember, even Pastor Dan gets nervous! I decide that I'm going to do it. I'm going to be bold...but I'm nervous.

The waitress comes and I ask her, "What are the specials?" She tells me, she takes our orders, and then I say, "In a few minutes, when our food comes, we're going to pray for our food. Is there anything that we can pray for you for?"

And she looks at me, and immediately, her face lights up. She says, "Oh yes! That would be wonderful! Please pray for my dog, he's got bone cancer and only has three legs now, and my mom just died nine months ago, and I'm scared that it will be just me and my dad soon."

We talk to her for a little bit, and when we pray for our food later, we pray for our waitress. And we let her know, and talked to her a bit more, and when we settled our bill, this is what was written on the receipt:

"♥ Thank you for your prayers!" ♥ [Name of waitress]

As we step out in boldness, we move from being self-centered, to being Christ-centered. And then we keep on moving, to be others-centered, where we see with God's eyes, His love for the people all around us. Because God is the hero of these stories, not Peter or John, or you or me. We just walk with the resurrected Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit. God is the hero, however it turns out.

On the flight home, I'm settled into my seat ready to watch the movie, "Wonder Woman", which I love. And a woman sits next to me, and I think, I'm going to be bold! So I ask her this question, "Are you going home or leaving home?" And we start talking, and she starts sharing some things that are going on in her life. Complicated, sad things. And I listen, and she shares more and more. And then I ask, "Can I pray for you?" And I pray for the things she was sharing about, and she says, "Thank you."

And I think, "Great! Now I can watch 'Wonder Woman'." And then she shares more. More complicated, and sad, and tragic things in her life and in her past. Shocking things, heart-breaking things. And I continue to listen, listen to her and listen to the Holy Spirit, and I try to speak God's truth to her: that God cares, God loves her, God is not shocked by her or us in all of our broken humanness. God forgives. We spoke for like three hours.

And I realize, that the key to our passage in Acts isn't the prayer for boldness in Acts 4. It's back in Acts 3. It's back when Peter and John are walking to the temple are available to the disabled man. And they stop, pray for the man, and God heals him. It's not the boldness of their words. It's the boldness of their *availability*.

Here's Acts 3:1-11: ¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. ⁴ Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. ¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.

Did you catch that amazing line in the middle of the passage? Acts 3:4 Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

Peter and John could have kept on walking past the man. How many times do we just keep on walking?

Our boldness isn't a boldness of words. It's a boldness of availability. Available to listen to the Holy Spirit and available to the people in our lives; opening our eyes to see the lives of the people around us. Being present in the lives of people who desperately need a Savior, just like we desperately need a Savior. Being available to be used by God in the lives of other people.

It is the need before us that brings forth the gift of the Spirit within us. The need before us brings forth the gift of the Spirit within us. As Pastor Steve preached last week, wisdom comes when we intentionally set our hearts towards the people around us.

Final story. There was one last thing I had to do as I reflected on boldness. So last week, I found a piece of paper on my desk, and then prayed, and dialed the phone number on the paper. And a woman picked up, and I said, "Hi, it's Chris from First Prez Church. We spoke a few weeks ago about the road race on the Old Pali Road. I just wanted to call and see how the race went."

And she said that the race went great, and we talked for a while, and I had the boldness to make myself available in her life. And as we neared the end of our conversation I said, "You know, a few weeks ago, you asked if I could keep you in my prayers. Is

there any specific that I can pray for?"

And she named a few things. Very heartfelt, very honest things. And then I asked, "Is it alright if I say a prayer right now?" She said, "Yes." And I prayed a short prayer, naming her requests, blessing her. That was it. And when I was done, she said, "Mahalo nui loa."

Acts 4:13: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.

We'll end our service with time of silent reflection. What is God saying to you, and what does He want you to do about it? Take a few moments in silence to reflect. May the Holy Spirit get more and more of us, filling us, leading us in our thoughts and actions and prayers. Speak to Him and listen to Him. Dial down and pray if God might have a word or an image to strengthen, comfort or encourage someone you know. And pray for boldness, boldness not just of words, but boldness of availability. Close your eyes now if you prefer. Let's pray and reflect.

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