



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 2, 2014

"Welcome, Friend!" (How to Have Healthy Relationships Series)
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

Deut. 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe,

Deut. 10:18 who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.

Deut. 10:19 You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Last week, Jenny kicked off our series on How to Have Healthy Relationships. It came out of my wife Pam's and my deep conviction to have a series on how we are to be a people who get along with each other, a people who have healthy relationships, and a people who have a welcoming spirit to those who are not yet part of our community. We are called to welcome the different, the weak, the ostracized, and those in need.

One of the traits of a follower of Jesus is to have a welcoming spirit to all, to all, especially the different, the off-beat, the irritable, the pokey as a porcupine, the stranger, the doubter. Let's take a look at this video made by another church. (The video *Welcome to the Church* was shown.)

St. Paul, one of the leading apostles in the time of Jesus and the main author of most of the letters in

the New Testament wrote this in the first century to the church in Rome.

Rom. 15:1 We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Rom. 15:2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.

Rom. 15:3 For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on Me."

One of the hallmarks of the Christ-follower is to be hospitable, meaning treating guests or strangers warmly and generously. Paul talked about the weak in verse 1. Who are they? For some, the weak are those who are in need of some kind of support, who are low in spirit, who need encouragement, or who are not always visible to the community's eye.

As a child many years ago, during the Vietnam War, I remember how we often had at our house marines, soldiers, airmen, and those in the intelligence community who were far from their home. My parents had invited them to come over for a home cooked dinner.

I recall the wives and children of Navy or Air Force pilots coming over for dinner because their husbands and daddies were serving far off in Asia, or in some cases because they were missing in action, and it was good to help them feel

welcomed in Hawaii. My mom and Dad often invited visitors over to the house.

They would socialize with those in show business—making friends with promoters like New Yorkers Sid and Geri Bernstein, who brought the Beatles to America. My parents would often go to bars or restaurants and befriend those who might be singing or playing the piano, and then invite them over for a home-cooked meal, as they were often mainlanders far from home. They loved my mother's sweet sour spareribs and lion's head pork cabbage and noodles.

My daughter in San Francisco seems to have picked up the hospitality gene from my parents in that she loves hanging out with people who work in bars. She tries to help them in their career by making promotional videos for them. She befriends them looking for a time she might share her Christian faith. She supports them when they have romantic break-ups. She helps them find jobs. And hanging out with them has inspired her to have a blog where she writes about how drinks are made.

In addition, in a not-very-safe area of San Francisco, she leads a weekly Bible study for former prostitutes who are trying to change their lives and follow Jesus. Often they were brought to America and put into sex slavery.

You might ask, “What kind of hospitality is that, Dan?” I think that is the hospitality of Jesus. It’s something Jesus would do. There might be some who say, that is not right she hangs out with bar flies, bar tenders, and prostitutes. But how else will the gospel be shared with people in the city? If she or others don’t do that, who will do it? If we stay in our own churches, and just go to Christian activities, then how will non-Christians know of the light and love of Jesus Christ?

By the way, whom did Jesus hang around with? Tax collectors – who were known in the first century as embezzlers and some of the greasiest, most dishonest people. Think of one of the most dishonest professions today and that is whom Jesus would hang out with as well as OTHER SINNERS like them. Here is what the Gospel of Matthew reported about Jesus in the Bible in Matthew chapter 9:

Matt. 9:10 And as Jesus sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples.

Matt. 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Matt. 9:12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Matt. 9:13 Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

What Jesus meant is that He is not into people who go through the actions of being religious and holy by making a show of their ritual sacrifices and rule-keeping. He is more into those who show real mercy and love,

to those who might be the stranger or the different one in the crowd. Jesus and His people should be the ones who look for ways to be hospitable and caring to the outcasts.

Fifteen years ago on THIS VERY DAY, a service technician working at Xerox in Honolulu turned on seven of his fellow employees and shot and killed them. He ran to the Hawaii Nature Center, where there was a standoff. For five hours 35 children were trapped at the center without food and water.

When the children were finally released, our church fed and ministered to them at our old Makiki church campus. We became the pick-up point for anxious and concerned parents to come and get their children. In addition, our church members volunteered to cook and deliver food for the spouses and children of the seven families who lost their husband or son in the Xerox shooting. The church members did that for four weeks straight. We thought having cooked food would be just one less thing for these families to worry about while they were grieving over the loss of their loved one.

When I announced from the pulpit the plan to feed them, I was proud of our members who immediately signed up to provide food. They even made sure they were aware of any food allergies or food preferences to fully minister to the families. In addition, our church staff produced and presided over a private memorial service for them at the church.

But a question came to me during that time – How is the family of the shooter doing? They must be so sad, so embarrassed, so traumatized so grieved that their son would have done such a heinous thing. The killer was held in great disdain and shame in society. But who

would minister to his family? What would Jesus do?

So I looked for their phone number and called them to ask if there was anything I could do to help them. What they said will remain private, but I just felt it was the right thing to do—to minister to all those who are hurting because of the tragedy, the victims of the crime as well as the family of the murderer.

I remember when a high-profile UH football coach was fired for a bad season. I wondered, who would say a word of comfort to him? The fans did not like him because he was literally a loser – at least in terms of the win-loss column of games. The newspapers were unkind to him, and I am sure his self-worth and self-esteem took a despairing hit. Who ministers to the literal losers of societies? I think followers of Jesus should.

So I cold-called the coach, introduced myself and asked if he needed a listening ear. I just wanted him to know that someone in the city understood his pain and wanted to support him. That conversation shall remain private too.

We, who claim Christ as our Lord, should be the first to help the outcast. Our relationship with Jesus should naturally make us be hospitable to those who are different from us us those with a different culture, a different religion, different philosophies.

Yes, we should hold onto our Christian beliefs and convictions, but we should hold on to them and still be gracious, merciful, and loving to others who don’t agree with them. It’s hard for some of us to be gracious to others who are different than we especially when it comes to tradition. We must not get into traditions, customs, and religious thinking that has nothing to do with Jesus.

Hear this from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 7:

Mark 7:5 So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony."

Mark 7:6 Jesus replied, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Mark 7:7 Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'

Mark 7:8 For you ignore God's law and substitute your own tradition."

Mark 7:9 Then he said, "You skillfully sidestep God's law in order to hold on to your own tradition."

Mark 7:10 For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.'

Mark 7:11 But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, 'Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.'

Mark 7:12 In this way, you let them disregard their needy parents."

Mark 7:13 And so you cancel the word of God in order to hand down your own tradition. And this is only one example among many others."

When we observe traditions, we always have to ask, how do these traditions or beliefs point us to Jesus?"

A while back, I was out for dinner with two friends and I thought

I was paying for the meal, and I decided to order a glass of wine. I don't drink a lot, maybe a glass, twice a month.

When the waitress brought the bill at the end of the meal, one of my two friends said he would pay for the meal—which was nice. He would treat me! But then he told the waitress that he would only pay for the food, and not the wine. You see, his ministry doesn't think it is right to pay for alcohol because alcohol unlike a calorie-laden milk shake or smoothie is sinful or can lead to addictive sin. So he asked if the waitress could please do two separate bills: one for the meal, which he would pay, and the other bill for the wine, which I would have to pay.

It was an awkward moment. I felt a little embarrassed by that. I don't mind paying for a glass of wine but I thought it was a bit inhospitable. However, if that is how he felt about it, I didn't want to judge him.

As it turned out, my other friend jumped in and said he would pay for my drink, which could have been a new ministry he was starting—let's all pay for the pastor's drinks! Again I don't drink that often. I often don't finish a glass and I never have more than one.

But I remember driving home that night I thought to myself, I am so glad my unchurched friends were not eating with us that night. They would have thought that was really weird. And that could just make them wonder, "Why would I want to be a Christian and be like that? To embarrass a guest is just not hospitable. Why would I want to be part of a church where you pay for some food or drinks but not others?"

How is this for a thought: Don't we want a church where there are wine drinkers, like Jesus at the Last Supper, where they drank wine,

like Jesus who made wine at a wedding so that everyone could drink it. I am sure our Lord was against drunkenness as we all are.

Yet how did we get to the place where drinking wine is sinful and, therefore, if you order wine you will have to pay for it yourself because my hospitality does not cover alcohol? We want a welcoming church where the outcasts, the different are welcomed. We are not talking country club, we are talking about how a church should be a magnet for different people, ungodly people, imperfect people like you and me.

I am glad that our Children's Ministries welcomes all kids, especially those with learning differences, and there is a significant number of them downstairs because we welcome all kids so they will know the Lord.

And hear me, Auntie Karen who runs our Children's Ministries says we need more help right now to assist those with special needs. If you can help, please call the office because assisting with our special needs kids is one of the ways we show hospitality to all.

Sometimes, welcoming those who are not like us is hard. Once, I was talking story with some friends and another person, a Christian leader who I didn't know, joined us. I can't remember how the conversation came to this, but somehow she came to asking me if I would allow gay people to be members of my church. I said yes. It's been that way as long as I can remember, and I have been with this church since 1980. If the requirement for a member is to confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and to trust and follow Him, then that would mean to me that all people, all people who are proclaiming that Jesus is their Lord get to be a member of this fellowship.

That Christian leader who asked me the question said, “But gay people are sinners,” and so I said, “I get that, but so are heterosexuals.”

Now I am an orthodox believer, and I get it and I support the belief that marriage was designed by God to be between a man and a woman, and our church does abide by that. However, to not include people who might be different than us in lifestyle or orientation would be a sin.

So this woman Christian leader pushed a bit more, saying that how can I have people in our community who are active sinners? I was surprised by that remark, and I said, “well, in your mind you are going for that, but how about I go after other sins like pride, selfishness, gossip, gluttony, materialism, or greed and so then it would mean that no one, including the pastoral staff, would be left in my church. The Bible says that pride is an abomination to the Lord. I think that puts us all at risk.

Aren't we all pilgrims on a journey not to perfection but a journey to learn what it means to have a close relationship with God through Jesus? I don't think a church that is hospitable should concentrate on who should NOT be there, but it should concentrate on WELCOMING ALL to BE THERE....in our homes, in our church community. The Apostle Paul said:

Rom. 14:1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.

Rom. 14:2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables.

Rom. 14:3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.

Rom. 14:4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

We just finished a sermon series on facing the giants in our lives—like anger, pride, lust, addictions, so let's slay those giants together.

A recovery group like Celebrate Recovery, which started this week, or Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous is saying, let's slay the giants together. We admit we are all sinners and we all have different issues we are working on, but let's have EACH OTHER'S backs and kill some giants in our lives so that we may be freer in Christ. What counts in life is our relationship with God. That is the ONLY thing.

If you make your self-esteem based on your achievements or your careers or your jobs then you have missed the boat. What only matters is our relationship with God. God cares about that. He doesn't care how much money you have or what accomplishments you have made, but, as Nick said in a sermon two weeks ago, God wants a man, a woman, a student, or a child who has a heart after Him. Having a heart after God is The ONLY thing that counts.

And when we get that down, then we will know how to be truly hospitable to all people. And when we are hospitable to all people, we are hospitable to Jesus. Well, who said this? Uh, Jesus did. In a parable where he mentions a king that represented God the Father.

Matt. 25:34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

Matt. 25:35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

Matt. 25:36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Matt. 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

Matt. 25:38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?

Matt. 25:39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

Matt. 25:40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

When we truly welcome people, we welcome Jesus too. When we are kind to people, we are kind to Jesus too.

The mark of follower of Jesus is that we defend the kid who is being bullied on the playground because he or she has a different sexual orientation or is a bit overweight or not as athletic or cool as others.

Students, if you ever, ever see a kid being ignored or criticized because he or she is different, go over and stand by that kid and protect that kid and befriend that kid. For that is what Jesus would do. Jesus would use lunchtime in the cafeteria to find the lonely kid and sit next to him or her, and be a true friend.

For that colleague or employee or family member who is a bit different or even prickly, maybe this week God is asking you to stand by that person and befriend that person for you may be the only way for that person to be loved.

When that person is difficult because he or she is depressed or bipolar or autistic or has ADHD, stand by that person and be part of the solution. Show that therapeutic Christ-like love.

How would we feel if we messed up and the church didn't accept us? How would we feel if we were really different and church was just like the cool group at school who didn't accept us, who didn't accept us because we weren't smart enough, or we were too clumsy, or awkward, or too quiet? Let's be more welcoming of other people, even though they are different. That's one of the ways to develop and, as our sermon series says, have healthy relationships.

Earlier, I quoted this Bible passage:

Rom. 15:1 We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Rom. 15:2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.

Rom. 15:3 For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

As we move to Communion, may we remember that Jesus died for our sins. When He was on the cross, He took on all of the insults and had them fall on Him. He is the one who takes on the biggest bully in the universe and says to Satan, if you want to go after them, if you have to go through me first. But I have won. I

have sacrificed my life for them. On the night He was betrayed.....

(The congregation went into receiving Communion.)