



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 18, 2018

"He's Calling You" - Hope Restored Series

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Good morning! My name is Jenny Sung. I'm the Executive Coordinator on staff, and one of the lay pastors at First Prez. My nine-year-old son, Mitchell, was asking me what I do and I said, "Well, as lay pastors we help with baptisms, communion, weddings and funerals but we're not ordained. That's why mommy is still studying and going through seminary."

Now I have to remember to articulate and perhaps spell certain words that may be foreign to my children, because he showed me his school project that he turned in to his teacher that week...and apparently, I am a "LATE" pastor! (I do have his permission to share this with you). Now it is true that sometimes I am a "late". I try very hard not to be late, but we are human; all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, let's pray for this late pastor to be faithful in delivering God's Word, and that we may hear God's truth in this message.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being the God of all hope, and that You are faithful to our needs. We lift up this time to You, asking for a fresh filling of your Holy Spirit. Open our hearts and minds to the truth of Your Word, and may we hear Your voice, and Your voice only, to guide us in wisdom and love. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

We continue our sermon series called, "Hope Restored", in the book of Mark. Today, we learn about a person named Bartimeus. On Sundays, we've sometimes been listening to scripture together using a dramatized audio Bible. This is especially helpful when looking at the Gospels, which really brings events to life. We're listening to the Word of Promise audio Bible, the New King James version. Our scripture for today is from the book of Mark, chapter 10, verses 46-52.

Today's message is entitled, "He's Calling You", and we learn about a man named who's healed and transformed.

What do we know about this man? We know he is blind and a beggar, a person with no status or means—lowest on the totem pole. According to the book of Leviticus chapter 21, Bartimeus was in a class considered "unclean", not whole or complete. The blind, the lame, and the deaf were all figures who were unclean to the Jews in the culture of ancient Judaism.

Jews who considered themselves pure and holy would be defensive regarding their purity. Concern for purity meant distancing oneself from all that is unclean. In other words, you maintained proper boundaries and lines. So, when Bartimeus shouts

out to Jesus in verse 47, people hush him. They try and shut him down. It says that "many" rebuked him—admonished him. His behavior was completely inappropriate, a huge violation of the cultural norm.

Now this was in the time of Jesus, but it may not sound too foreign from our current culture, where social norms govern our everyday lives. If ever those boundaries are crossed, at the very least it's a "faux pas".

In fact, there are so many social norms and boundaries in our American lives, norms that are so inherent that we don't even notice them...until the boundaries are crossed!

Here are some boundaries that one should not cross:

- Picking your nose or feet in public.
- Standing too close to a person ("close talker" episode in Seinfeld).
- Talking with your mouth full of food.
- Striking up intimate conversations with strangers next to you in the urinal.
- Local one: walking into someone's home with your shoes on!

There are even norms for the elevator! See what happens if you do any of the following:

- Stand right by someone, really close, even if there are only two of you in the elevator. Even better, try that in a movie theatre: sit right next to someone even when there's only one person in the theatre.

- When going into the elevator, face the back of the elevator wall, not the door.

- Push all the buttons of the floors you are not going to; Buddy the elf did this in the movie "Elf".

Now these norm violations may be humorous, even ridiculous, but going back to those who were rebuking Bartimeus, "crossing the line" was very serious business.

Professor Jerome H. Neyrey, a professor of New Testament at the University of Notre Dame says this about Jesus: "According to Jewish religion and culture, Jesus would be expected to be a defensive person and avoid all contact with uncleanness. He would be expected to respect the lines and boundaries of Jewish observance... Holiness, defined as separateness from all things unclean, defective, or marginal, is indicated in behavior which keeps one separate from uncleanness and which maintains the classification system."

So as people hear Bartimeus crying out louder and louder, shouting "Jesus! Son of David!, Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!", what does Jesus do? Does He maintain the "classification system" and distance Himself, keeping Himself separate from the unclean?

No. In fact, He does the opposite. He calls Bartimeus to come closer. Jesus draws him near to Himself. Some in the crowd

notice this. They tell Bartimeus, "Hey, be of good cheer! On your feet! He's calling you."

Jesus is calling out to Bartimeus. I'm sure the critics are finding this unbelievable. What is this Rabbi doing? Jesus is getting closer to the blind beggar? Why doesn't He protect himself? He's going to be defiled!

But we know from previous chapters that Jesus rocked the boat on all sorts of boundaries. He reset social norms in a radical way—some call it the "upside-down Kingdom of God". In the last chapter, Jesus welcomed the children (who were lowly in social status and taught not to bother the teacher) and harshly rebuked those who kept the little ones from Him. Women, who were considered possessions and second-class citizens back then, were lifted up by Jesus, given value and attention.

In the last few verses of this very chapter that Pastor Dan preached on two weeks ago, Jesus reframes the idea of greatness. He tells His disciples, "*Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve*". The Gospel is an entirely counter-cultural message.

When we think of leaders we don't think of servants. It's counter-cultural. But Jesus modeled it first by crossing all norms and boundaries and serving the rejected, the forgotten and oppressed. He ultimately gave His life for all of us and paid for our sins forever. He offers His love freely to everyone who will accept this gift. And with God's love we are able to go out and share that love with others. Once we

experience and taste the freedom in Christ, we want to take it to others. We want to share it. It's like, "Come and see, taste and see that it's good!"

Next year, First Prez is expanding the church and crossing boundaries into Kaka'ako to plant a satellite campus, a branch of First Prez called THE VINE. There has been much prayer over the months and years, for the long-term vision of the church, and that we'll be faithful to what God has called us to do. We've been walking the neighborhood and praying, getting to know the businesses and people in the community.

There is one person we've been getting to know in particular, a Bartimeus type of fellow, NOT that he's blind or a beggar in any way, but that he's been transformed by the love of Christ and wants to bring healing and restoration to others.

Over the months we have been getting to know a man named Warren Lilo, who is the head of security they have at 547 Halekauwila, and founder of a youth outreach ministry called Life 360 Network. Life 360 provides a safe haven for at risk youth and young adults. They work to provide alternatives to issues such as: truancy and drop-outs from school, alcohol abuse, and gang and drug activity.

On any given day that we've visited the campus, we've seen the life coaches, leaders who are young adults in their 20s and 30s working with youth in Bible studies, helping with homework, going surfing and worshipping together. They partner with the Honolulu police department and neighborhood watch and with businesses in the community.

Since day one, Warren has been excited and supportive of THE VINE, donating café furniture for our coffee lounge area, getting the site ready for campus tours and helping in whatever way he can. He has a powerful testimony, and KITV did a Hawaii MVP segment on him and Life 360 in 2015.

Warren is a follower of Jesus, a servant leader. He told me he has been praying for a church to come into the building for years. He has experienced the grace and mercy of God, and was given the opportunity to bring healing and restoration to others. He wants to partner with churches like First Prez and other businesses in many ways to bring healing and renewal to families and communities.

I hope that as you come on the satellite tour, (there's one today at 2:00pm and another one at 6:00pm tomorrow), that you might be able to meet Warren and some of the life coaches.

Let's go back to the story of Bartimeus, another man changed by the mercy and love of Jesus. What others see is a blind beggar, but Jesus sees the heart, and in Bartimeus He sees a heart that is full of faith. I think we can all learn some valuable lessons from Bartimeus:

1. First, Bartimeus has a heart that is responsive.

When Bartimeus hears that Jesus has stopped for him, verse 50 says he threw off his cloak, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. Bartimeus is eager and expectant. There is a responsiveness to Bartimeus, even a boldness.

When was the last time you were bold and expectant for Jesus to move? Is there an eager expectation of what He's about to

do...or are we cautious, maybe even doubtful? Are we responsive to His voice, His promptings, and are we responsive to follow where He goes?

Just a few days ago, I took my children, Grant and Mitchell, 12 and 10 years old, to the Life in the Spirit conference, which was about prophecy and hearing God. Many of you heard the speaker, Wayne Drain, in last Sunday's sermon. After each session at the Life in the Spirit conference, there was lab time to practice. We got into triads and prayed for one another, asking God to give us a word for someone. It's wasn't weird, and there was no pressure. We just prayed and listened.

During one of the sessions, Grant thought he got two images for someone, but was hesitant to share the second image because it seemed it bit silly. In the end, he decided to be bold, took a step of faith and shared both images. They ended up really ministering to and encouraging the person Grant was praying with.

In fact, the second image that Grant almost kept from sharing, was the one that meant the most to the other person who was sharing about Jesus with his friend. Since that experience, Grant was so excited and eager to return to the conference the next day. He was pouring over the Bible nonstop, and wanted to return as soon as possible. As a mother, it was so cool to see the transformation from hesitancy to excitement about what God can do.

As we expand into Kaka'ako for a satellite campus, do we have the eager expectation of what God will do? Are we responsive to His call, to reach those who don't know Jesus? Like our campus here

in Ko'olau, we want to create a safe space where people can experience the love of God, the presence of God, in worship, in prayer and community.

Our church mission is the same: to Love God, Love People and to reach the World for Christ.

The Great commission is not only global, but local, pressing past boundaries and walls as we reach the world of our backyard to those who don't know Jesus. As a congregation, you've been incredibly faithful and generous with your prayers and resources. In the 547 appeal, we are currently at \$259,249, almost halfway to our goal.

We've had several satellite tours, informational meetings, prayers walks, and coming into the week of Thanksgiving, we will be able to announce our appeal total next Sunday. As we've walked and prayed on the grounds, people have responded with great expectation and excitement, rather than fear or hesitancy. Like Bartimeus, I can see us throwing off our cloaks and jumping up. We are responding in faith to Jesus calling.

When we first learned about the possibility of this campus, we had prayer walks with the elders, staff and ministry leaders. Several saw visions and received a word from the Lord.

One elder saw the Statue of Liberty holding a torch. She saw the words inscribed on the statue of liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Those words were reminiscent of the words Jesus spoke about Himself when he was quoting Isaiah 61: *“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Then Jesus said, *“Today this scripture is fulfilled.”* These words give us hope and eager expectation of the freedom God will bring to those who are struggling and searching for true meaning in life.

Another elder who has been a member of First Prez for over 20 years, recognized the physical walls of the room from a vision she had over twelve years ago. Back then, she had thought it was strange as it did not match the banquet center walls at Ko’olau when First Prez moved in 2006. She now knows that God had given that vision for the future of the church.

As we hear Jesus calling, we want to be courageous and bold in our faith to cross boundaries and follow where He leads. Like the heart of Bartimeus, we want to be responsive.

2. Secondly, we see that the heart of Bartimeus is open and honest in his need for Jesus.

There’s no pretense, no hardness, just a complete dependence. He’s open and humble enough to be transparent. Twice he shouts out for all to hear, for Jesus to hear, “Jesus, Son of David, have Mercy on me!” “Have mercy on me!” Bartimeus may be blind, but he isn’t blind to his need for Jesus in his life.

We also know that Bartimeus had faith and belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior. When he called Jesus the “Son of David”, Bartimeus knew that Jesus was the long-awaited Deliverer, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Bartimeus knew to call out to the only one who could really save him.

The Bible says that all have sinned and gone astray, each of us going our own separate ways (Isaiah 53:6), and that Jesus has paid for all our sins. God knows the depths of our worst actions and thoughts and intentions, and yet He loves us completely, undeniably and without reserve. He is the definition of perfect love.

When we believe in Jesus, we invite Him into our lives and ask Him to do life with us, to lead us and guide us. And He gives us the Holy Spirit who comforts us, counsels us and empowers us to share God’s love with others. We are not alone.

Some of us don’t even realize the relationship we’re missing out on. We can fill our lives with all sorts of stuff or other people and put those things on a pedestal. We can live life dependent on circumstances and how good we feel depending on how much we make, or how many friends we have, or how busy and important we feel. We can ignore the hurt of our past, the pain of loss, betrayal and disappointment, or ignore the brokenness and injustice in the world.

Or...we can live life a different way. We can build our lives on the love of God. We can soften our hearts and cry out to Jesus, “I need You! Have mercy on me...”

His response is not dependent on how much we’ve accomplished or how good we are. It’s only dependent on WHO HE IS. God’s love is endless, unfailing, stable and true, and He is the only one who can take our scars and wounds to heal and restore us.

The late author Brennan Manning wrote, “Do you believe that the God of Jesus loves you beyond worthiness and unworthiness, beyond fidelity and infidelity—that He loves you in the morning sun and in the evening rain—that He loves you when your intellect denies it, your emotions refuse it, your whole being rejects it? Do you believe that God loves you without condition or reservation and loves you this moment as you are and not as you should be? ([All Is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir](#))

3. And lastly, do we have the heart to follow Jesus?

Bartimeus had the heart to follow Jesus. He could have gone on his own way, experiencing a new life with his perfect eyesight.

Charles Spurgeon, a passionate and gifted preacher, wrote a sermon on these passages back in 1859. Sharing some of what he wrote, *“Maybe he could have done lots of other things, I wonder, once he gained his sight. Does he not desire to hold all the beauties and wonders of the world? No, but he chooses to follow Jesus along the road... The one thing Bartimeus wants to do is serve Christ, His tongue begins to itch, to share of the mercy he has found. Once we know who we are, and who He is, we cannot but cry out, God, have mercy on me. We are all beggars redeemed as followers of Jesus. Bartimeus left his place among the beggars and took his place among the followers of Jesus.”*

When we experience the love of Jesus we can't help but want to follow Him. We can't help but want to share that love with others. So, He sends us. Jesus sends us out, telling us to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He promises to never leave us. We are never alone.

We are on our last week of the 547 appeal. Many of you have given in faith, like the widow's two mites. As a widow myself, I find myself drawn more towards passages about widows. I can relate. I lost my husband last year. I am a single mother of two children. Times have been difficult.

Know that God doesn't ask us to do more than what He has called us to do. We don't give out of obligation or guilt, but only out of faithful obedience. When we hear Jesus calling, we cast off our cloaks and stand for Him. We follow Jesus along the road and share what He has done for us.

The vision for THE VINE is that many who don't know Christ will come to know Him, and that they will experience and share His love with others.

In our main campus here at Ko'olau, we support the mission of the church in **all** ministries, and now **all** campuses. We may not all go to GriefShare or DivorceCare, but we support the vision of the church to care for those in our community. We may go to the 8:00am service and never attend an 11:11am service, but we support all the services and believe the vision of worship for all at the church. We may not need an Alpha course for ourselves, but we believe in the mission of evangelism and support it all the more.

It is like that with THE VINE in Kaka'ako. We continue to reach out to those who don't have a church community, in new ways, to new families, new lives, new souls.

Can we, like Bartimeus, have the eager expectation for what Jesus is going to do? Are we responsive when we hear His voice calling us?

Do we have an open and humble heart to cry out to Him, to know that only Jesus can save us?

And lastly, do we have the heart to follow Him along the road, wherever He takes us?

As we end our time together, I want to close us in prayer, and Nat will come up and lead us in a time of worship with a special song called "Excavate". Afterwards, on this very special week of Thanksgiving, we will be closing with our tithes and offerings, giving thanks to God.

Let us pray.

"Lord, we are all but beggars redeemed by Your love. We are blind until You opened our eyes. We believe in You and in Your power to save and restore. Help us to pursue You with abandon, eager to respond and build Your kingdom, here on earth as it is in heaven.

"Soften our hearts, we want to be open and pliable, molded by You. We want to follow You wherever You lead and pursue the things that really last. We offer up our tithes and offerings, thankful for Your goodness and faithfulness. Bless them and multiply what we offer in faith, and use it for Your glory. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen."

If you would like to come forward for prayer after the service, please feel free to do so. Know that Jesus loves you and cares for you, and that we care called into community with other believers. And part of that is praying together.

Now please receive this blessing: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May His face shine upon you and his countenance be gracious unto you. May you always know the love of Christ deep in your hearts as you listen for His voice, and follow Him. In Christ's name, Amen.

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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