



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

December 30, 2018

"Remember the Lord Your God (2018)"

Christopher Pan

**G**ood morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

Happy New Year's, and I hope you had a wonderful Christmas. I hope you ate lots of good, delicious food.

So, I have bad news, and I have good news.

The bad news: 88% of Americans gain weight between Thanksgiving and New Year's. I've seen different numbers about how much we gain—anywhere from one pound to five pounds to ten pounds. I know that I personally gained at the higher end of that spectrum, but I had a head start, because I've been eating Halloween candy since October! That's the bad news.

Here's the good news: New Year's Day is on Tuesday, so you're almost done gaining weight—just hold on for two more days and you'll be skinny again on Wednesday! I'm pretty sure that's how it works. Seriously though, if you are one of the 88% of Americans who gained weight during the holidays, I think the actual good news is that hopefully you gained weight because you have stable access to food and shelter. I'm sure you know that there are many in our state and in

our world who don't have that luxury.

I have more bad news and more good news.

The bad news—I'm only going to speak for about 15 minutes this morning. I know you are disappointed.

But the good news: We are going to do something very different today for our sermon. Instead of me taking all the time to speak, you all will have an opportunity to speak, and share about God's faithfulness and grace to you in 2018.

Our sermon title today is, "Remember the Lord Your God, 2018 Edition". Before we make our resolutions for 2019, before we move with anticipation into a new year, we're going to take this Sunday to remember the Lord our God. Let's look back, and remember and acknowledge God and all He's done for us in 2018.

I'm always grateful for the opportunity to speak and share my stories from this pulpit. But I know it's not just me and the people who stand up here who have stories about God's love and grace. Each of you has an amazing story about God's provision and mercy and grace this past year. So, please start praying and thinking about

whether you would like to share with all of us in a few minutes, about how God has shown his love and grace to you in 2018.

We all sang in the hymn just a few minutes ago, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, here by Thy great help I've come." And that song was written 260 years ago, so those words may sound weird and unfamiliar to you. You may be only familiar with the name Ebenezer from Ebenezer Scrooge from the Christmas Carol. But Ebenezer actually comes from the Bible. Ebenezer is Hebrew for "Stone of Help".

In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, the nation of Israel is battling for its survival against the Philistines. And there's a series of battles between Israel and the Philistines. And finally, near a town called Mizpah, God intervenes and saves the Israelites and the Philistines are soundly defeated. Peace descends on the land. So Samuel, Israel's leader at the time, places a giant stone, to mark the victory and remind the people of God's help.

1 Samuel 7:12: *Samuel took a single rock and set it upright between [the towns of] Mizpah and Shen. He named it "Ebenezer" (Rock of Help), saying, "This marks the place where God helped us."*

**S**amuel places the rock, so that everyone would see and remember how God came through for them. So, that's what the lyrics mean and that's what we are going to do today. We are going to raise our Ebenezer, to testify about how God was there for us in 2018, as a reminder of God's faithfulness and love.

Are you ready? Not yet? Want a few more minutes to psych yourself up? Okay, I'll give you a little more prep time.

400 years before Samuel, Moses leads the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. You know, there's the ten plagues, and the crossing of the Red Sea, and then Israel wanders in the desert for 40 years. And while they're in the desert, God provides miraculously for them. Their clothes and sandals don't wear out, God provides a bread-like substance called "manna" to eat every day, and fresh water to drink.

And after 40 years of wandering, the nation of Israel is finally about to enter the promised land. Moses stops and gives a speech, reminding the people to remember God. He tells them, don't forget God, and don't think that you got where you are on your own strength.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 8, Moses describes the promised land, a land flowing with abundant water, full of fruit and honey, a prosperous place...a place where 88% of them will gain weight over the holidays. And then, Moses says this. I'm going to read it at length because it applies to us today, just like it applied to the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 8:10 - *"10 When You have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord Your God for the good land He has given you. 11 Be*

*careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord Your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*

Moses says, "Remember the Lord Your God. When you've eaten and are satisfied, don't become proud and forget how God has provided for you." And those are the same instructions for us today, at the end of 2018.

Moses continues to remind them of how God has provided.

Verse 15 - *"15 He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you."*

You know, we are on a journey, just like the Israelites, and God has brought us along every step of the way in 2018. He has delivered us and saved us and provided for us in big and small ways.

And I know the reality is that some of us today maybe aren't feeling well-fed or satisfied. Some of us here today have experienced tremendous loss and pain in 2018. Some of us may feel like we are still out wandering in the desert, surrounded by venomous snakes and scorpions. But the instruction is still: Remember the Lord your God. Don't forget Him. Because even in the desert...maybe

especially in the desert... surrounded by venomous snakes and scorpions, God is there with you. He is bringing you water from the rock and giving you manna to eat.

Moses concludes by saying this in verse 17 - *17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which He swore to your ancestors, as it is today."*

Everything we have is a gift from God, it's a result of His grace. You might say, "No, I got this because I worked hard for it," but Moses reminds us that even that ability to work hard, is a gift from God by grace.

Now are you ready? Let's be a community that pauses, and raises our Ebenezer, and remembers the Lord our God.

It's always hardest to go first, so I'll go first and share just a few things from my perspective as Executive Director, of how God has been gracious to us as a church in 2018.

First, praise God for all of you. This church community is what it is because of all of you. So thank you for being here and being part of our community.

God provided abundantly this year, bringing us two new staff members in 2018: Jeff Page, our Young Adult Director and Christian Schroppel, our Middle School Coordinator.

God graciously paved the way for us to open a satellite campus in Kakaako next year.

On the day after Christmas, Jenny Sung and I received a great Christmas present of picking up the keys to our location at 547 Halekauwila.

Here's a picture of Jenny and Warren Lilo, whom you may remember from the video in Jenny's sermon a few weeks back, standing at 547 Halekauwila last Wednesday. As you can see, the dividing walls have already been removed and renovation is on the way. Praise God.

Speaking of 547 Halekauwila, we launched the 547 Project in November, hoping raise startup funds for the satellite campus, with a goal of raising \$547,000. Well, as of Christmas Day, we've raised... \$548,000. \$548,080 to be exact. Praise God for His grace and provision, and for your generosity. Thanks to God's faithfulness and your generosity, our general operating budget ended last year in the black financially, and we hope to do so again this year.

Praise God that on Easter, we had 53 people who were baptized for the first time, and 80 more made reaffirmations of faith. Hundreds of kids came to our Summer Jam/VBS this summer, and more than 3,400 people attended our Christmas services last week.

Praise God for Laundry Love, our ministry of washing laundry for free for our houseless friends in Waimanalo. I vaguely remembered that we passed some milestone this year, so I called Laura Kay Rand, and asked: "Was it 1,000 pounds of laundry?" And she said, "Close—it's 100,000 pounds of laundry!" In fact, as of just last week, we've had the privilege of washing 159,522 pounds of laundry. A few months ago, we helped launch a mobile hot shower unit for the houseless that you may have seen parked in

our lot. And thank God for our youth and young adults who handed out more than 400 care packages right before Christmas to the houseless in Kakaako, Chinatown, Waimanalo and Waianae.

God has been present this year at our healing services, our Mental Health Conference and at the Life in the Spirit Conference, working in amazing ways to heal people's lives, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually.

Praise God for all of this and so much more in 2018. God has been gracious and merciful.

Now, it's your turn, to Remember the Lord Your God.

Two rules: Please be concise and Christ-centered.

Rule 1: Concise. Concise means...concise. So please, no stories that start, "When I was four years old, back on the farm..." If you are not concise, I'll say, "Thank you so much for sharing," and we'll get that music they play at the Oscars to play you off.

Rule 2. Christ-centered.

As Pastor Dan preached last week, God has written Himself into our story. And not just that, God is the hero of the story. So I know your kids are great, my kids are great, but now is not the time to tell us how great your kids are, or grandkids are. Now is the time to tell us how great God is. God is the hero of the story.

Unwritten rule 3. Keep the mic one shaka away from your face so we can hear you, and please say your name.

We've got two helpers, walking around with mics. Just raise your

hand and they'll find their way to you. Before we start, let's pray, 'cause who knows what's going to happen!

God, You are the hero in our story. This year and every year. We remember Your provision, and Your mercy and Your grace to us in 2018. We raise our Ebenezer now and say, "Here by Thy great help we've come." May Your Holy Spirit move among us now, give people the words to share how marvelous a God You are. In Jesus name. And all God's people say, Amen!

[Time of Sharing]

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories. Thank you for your courage and your vulnerability. There are so many stories of God's faithfulness and mercy. If you didn't get a chance to share, please email: [aloha@fpchawaii.org](mailto:aloha@fpchawaii.org) We'd love to read your stories.

There are two more days in 2018. I encourage you to take some time today and tomorrow to reflect, and remember the Lord your God and His grace and love to you in 2018.

Will you please stand and pray with me:

God, You are gracious and good to us. You are marvelous, and we remember You. You are our God. We stand amazed in Your presence. We pray in Jesus' name, and all God's people say: Amen!

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*Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by contacting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*