



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
December 4, 2016

"The Royal Law" (Real Faith for Real People Series)
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

James 2:8 *You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

James 2:11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

James 2:13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

It is the second week of Advent, and Christmas is coming! When God came to earth in the form of a man named Jesus Christ, we find that His coming turned our world upside down.

Until recently our whole calendar was based on His birth, where we referred to the year as either BC—before Christ—or AD, for "after His death," or in the Latin – anno Domini – the year of our Lord.

But one of the greatest revolutionary things Jesus Christ brought was that we could have a friendship with God. That was His term. He desired to be our friend, and He taught us what it would be like to be a friend to one another. He taught us about true love, true love that would be between friends, relatives, colleagues, and classmates.

He taught us how to live as the royal children of the King of Kings. He taught us what our passage today in verse 8 called the "royal law." Why is it called the royal law? Because love is the supreme law of the great King, who's God. And according to today's Bible, the Royal Law is simply this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This is a major change in viewing love. Remember, in the Old Testament, love and justice were seen as "if you love me, then I will love you. If you hurt me, then I will hurt you." Here is what it said in the book of Leviticus.

Lev. 24:18 "Anyone who kills another person's animal must pay for it in full—a live animal for the animal that was killed.

Lev. 24:19 "Anyone who injures another person must be dealt with according to the injury inflicted—

Lev. 24:20 a fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whatever anyone does to injure another person must be paid back in kind.

BUT then incredibly, phenomenally, amazingly, Jesus comes and says, "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not

come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose." (Matt. 5:17)

When He said He came to accomplish their purpose, He meant He came to show what real justice and real love in the law of Moses are all about, not the kind that burdened people.

The Old Law had taught people to provide love for love, hate for hate. You love me, I love you. You nice to me, I nice to you. But if you not nice to me, I am not going to be nice to you. This was so-called justice. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a fracture for a fracture. A proportional response, in other words. But the problem is that we tend to do more in our response than what is fair.

This reminds me of the West Wing clip I once showed you where the president of the United States, played by Martin Sheen, wants to respond to a foreign attack on our military. (Video clip was shown.)

Proportional response, disproportional response, it's all about you hit me once, I hit you harder. And we call that justice. But that leads people to hate, not love. We yell "lock him up, hang him," or worse yet "kill him." We legitimize hate.

But get this. What we think is true justice is an impossibility because we often don't know what is fair and just. And in some cases hate is justified and legalized.

Some of the greatest sins of the world were legal – Nazism and anti-Semitism in Germany, slavery in America, Apartheid in South Africa, the Killing Fields in Cambodia, the genocide in Rwanda by the Hutus, the rape of Nanjing by the Japanese Empire, and the atrocity of the Cultural Revolution in China, Chinese on Chinese.

But Jesus teaches us that true justice and love do not look like any of those. He says, love your neighbor as yourself. It's a change of a platform, a change in the foundation of understanding. Jesus changed the platform of love.

I am reading a book right now called *Platform Revolution*. It's really a book on business on how to identify and understand the foundational structure of your business, but more importantly to see how the future of platforms must change in order to create the new economy. Okay, that sounds like a mouthful. Let me give you some examples of how platforms were changed in our economy today.

It used to be that viewing movies meant either going to a theater or going to a Blockbuster store to rent movies. But Netflix changed that platform. Netflix allows us to rent or buy movies without leaving the house because we can watch the movies online. It was revolutionary! Last year Netflix was worth 41-billion dollars.

If you wanted to go into the hotel business, you traditionally bought real estate, built hotels, and hired a staff. Then along comes AirBnB that doesn't even own any hotel but is able to provide lodging to millions of people worldwide through private residential owners renting out their own homes to other people. In the last year, AirBnB had 2 million listings in 34,000 cities and 191 countries. Today AirbnB is worth \$30 billion, and it doesn't even own a single hotel. Low

overhead. Now that's changing the platform.

If you wanted to go into the taxi business you traditionally had to buy cars, hire employees to drive them, hire mechanics to maintain the fleet of cars, and buy or rent land to house them. But that platform changed just seven years ago when Uber started its concept of not owning cars but used private citizens' cars to bring people where they need to go. Today Uber is worth \$68 billion, having passed the net worth of Ford and GM in just five years! Uber changed the platform of how to do the rental car business!

Amazon is worth \$292 billion today because of how it changed our buying habits and preferences. You can buy almost everything from Amazon today without leaving your home!

And we all know Apple. We used to think listening to music on our portable CD player or our Sony Walkman and having 12 songs on it was amazing. But Apple changed that platform. It created iTunes and the iPhone that play music not just from a library of 12 songs but from tens of thousands of songs! As of May this year, Apple was worth \$495 billion.

Having worked in the Silicon Valley area for 6-plus years, I believed in Apple when it was just \$33 a share and so bought some. Today it is worth \$110 a share! What a prophet I am that's p-r-o-p-h-e-t. The good news is that I am donating a lot of it to the church to help the deficit. So hint, hint! All of you can do something similar to help the church in any way. We desperately need it.

But back to my point in that there are all these platform changes that's greatly affecting how people live all over the world. When Jesus says to love your neighbor as yourself, that is a game changer too. It is a platform changer to centuries of how people ought to live their lives. It's revolutionary; countering centuries of Old Testament thinking of eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

Why is it so radical? Because Jesus perceptively knew that we, for the most part, love ourselves so much – more than anyone else in the world.

So if we love ourselves that much, it would be revolutionary if we could love others as much as we love ourselves.

And you say you don't love yourself? Then let me ask, who is the one person you defend more than anyone else? Who is the one person you protect more than anyone else? It is you. When we get defensive, who are we protecting? Ourselves.

We make excuses for ourselves all the time. Hey, I wasn't running late; it was the traffic that was bad today. Wasn't me. Hey, I couldn't help what I said. You should have heard what he said to me. What do you mean I am defensive? It wasn't my fault! And why are YOU raising your voice? Don't treat me that way! Don't talk to me that way! Life is so unfair to me. No one has it harder than I! Why didn't Jesus answer my prayer? He was supposed to!

That's all self-love talk. Even if we have poor self-esteem, there is a little voice in us which can get bigger that says don't treat me that way, back off, I didn't mean it that way, I deserve to be treated better. We say that because we love ourselves.

Jesus knows how much we protect and defend ourselves, so He wisely said – love others like you love yourself.

Did you know that every year Pam chooses the theme of the Hawaiian Islands Ministries conference? 400 churches from 40 denominations attend the conference. We choose a theme that we believe God wants the church in Hawaii to ponder, maybe graft into their hearts.

One year the theme was worship. Last year it was on the character of God that He is greater, greater than our fears, greater in magnitude. This year it is MERCY.

We need to understand more the character of God that He is merciful, and that we are to be merciful. For too long people have thought we are against this or that. Can we be for mercy and be merciful?

After we chose our theme of mercy, we heard that Pope Francis chose mercy, too, for the annual theme of the Catholic church. The Pope always steals ideas from H-I-M! The Papal Catholic Church theme just ended recently, but ours continues! Not that we are competitive...

When we love others as ourselves, then we can be merciful. By being merciful, it breaks the cycle of our selfishness. It inserts a new way, a royal way, of living in which we don't have to force our way, but to live a life of selflessness. We don't have to be bent on this thing of justice—bringing other people's wrongs to right. But instead we have a freedom, yes, a freedom to love, forgive, and be merciful for we want to give others a break as much as we would want a break in life.

Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven."

Luke 6:38 Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.

Being generous is a good principle for tithes and offerings. But in the context of these verses, we are called to be generous not only with money but with forgiveness and mercy. For this is the royal way, the right way, the royal law of doing things. This is true justice. There may be someone in your life today who

needs you to love them as you would want to be loved – to offer them forgiveness and mercy.

The last part of today's passage talked about adulterers. It came out of nowhere it seemed.

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Yes, even show mercy to adulterers and murderers. Really? Did we not hear last week Lani Link saying that she prays for the murderer of her husband that he might know Christ?

And can we forgive adulterers?

Forgiveness is difficult. I have had to forgive someone who left me in marriage 40 years ago, who then married someone else a month after the divorce, whom I didn't know even existed. And then a year later sent me a baby announcement. To say the least, that hurt.

Why defend anyone who has hurt us? Or why show any mercy? Because God has shown us mercy! Remember those times when we have been unfaithful to God, ignored God, paid Him lip service but no action? When we lied, mistreated others, given in to temptations, and followed other pursuits in our career, in our way of making money, in our way of making friends and socializing, and in how we have crowded our calendars without Him?

We have been spiritual adulterers who

have been unfaithful to our Lord, or unfaithful to His church – the bride of Christ. Why should we be merciful to other sinners? Because at Christmas, more than any other time, we remember that Christ came to defend and love all sinners. He came to save them. Or to put it more clearly, He came to save us sinners. He came to defend us. He came to say, that with all of our wrong doing, He in His mercy would die in our place so that we could be holy in the presence of God in heaven.

That is the real Christmas story. And if we bypass that story by just singing Frosty the Snowman, Silver Bells, or Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer, then we have missed the whole point of the Christmas season. This Christmas there should be a lump in our throats that God came to earth to save us, forgive us, and show us mercy.

The other part of our story today is this: love others as you would want to be loved. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. And that means you need to put yourself in the other person's shoes, imagine, or empathize what the other person is feeling.

Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

We have an opportunity to show God's love to someone else, because you know how they feel.

I close with this Christmas story.

It was told about ten years ago by Dr. Albert C. Pierce, the Director of the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics at The United States Naval Academy. He was introducing General James Mattis, who gave a lecture on Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Conflict in the spring of 2006.

I chose to use this story on General Mattis more than a week ago. I didn't know till two days ago that he would be the candidate for Secretary of Defense. First the Pope and now Donald Trump is stealing my ideas, reading my tweets. This is an interesting choice for a Secretary of Defense because President-elect Trump is friendly with Russian President Putin and Mattis thinks Russia is a danger to the US. President-elect Trump is for torturing enemies, but Gen. Mattis is against torture and would prefer friending a captured agent with beer and cigarettes to get information.

Back to what Albert Pierce shared about General Mattis, and I quote him now.

"A couple of months ago, when I told General Krulak, the former Commandant of the Marine Corps, now the chair of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors, that we were having General Mattis speak this evening, General Krulak said, "Let me tell you a Jim Mattis story."

"When he was Commandant of the Marine Corps, every year, starting about a week before Christmas, General Krulak and his wife would bake hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Christmas cookies. They would package them in small bundles.

"Then on Christmas day, he would load his vehicle. At about 4 am, General Krulak would drive himself to every Marine guard post in the Washington-Annapolis-Baltimore area and deliver a small package of Christmas cookies to whatever Marines were pulling guard duty that day.

He said that one year, he had gone down to Quantico as one of his stops to deliver Christmas cookies to the Marines on guard duty. He went to the command center and gave a package to the lance corporal who was on duty.

"He asked, "Who's the officer of the day?" The lance corporal said, "Sir, it's Brigadier General Mattis."

"And General Krulak said, "No, no, no. I know who General Mattis is. I mean, who's the officer of the day today, Christmas day?"

"The lance corporal, feeling a little anxious, said, "Sir, it is Brigadier General Mattis."

"About that time, General Krulak spotted in the back room a cot, or a daybed. He said, "No, Lance Corporal, who slept in that bed last night?"

"The lance corporal said, "Sir, it was Brigadier General Mattis."

"About that time, General Krulak said that General Mattis came in, in a duty uniform with a sword, and General Krulak said, "Jim, what are you doing here on Christmas day? Why do you have duty?"

"General Mattis told him that the young officer who was scheduled to have duty on Christmas day had a family, and General Mattis decided it was better for the young officer to spend Christmas Day with his family, and so Mattis [who is unmarried] chose to have duty on Christmas Day.

"General Krulak said, "That's the kind of officer that Jim Mattis is."

Jim Mattis empathized with his troops and so he took the place of a young officer who would have loved being home for Christmas. That is loving your neighbor as you love yourself. At the time of that story, Jim Mattis was a one-star Brigadier General, but he retired as a four-star general in the Marines. No surprise that a man of his quality was promoted.

We don't have to be generals, officers, or people with titles to live out the royal law of loving others as we love ourselves. We can all extend love and mercy to others. In fact, we ought to because it's the supreme law of God, the King of Kings, who sent His only Son to save us.

So follow the star of Bethlehem and you'll be a four-star in God's eyes every time.

Merry Christmas! Let's pray.