



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

December 2, 2018

That's What We Were Supposed To Do (Hope Restored Series) Pastor Dan Chun

**M**ark 11:11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Mark 11:12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

Mark 11:13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, He found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

Mark 11:14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And His disciples heard Him say it.

Mark 11:15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves,

Mark 11:16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

Mark 11:17 And as He taught them, He said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill Him, for they feared Him, because the whole crowd was amazed at His teaching.

Mark 11:19 When evening came, Jesus and His disciples went out of the city.

Mark 11:20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

Mark 11:21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

Mark 11:22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered.

How can we have our Hope Restored today?

We just had a wonderful Church family Thanksgiving lunch with 550 people, with some people in costume for a great celebration. The retail stores already started their bombardment of non-religious decorations, including The Grinch, who traditionally does NOT give us hope. So when we walk the malls of O'ahu, from where does our hope come?

Why does Hope come to us during Christmas? It's because God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day. And why did God decide to make an in-person, appearance on earth for 33+ years? It's to demonstrate up close His presence, power, and purpose.

## 1) PRESENCE

This is probably the easiest one to understand. God came to earth 2000 years ago to be PRESENT with us.

For three decades He walked this earth and for three years, He went public with His ministry. His disciples could see up close and personal what He was really like.

If you really want to know what God is like, study Jesus. In the Gospel stories, in the Bible you'll find Him welcoming to all, whether you are a well-established centurion, or a woman caught in adultery, or a woman who had five husbands, or a leper with sores all over his body, or a person in poverty, or a dishonest tax-collector named Zacchaeus, or common fishermen like Peter, James and John.

You'll see that Jesus loved children. He loved the poor and the rich. He loved the immoral. He loved those afflicted with many demons, like Mary Magdalene. He loved the bustling and hard-working, like Martha; and He loved her sister Mary of Bethany who just wanted to chill and sit and learn. He always had His eye on the outsider – the widow, the prisoner, the poor, and the immigrant to the land. He taught forgiveness. Non-violence. Peace. Unity. Love.

If you are here today thinking what is God really like? Would I trust Him if I knew Him better? Then think of Jesus. Read about Him. Study Him. For God as Jesus actually visited this earth!

For many of us, if we wanted a God in this universe, it would be like Jesus. Now, did He ever get mad? Yes.

**T**hat is why He overturned tables in the temple courts. That Bible scene from our reading takes place in the Court of the Gentiles at the Temple. The tables and moneychangers were blocking unchurched people, outsiders (the Gentiles) from getting to know God. Jesus didn't like that people had to buy their way in by having to exchange their money for Temple money at an exorbitant price to be used to buy animals for sacrificing.

Jesus used the fig tree in our Scripture passage as a metaphor for the Temple that was not fruitful. It was not focused on real prayer. It was dead; withered in its passion to help people know God. He also knew that if we chose a life that blocked Him, it would not be good and our lives would be like a fig tree withered from the roots.

**PRESENCE.** Jesus wanted us to see and know what God is really like. So He came to earth to show us, to be with us. When we sing O Come O Come Emmanuel, know that Emmanuel means God with us. His presence.

In-person presence is always important. When country leaders need to talk about something important, they fly to see each other in person. They don't dial in, or use email, or Facetime or Facebook. When it is really important there is something about being in the same room with the person you need to talk to. Presence.

When Jesus was here on Earth in human form, He was really like us. He felt physical and emotional pain. He was tempted but never sinned. He wept when He lost a loved one. He was betrayed, misunderstood and people plotted to kill Him. He was tortured and beaten for no reason.

His favorite name for Himself was not *Son of God*, but *Son of Man*, because He wanted us to know that He really understands our pain and went through it like we have and would. He has great empathy and sympathy. We need to know that when we pray to Him.

The interesting thing is that God could have been a distant God. He could have been detached from the people He created. But no, He chose to come down and show His love in person.

## 2) POWER

When He was here on earth He could show us His power as God. He could physically heal lepers. He could raise people from the dead. He could heal a young boy like Danner Lim, who almost died, as we heard in the Advent testimony of Jeremy and Megan Lim.

Jesus could cast out demons. Or like in our Bible passage He could make a tree wither with just a word. Boom! Power! He could calm seas. If I wanted a God, wouldn't I want one like Jesus? Some of you who are trying to figure out if you can trust or believe in Jesus. I ask—what more would you want in a God?

And the incredible thing about God coming to earth is that He came in such a gentle HUMBLY way – born in a manger in a stable because there was no room in the inn. Did Mary or Joseph pull rank and say, “Hey, do you have any idea of who Mary is giving birth to? So throw out your best customer to make room for us. Give US the presidential suite! This baby that is coming is the big one, the real Bambino, the baby of all babies, the big Bambucha! So roll out the red carpet for us! And we don't want shepherds greeting Him. No, we want the head of the Chamber of Commerce. We want the Mayor of Bethlehem to be here.”

Isn't it interesting that the arrival of Jesus came in such a humble way? Almost God incognito. That's why I believe Jesus is the Messiah or He doesn't come like an insecure world leader, or a narcissistic CEO. He's different. He has the power and the authority, but He comes gently, humbly. He only shows *controlled* anger when the outcasts of life are jeopardized or people use legalism to burden them.

And get this, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit we can witness His supernatural power – to love the unlovable and through prayer help people get supernaturally healed, and hear God's prophetic voice. Here at First Prez, we are committed to training people in that power.

## 3) PURPOSE

Jesus wants us to follow Him. But why? If Jesus wants us to follow Him, is it because we have our hand out to get as much as we can from this all-powerful present God? Or is there something else going on?

Why did Jesus overthrow the tables? It meant someone messed up on the purpose of God's Temple. The Religious Leaders were off strategy. They were not on mission. Their purpose was to make money. They went commercial like our Christmas season. They were a withered, shriveled fig tree.

Two thousand years later, it's still really hard to hear the real Christmas message. I agree with what Chris Pan said last Sunday. There are two Christmases: one that is highly commercial, which focuses a lot on what we hope to get; and that we show our love to others by the things we give. And the other Christmas is this reality: Christmas is about Jesus coming to earth.

We can get distracted with the parties we want to go to or have to go to and forget that this season is really all about Jesus' birth; that our loving Lord has come to earth. And rather than focusing on Advent and preparing our hearts to ramp up to Christmas, we can put our attention on the other Advent – the playoffs for college football and the NFL.

As I said before, in America, football season is the modern day Advent ramping up to the holiest of holy days in this country – SuperBowl, which might be more attended and more watched than all the Christmas Eve services in the U.S.

**T**he Three Wise Men of Christmas have been replaced by the three wise coaches of the Universities of Alabama, Clemson, and Georgia – known as St. Nick Saban, St. Dabo Swinney, and St. Kirby Smart.

At least in the top four college teams this Advent we have the Virgin Mary featured because of the university called Notre Dame.

What is our purpose? To get as many goodies we can? If Jesus who is God has come to this earth, what is our *Purpose*? Jesus desires us to use His divine *power* to help others. He actually gives to His followers His Holy Spirit power to heal, to help, to strengthen, encourage and comfort. Just before He left this earth, some 33 years after the first Christmas, He said this:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

It was always supposed to be that we have a **PURPOSE** to go out and be the **PRESENCE** of Jesus in this world and to use His **POWER** to demonstrate that. People are to **WITNESS** us in using the power of His Spirit to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgiveable, to actually heal and pray that someone would be miraculously healed.

That was always what we were supposed to do. That is why Jesus came to this earth—that we might be agents of His presence, power, and purpose. People are despairing to find a community centered on that purpose, a community of Christians that actually has power of the Holy Spirit and has the presence of God in their souls. That’s the purpose. What’s what we are supposed to do.

Let me close with this true story that hopefully puts it all together. Two weeks ago, a man named Andrew Fitzgerald died in Aurora, Colorado. He was 87. You may

not know that name, but he was a great man.

Andrew Fitzgerald was the last surviving member of a Coast Guard crew that back in 1952 rescued 32 of 33 merchant seamen who were clinging to a piece of a tanker that had split in half off of Cape Cod.

We have the former Commandant, the highest-ranking officer of the Coast Guard here at First Prez, and he might tell you that what Andrew Fitzgerald did was part of what many call the greatest small-boat rescue in the history of the Coast Guard. It was made into a Disney film in 2016 called *The Finest Hours*.

It was on February 18, 1952 that the 503-foot tanker called *Pendleton* with 41 crewmen headed towards Boston from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. They got hit with a huge northeastern storm. Waves taller than a six-story building hit them. Winds exceeding 80 mph with blinding snow pelted them. By 4am, the waves were breaking over the stern. Suddenly, around 5:50 am the *Pendleton* shuddered violently and broke in two.

Many of the seamen scrambled topside. Somehow, they clung to the half ship that remained afloat for 14 hours. They had no time to send out an SOS from the bridge. No transmitter in the stern where the 33 men were. The captain and seven others floated away on the other half of the ship.

But some with a portable radio receiver heard that *another* tanker, named the *Fort Mercer* with 43 men on board, had radioed an SOS from 20 miles offshore. The *Fort Mercer* had also split in two. They too were in trouble, so Coast Guard vessels and plane were dispatched to find the *Fort Mercer*.

Hours later, a radar station discovered there were four pieces of ships floating out there. Two of them must be the *Pendleton*. So, a second rescue operation had to get underway. Four Coast Guardsmen, including Andrew Fitzgerald, **VOLUNTEERED** to go out into

the dark in a 36-foot boat in the midst of a storm to find the *Pendleton* and to rescue the lost.

They did not have the modern day instruments that we have today and so they had to navigate by what is called “dead reckoning.” It’s a seaman’s instinct to pilot a boat through darkness...and in this case in the midst of a turbulent storm.

Somehow miraculously, after an hour, they found half of the *Pendleton*. It would be a dangerous rescue. They only had a spotlight and there were no lights or signs of life on the ship. They tried to get close but the huge stern and the tiny lifeboat got into a dangerous rhythm where the rising of falling of waves would make them soar high and then plunge rapidly and randomly making it incredibly hard to get closer without crashing into it.

They could hear the broken ship groaning and breaking as if it was about to go down. Then they saw men on the *Pendleton* waving their hands and arms frantically.

But now the small lifeboat crew could not figure out how to get them down from the tall half of the ship that’s floating and bobbing in the raging sea. But suddenly they saw a Jacobs’s ladder the men on the *Pendleton* threw over a rail and down the hull a ladder of ropes and wooden slats.

They could see seamen trying desperately to climb down the crazy swinging ladder in the high seas to get to the lifeboat. One by one they got into the boat. All were saved except the 300-pound cook known as “Tiny.” He had given much of his clothes to his shipmates so they could be warm. As Tiny tried to get down the ladder, he slipped and fell into the sea. He was hit by a big wave and hurled back into the water and he drifted away.

As they pulled the last man to safety, the *Pendleton* stern rolled one last time and capsized and sank into the deep.

**A**ndrew Fitzgerald and his three mates saved the crew just in time.

The small crowded lifeboat with its 32 survivors and the four Coast Guardsmen made its way back to shore. People called Andrew Fitzgerald a hero but he kind of shrugged it off. He didn't even tell his wife about it until two years after they got married.

When *The Boston Globe* interviewed him four years ago, he humbly said this great quote: "It was three hours of work that we were supposed to do." Fitzgerald volunteered to do what he was supposed to do at great risk to his own life.

Friends, when Jesus came on Christmas, He came to show us His presence which we can still feel today through His Holy Spirit. And He gives us His great power... but it's not just for our pleasure but rather, it is to use it to save others. That is the purpose He has for us. That is *what we are supposed to do*. That is the purpose of our church here at Ko'olau. And that will be the purpose of our satellite in Kaka'ako.

There are many who are on The Pendletons of Life sinking who need saving. For many of you who are in a storm with great gales of wind and waves, know that Jesus hears your prayers. He will not leave you stranded.

You are sitting here with some hurt in your heart because your loved one died, your finances are stressed, your pets are terminally ill or have died, your body is hurting and for you or your loved ones there are diseases that might be scaring you. Have hope, for help is on the way. The Holy Spirit is here.

And though your healing many not be as dramatic as Danner's as shared in the Advent testimony earlier in the service, help is on the way. God offers you peace and comfort. It may start as just a small spotlight shining towards you as the rescue boat shining a light on the *Pendleton* but know that light is the

beginning of the Light of the World – Jesus Christ coming to you, like an Advent Candle telling us of Jesus.

And here is the twist of the Fitzgerald story that tells us the real, true meaning of Christmas. It's not only that we are to be like the Coast Guard for others but also that Jesus is the coast guard to save the shipwreck of our lives.

What Jesus did was far more than what Fitzgerald did. Jesus saved us at tremendous cost to Himself. It was as if He paddled up to our sinking ship but there was room for only one person in the rescue boat. And He says, "Take my place so you can be spared and I shall die instead. Take my seat. Take my jacket. Get on the boat. I'll die in your place and go overboard into the freezing water."

When Jesus came and was present in the rescue, He gave up His power. HIS PURPOSE was to sacrifice His life for us.

So when we drink that eggnog, sing that Christmas carol, celebrate Christmas at that party, open up that gift, please pause and remember why Jesus came and what He did for us.