



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
November 16, 2014

**"Seeing the Best in Others!" (How to Have Healthy Relationships)
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun**

Today is a different kind of sermon. I'll be using videos as parables as we continue in our series on how to have healthy relationships.

One of the best ways to have healthy relations is to be affirming. Let's look at this video. ("Validation" video was shown.)

There is something magical, spiritual, wonderful, and healthy about giving and receiving affirmation. Clearly, one of the best ways to have healthy relationships in a community is through affirmation. Wouldn't it be great if we were an affirming church? I believe we, a society that tends to be more negative than affirming, tend to point out the imperfections of others rather than seeing the best in them. We tend to be critical but at the same time we ourselves also long for affirmation.

It makes such a difference to spend an evening with someone who is always affirming. Have you ever had that kind of meal with someone? It's an incredible oasis, a wonderful feeling.

Whenever I have dinner with Donna and Robert Schuller Jr., the son of the famous television preacher, it always stands out from among other dinners because they live out the philosophy that one should always be positive, but not in a fake way. Everything Robert or Donna says is affirming — the food, the drink, the

fellowship, the trees swaying, the wind blowing. They affirm my life, my wife Pam's life, our ministry, and our interests. They listen. It is so shockingly different.

I'm not saying that we want to be narcissistic where it's all about us. I'm talking about being with people who see the best in us. How I wish we could have that as part of our DNA—seeing the best in other people.

Most of the time I, and maybe you, don't have such conversations, for at one point the talk turns to what we are not happy about, like the national scene, the Hawaii government, an international crises, why you need to improve, or why so and so is not a nice person. It can go negative.

It's really hard for many people to affirm others. It is hard to see the best in others, and even harder to actually say what you see that will compliment, encourage, and affirm a person right then.

Why is it hard? Maybe it is because we were raised in a home where we were not affirmed much. As a result, we have been Xeroxing that behavior with other people because we don't have any other model in our head. It's an unhealthy script written in our hearts. Maybe it is because as a child, we did not get hugged or kissed or were told words of love. Maybe at a young age we were lied to by a

coach or a parent or a coach or a friend who told us we were not pretty or handsome or smart or creative or talented, and we believed them.

They were lies. And somehow because of these wounds, we then pass on those lies to others. But know that in the Bible Satan is given the title "the Deceiver" (Rev 12:9), the Father of Lies (John 8:44). And when we unfairly criticize others, we are passing on Satanic lies to others which might infect them to then criticize others. We become tools of Satan rather than Jesus. That should make us shudder! Negativity and unfair criticism is toxic.

Maybe we have a critical nature because we are competitive and we want to take the other person down. Maybe we want to get ahead or be higher than others and so we do or say things that make others look bad to subconsciously make ourselves look good. Maybe we are addicted to criticism. We can't stop it. Seriously. Take the test! Go 24 hours without saying a negative word about anything. Anything. Try it to see how long you last. 24 hours. And if you think "Dan, that's a dumb idea," ha! You just lost! Start the clock again. 24 hours to go.

But if we could get into the habit and eventually develop a lifestyle of affirming others, it would really raise people up. Let's watch this second video. (Another video was shown.)

Hey, and that video was made by a life insurance company! Really? A life insurance company! Maybe they know that statistically if you are positive in life, you live longer. But forget statistics, what does the Bible say?

Prov. 12:25 Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up.

Prov. 3:27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.

My friend Vip Patel is a very smart person. He created the website ehealthinsurance.com, which was very successful and really helpful after President Obama created Obamacare. He also created jesuscentral.com, a website that helps people know Jesus. Now, guess what he's into? Affirmation! He thinks that is so important in the word that he created a new app called Uptag.

Uptag is an app that encourages users to send affirmations to their friends every day using either their own photos or provided photos, plus a message. Vip believes if he could help change our sinful hearts and get us more to affirm, we will be in a better place. Feel free to be a subscriber and uptag me!

Now this is not a pop psychology talk. There are deep theological reasons for living a life of an affirmer.

First of all, we need to realize that God has validated our lives. God finds us to be of great worth. When God was thinking about creating humans he decided to put His own image in us.

Gen 1:27 So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

The divine imprint of God is in us – for all men and women, all boys and girls. God created us. He designed us. And God doesn't make no junk. Things of excellence are of great worth.

We look at a pen, and if it's made my Mont Blanc we know if it is of excellence. We look at a Mercedes, we know it is a car of excellence.

I eat at Zippy's all the time, and I love the food for its variety and taste. But once I went to a Gordon Ramsey Restaurant, called Petrus in London. Gordon Ramsey! You know that the place will be excellent as I found out three years ago, but Petrus is a whole different class.

The inside looks elegant. The chairs, the tablecloths, the glasses, the lighting! The food succulent and tasty. Here is Crispy Suffolk pork belly with sage Lyonnaise, braised apple and Maderia jus. The food is simply divine. Salmon and lobster cannelloni with champagne and chive veloute. And the service is exquisite.

Servers all over the place, placing the food, filling the water, folding our napkins. And then, the dessert! Orange and Vanilla Baked Alaska with Grand Marnier sauce. Ko'olau Kitchen, we can do that! All products are made of excellence and so are expensive. There was a cost to make them.

My compliments to the young Chef Sean of Petrus. He spent years training, probably getting yelled at by Gordon Ramsey. He is so creative, diligent, expensive in talent but expensive just because he is a human and when God made us he made us of excellence.

When you look at people, we ought to know that they are expensive. They are valuable and it is because they were made by our

Maker with His signature. His creative image in us. It's far more excellent and expensive than a Mont Blanc, a Mercedes Benz, or lunch at Gordon Ramsay's Petrus restaurant. And that's why we should value other people's lives, including ours. People are designed by God. All people—the poor, the homeless, the irritable relatives.

God designed us. We were not RANDOMLY made anymore than you could jumble airplane parts and throw them into a hanger and they just happen to form together a Boeing 777. Intelligent design!

Why do we want to release children from poverty in Jesus' name? It's because we know each child is valuable, and we must release them from being poor or from being a sex slave or from being a toy soldier drafted into some terrorist militia.

Hence, once we realize that we are valuable and priceless, then we must see others that way and affirm that reality in them. Confirm their worth through affirmation!

The Bible directs us to do that through encouragement and to help those in need.

1Th. 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

1Th. 5:14 And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.

See that? Be patient with all of them! The incredible thing is that what goes around comes around. When we are kind to others, we bless ourselves.

Prov. 11:17 Those who are kind reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.

Prov. 11:12 Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent.

If we can't affirm, then we need to be quiet rather than be critical. When we affirm others we actually make OUR LIVES more blessed, OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY more blessed, OUR HOME more blessed, OUR CITY more blessed. We are blessed to be a blessing but we also get blessed when we give blessings to others.

My prayer and hope for our church is that we create an environment in which people are always blessing others. We are always catching others doing things right. We affirm and recognize the good in one another. Not for pride reasons, but for the reality that we are spreading God's love, I would hope that we would be active and known for being positive and encouraging and affirming.

Wouldn't it be great if people would say this about us: "One thing about those First Prez people they are so affirming!" Or, "When I am around those First Prez people I feel validated. When I am around them I feel God's love."

I do believe that institutions CAN CARRY this ambience of goodness. I am a big fan of Notre Dame University. I like their football team but I like their student body and administrators more. My son Dylan and daughter Noelle say, when they meet Notre Dame students they find them to be really nice. They have such servant hearts. They are kind. They stand out in kindness.

I believe that the Notre Dame administration, which is Catholic and Christ-centered, is successful in teaching the students morals that giving and serving are good, and so it has become part of

the students' DNA.

Nordstrom stores have this wonderful affirming ambience. You can say they are being friendly for the making of money, but a lot of stores are out to make money but Nordstrom is light years ahead of them in creating an atmosphere of affirmation and friendliness. I don't know of any other store where I know so many people by their first names because they are so friendly. There's Chris, and Dennis and Milton, and Danielle, and Jarrad and Patrick and Barbara and April. It's like walking into the Cheers bar where everybody knows your name.

Nordstrom is friendly to make money. Our cause is greater. For the cause of Christ we should be affirming.

But I have left the biggest reason for the end of why we need to affirm others. I want to show one more video and then I will explain how the essence of the gospel is in this. (A third video is shown.)

What does that video talk about – forgiveness of a debt that was paid. That's the essence of the gospel. It's the basis for our motivation to be kind and affirming.

We need to affirm others, give people second chance and not be critical because we ourselves are not perfect, but more importantly it's because we have been forgiven for our faults so we need to forgive others, and be kind and gracious.

Even though we have been made in the image of God, and even though God's imprint is on our hearts, we have a terminal disease in our hearts. It's not a perfect heart. The heart has a kind of spiritual sclerosis, a hardening of the arteries and that is due to the terminal disease called sin, which is mainly due to pride, which often manifests itself in a critical and

negative nature.

It's a strange disease. It's one in which it makes people, which includes us, think we can be like God or that we don't need Him. And that's why we disobey God. We ignore God. We think it is better to live for ourselves than for God. And we often cut down other people.

We may be tempted to think that false gods like money, sex, power, or status are more important than the loving creator God and His son Jesus Christ. But the weight, the debt of that sin is so great, that it weighs us down. We can sink to a place called hell where all aspects of a loving God do not exist.

Now we can think, "What a bum deal. God creates us with His imprint. But God doesn't make us perfect like Him."

He creates us with a human nature that falls to sin and so now we have this thing called sin that we have to do something to pay for the penalty of sin. We are now slaves to sin. We are doomed.

But that's when God says, no. God says we need not be slaves. We need not have any debt. It's because we have been bought by the price of the life of my son Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has paid the debt. He has paid the bill. He died on a cross so that all of our sin would be wiped away and we can be with God forever in heaven.

And when we realize how saved we have been, how OUR debts have been fully paid, how our sin has been taken care of, then we have more than a thousand reasons to realize that we are not perfect; only forgiven.

Other people are not perfect either, and so we need to extend grace to them, a second chance.

Give them some leeway. And one way of extending grace is by not zeroing in on their faults or sins or weaknesses, but affirming and encouraging them instead in the love and forgiveness and grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. And ask the Holy Spirit to empower us to do so.

Seeing the best in others is one of the ways to have healthy relationships. And so when we see someone blow it, even like in the video where a kid steals medicine, we pay the price and give him soup, medicine, and encouragement because we know someone once paid for our sin.

And that is how we see the best in others, for Christ has seen the best in us and died for us. What a great God! Amen? Amen.