



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

April 20 & 21, 2019

"Jesus is Real, You Know" - Easter Weekend

Pastor Dan Chun

I think many of us want a world where there is safety and order.

It starts off small.

Years ago, when Starbucks started invading the world, I was just getting into coffee. So when I went to Starbucks, I didn't know what to order.

I would say, "I'd like a cup of coffee please."

And the barista would say, "Regular or espresso?"

Oh, I guess espresso, whatever that is.

Like what kind? Macchiato, latte, americano, café mocha, cappuccino, or maybe a frappucino?

"Well, they all sound like pasta to me, so I guess a latte."

What size?

Ummm ... medium?

Oh you mean "grande," which is smaller than a venti, but taller than a tall.

Taller than a tall? Oh yes, grande, I guess.

Hot or cold?

Hot.

You want regular milk?

Oh no, I'm Asian. I would like soy milk please.

No almond?

No, soy is fine.

So you want a hot soy latte grande?

I guess that is what I want. But could I have something sugar-free? Like put in Splenda.

Oh yes, you can help yourself over there for Splenda, or you can get a sugar-free syrup, like vanilla, caramel, mocha, peppermint, hazelnut or cinnamon dolce.

Oh, I guess a cinnamon dolce.

So you want a hot soy grande latte with sugar free cinnamon dolce?

Yes!

So that is what I order all the time now— a hot soy grande latte with sugar free cinnamon

dolce—plus a dash of foam. Remember that for me next time you're at Starbucks. (Just kidding!) All that, only 90 calories.

Rattling off a coffee order like that is now normal for most of us. We want specifics and order in how we do things.

When it comes to religion, some of us may want choices. We may be looking for a religion of many gods—gods of varying powers that can come in tall, grande, venti, or trenta.

But when life is hard, when there is a lot of flap, it's not the time for a frappuccino. We want something that will help us when there is trouble and maybe even danger in our lives.

I rarely tell travel stories, but let me tell you of a recent time when I was on an international flight.

The plane had just arrived at the gate. We were all lined up in the aisle to disembark.

Pam and I were talking to this wonderful Christian African-American flight attendant.

We were just starting to walk off when a British man inadvertently bumped a middle Eastern woman standing behind me when he tried to pass her and us to get up front. Maybe he had a connecting flight to catch.

She immediately yelled, "Hey, what do you think you are doing?"

He looked back and said, "What is that you were saying?"

"You bumped me!"

"You talking to me?" He now was turning back.

The woman yelled, "You had no right to do that!"

He drew closer and said "You talking to me?" And I'm thinking, "Golly, this is like Robert DeNiro as the cab driver in the movie *Taxi Driver*: "You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me?"

Then she yells and eggs him on, "I'm not afraid of you. I'm not afraid of you."

Meanwhile, I'm in between them and I'm thinking, "I'm afraid."

The man drew closer to her and said, "You want to make something of this?"

The women kept yelling, "I'm not afraid. You have no right to just walk by and hit me."

And I'm thinking, "Oh great, I have been in this situation before on a plane when I met a drunk in the aisle who tried to put a headlock on me and I had to go into my gung fu moves that

Bruce Lee taught me. Actually, I am a black belt in gung fu, but in my martial arts school, the black belt was the lowest level.

So I'm thinking, "Golly, I am going to have to go into my Praying Mantis stance, which is not the classic gung fu praying mantis. Rather, it's a prayer position during a time of conflict, as it gives a picture of peace. "Can I help you?"

But from there I can quickly block and deflect, if need be. Or I can even hit the throat to put the guy out. Don't try this at home, kids. Only ordained pastors powered by the Holy Spirit can do this.

So here we have an African-American flight attendant, Pam and me, the Chinese representatives of Beijing, a Brit whose offense I didn't think was that bad, and a Middle Eastern woman who was clearly bumped and now pumped. I'm thinking, "Man, it's time to call the UN Security Council into session!"

This is going to be bad, and my praying mantis may not work.

Then suddenly the flight attendant started yelling to the man, "Hey you, just settle down!" But the man kept talking and the other woman kept yelling.

The flight attendant said, "No, you all settle down and keep moving off the plane. Keep moving. Everyone just settle down. That's enough. Walk away. Walk away!!!"

And the man backed off and walked off the plane.

At the time of a crisis, we need a strong voice, for someone to be in control, someone with wisdom, someone who has peace in their mind to supervise our life and can articulate what we need to do and how to do it.

We live in a world that is full of conflict, as many of you in this room know. There is stress and worry. And there is pain. Broken relationships, illness, lack of forgiveness. We need a strong voice to tell us what to do.

There are three big questions in life: if you choose marry, who will be your mate? Choose the wrong one and it is a life of hell and heartache. Choose the right one and it's mo' bettah.

Then second question is what is your mission? What is your purpose in life? The two most important days are the day you were born and the day you know why. It's not to just eat, drink and make merry. Why are you here on earth?

Mate, Mission and then, finally, who is your Master, meaning who will be the loving one you will trust, follow, and rely on for guidance and wisdom and purpose and strength, especially when in trouble?

For those who are in a recovery program, they know there needs to be a higher power who will help them recover.

On this Easter weekend, we proclaim that Higher Power has a name, Jesus Christ. But can we even know that this Jesus of Nazareth really is God, the Messiah, the Christ?

That is what we have to figure out. Mate, mission, and master of our life.

Because I would say, this Jesus, He's real, you know. He actually lived and, as the Easter story says, He actually rose from the dead, which proves His divinity. He continues to live in Heaven today.

But how do we know there is a loving God in this universe who created the universe and even created the earth in it? Is there an Intelligent Being behind the design of all that we know?

My friend Lee Strobel is an award-winning journalist. A movie was made about him. It's on Netflix now.

He was the legal editor of the Chicago Tribune, with a law degree from Yale. He was an atheist, but then found that Jesus was real, you know.

Strobel has written many books making *The Case for Faith*, *The Case for Christ*, but his last book was *The Case for Miracles*.

He asked the question: Did God actually create and intervene in this world?

In his last book, *The Case for Miracles*, I was surprised that he interviewed another friend of mine, Dr. Michael Strauss. Dr. Strauss is a super smart guy.

I met Mike in Menlo Park, California in the young adult fellowship I was pastoring as he was into quantum mechanics and subatomic particles.

He got his Ph.D in High Energy Physics at UCLA. His dissertation was entitled, *A Study of Lamda Polarization and Phi Spin Alignment in Electron-Positron Annihilation at 29 GeV as a Probe of Color Field Behavior*.

When I heard the title, I was super bummed because I was going to write a book using the same title on the same topic! What are the chances?!

Dr. Strauss joined the faculty of the University of Oklahoma in 1995 and has earned the University's top awards you can get for teaching excellence.

You can catch him these days often performing research at Switzerland's largest and most powerful particle collider – the Large Hadron Collider – that smashes protons to understand, among other things, the properties of the top quark, which is the fundamental particle with the highest mass. I know many of you are jealous that he gets to do this work instead of you.

He collaborated on one or two experiments that actually used the data from that collider to help discover the Higgs boson, the so-called "God Particle" in 2012.

Okay, so Dr. Strauss is a smart guy who understands physics and the universe. And recently, for the first time in history, we just got pictures of a Black Hole, this huge gravitational hole in the universe where there is no concept of time, a hole that sucks in things that will never be seen again.

But here's the deal: it is fascinating to know that there is no doubt in Dr. Michael Strauss' scientific mind that when it comes to Easter, there is a God. God did come to earth in the form of a man. And the universe continually points to God.

But more importantly, scientifically, the universe started with, as you may have heard, a Big Bang and it is rooted in intelligent design by a God, not due to some random happening.

Michael Strauss wrote about it in his book, and is quoted heavily in Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Miracles*:

Dr. Strauss says, "Look, we don't live our lives based on obscure possibilities; we live our lives based on probabilities.

"Is it possible my wife poisoned my cereal this morning? Anything is possible, but not everything is probable."

"The real question is: Given what we observe with the universe, what's the highest probability?"

"Everything tells us there was a real beginning. Everything else is a mere possibility, with no observational or experimental evidence to back it up." (Case for Miracles by Lee Strobel, 2018, Zondervan, P. 173)

Dr. Strauss would say there is compelling evidence that there is a miracle-working God behind the universe.

He says, "Over the last decades, physicists have discovered that the numbers which govern the operation of the universe are calibrated with mind-boggling precision so intelligent life can exist...."

"Picture a control board with a hundred different dials and knobs, each representing a different parameter of physics. If you turn any of them just slightly to the left or right - *poof!* Intelligent life becomes impossible anywhere in the universe...."

"It turns out that shortly after the big bang, the amount of matter in the universe was precisely tuned to one part in a trillion trillion trillion trillion. That's a ten with sixty zeroes after it! In other words, throw in [the size of] a dime's worth of extra matter and the universe wouldn't exist." (Ibid., pp. 175-176).

And then he adds, "Not only is our universe precisely calibrated to a breathtaking degree, but our planet is also remarkably and fortuitously situated so life would be possible.... If you're too close to the center, there's too much radiation and there's also a black hole, which you want to avoid. [You'd get sucked in and that really sucks!]."

"If you're too far from the center you won't have the right heavy elements; you'd lack the oxygen and carbon you'd need."

"To have life, you need a star like our sun ... you need a moon like ours ... to stabilize the

Earth's tilt.... Also, it's nice to have a huge planet like Jupiter nearby to act like a vacuum cleaner by attracting potentially devastating comets and meteors away from you." [Ibid., pp. 179-180].

So how many conditions have to be met to create an Earth-like planet?

One person says that the chance of our earth being randomly created for life would be like shaking all the separate parts of a wrist watch and throwing them into a corner and seeing the parts all fall into place to form a well-run Timex.

Or if someone could shuffle pieces of metal and throw them into a hanger and they form a Boeing 777, perfectly wired.

Dr. Strauss says, "In science, we have a scientific phrase for probabilities like that – and the phrase is: Ain't gonna happen."

He said, I know for a fact, as a scientist, that "there's *one* universe that appears to have a beginning, which is credibly calibrated in a way that defies naturalistic explanations and there's a highly improbable planet whose unlikely conditions allow us to exist."

He said, "To me, all of that begs for a divine explanation." (Ibid., p.184.)

In summarizing why Dr. Strauss thinks that God is the most likely explanation for our universe and planet, he explains it this way:

God must be:

- 1. Transcendent**
- 2. Immaterial or Spirit**
- 3. Timeless**
- 4. Powerful**
- 5. Smart**
- 6. Personal**
- 7. Creative**
- 8. Caring**

"First, if a God created our universe, God must be transcendent, because He exists apart from His creation."

"Second, He must be immaterial or spirit since He existed before the physical world."

"Third, He must be timeless or eternal since He existed before physical time was created."

"Fourth, He must be powerful given the immense energy of the big bang."

"Fifth, He must be smart, given the fact that the big bang was not some chaotic, random event, but was masterfully finely tuned."

"Sixth, He must be personal because someone's decision had to be made to create."

"Seventh, He must be creative. I mean, just look at the wonders of the universe."

"And Eighth, He must be caring because He purposefully crafted a habitat for us...."

"All these qualities we've elicited from the creation evidence are consistent with the God of the Bible."

If there's just one creator, then that rules out polytheism (hence all the Starbucks coffee choices).

Since God is outside of creation, this rules out pantheism, which is the belief that God is within nature and the universe, instead of outside of it.

The universe is not cyclical, which violates the tenets of Eastern religions.

And the big bang contradicts ancient religious assumptions that the universe is static.

For a very talented and award-winning scientist like Mike Strauss, there is a preponderance of evidence that the God of the Bible exists.

So maybe there is a God. But is this God loving?

When we are stressed and hurting in this world, when we go through divorce or disease or a deficit in our finances or a drug habit or, if younger, when we don't make the team or get into the school of our choice, who will care or save or deliver our souls?

Easter began billions of years ago. It's the reality of God coming to Earth in the form of a man named Jesus. It was all part of the plan from the time God created the universe and then earth.

When we hear there was a Christmas star over Bethlehem heralding the birth of Jesus, the Son of God on earth, realize for that light from that created star to hit earth at that exact time, at

Christmas, it meant the star had to be created thousands of light years prior for its light to hit the earth.

In addition, if you were to make up and design a God, wouldn't you want a God like Jesus?

Jesus taught and lived love and grace and mercy.

He was for peace.

He was kind to children and women and men.

He forgave those who sinned.

He offered guidelines on how to live a better life.

And He was the only founder of a major religion who said, "I am God."

And for me, why did I decide to leave journalism, broadcasting, and filmmaking and devote my life instead to communicating the good news about Jesus? It's because I discovered He's real. He's real, you know. He is actually real.

And He suffered for us. We rejoice that Jesus is alive during Easter, but before Easter, the night before Good Friday, did you know that...

...Jesus was blindfolded
...and then brutally beaten
...and then hit with a stick,
...and then whipped
...and then stabbed
...and then was crucified

with nails put in His wrists and ankles onto standing wooden beams to make Him suffocate and die over six hours.

But though Jesus could have asked a legion of warrior angels to come down and save Him, He chose to be a sacrifice that would take away the sin, your sin and that of the world!

Mel Gibson directed a movie about Jesus called *The Passion of the Christ* starring Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus. There is a picture that Chris Pan showed in his sermon last week that shows Mel Gibson talking to the Jim Caviezel playing Jesus on the movie set. Here is the picture.



The reason I am showing it to you is that this picture is buzzing around the internet as some wise guy put a caption under it that I find really funny. "That moment when you try to explain to Jesus how hard your life has been lately."

"Jesus, did You know that last week they closed the Pali and the Likelike? It made the drive like 15 minutes longer in my air conditioned car! And yesterday, I couldn't find parking at Ala Moana! Jesus did You know that I, Dan Chun, had hand surgery last month and they actually cut into my hand with a scalpel and cut two tendons? Yeah, You had nails put in Your wrists, but my hand hurt so much that the Tylenol wasn't working."

This is not in any way to look down on the real, authentic pain in your life, but the point is that Jesus came to this earth to help us with our real pain and give us a mission in life that is worth living. He wants to hear from you. No prayer is too small.

And if He is real, if you were to come to terms with that, how would that change your life, your job, your social life, your family, your community work, your education, your dealing with your pain, your mission in helping other people with their pain?

The universe, at its core, is about God.

Earth is about God.

Hawai'i, in its very essence of creation, is about God, who came to earth named Jesus – fully human, fully God.

Even before the missionaries came, the Hawaiians sensed there was one true God greater than all the other gods and their kapu.

It began with Queen Ke'opuolani, the wife of King Kamehameha the Great, who was the first Christian convert and who left much of the old Hawaiian ways for Jesus. Read her biography!

And throughout the royalty we know that, to name a few, Kamehameha III and the Queens Ka'ahumanu, Kapi'olani, Emma, and of course the last monarch Lili'uokalani all—yes all—became followers of Jesus Christ and wanted all of Hawai'i to follow Jesus.

Such faith is in our roots of the aina of Hawai'i in ways like the universe we never might have known.

The song we often sing at the end of public gatherings, is Hawai'i Aloha. You know the tune.

E Hawai'i e ku'u one hānau e Ku'u home kulaīwi nei.

It's about God's divine blessings on His creation. That's what we are singing in Hawaiian.

But even this sacred, honored, traditional Hawaiian song, like the deep essence of the universe, was *actually*, historically all about Jesus Christ in its origins. Most people don't know that.

The original lyrics were actually a poem written in 1875 by a woman named Ellen H. Willis entitled "I Left It All With Jesus."

Then a man named James McGranahan took those words of the poem and made a melody to go with that. He died in 1907.

The original tune is McGranahan's, not Lorenzo Lyons.

The original song back in the 1800's was entitled "I Left It All With Jesus."

And here is how the original lyrics by Ellen Willis go. Sing with me with the tune of Hawai'i Aloha if you can.

I Left It All for Jesus

**Oh, I Left It All with Jesus,
long ago,
All my sins I brought Him
and my woe.
When by faith I saw Him
bleeding on the tree,
Heard His still small whisper,
"Tis for thee."**

**From my weary heart
the burden rolled away,
Happy day! Happy day!
From my weary heart
the burden rolled away,
Happy day! Happy day!**

That's the original song! One of the favorite songs of Hawaii in its roots was all about Jesus.

Jesus is real, you know. He created Hawai'i. The universe and this earth is all about God. And God really came to earth in Jesus thousands of years ago.

As you can see from the Scripture passage below, He chose to sacrifice His life on a cross or, as the song says, on a tree to take away any hindrance of sin in our lives both in this life and the next.

And to show He means what He says and has the power to do it, He rose from the dead. Resurrection!

He came to offer us new life. He loves us. He forgives. He will help us.

Most importantly, if we dedicate our lives to Him, we will find the hope we have always wanted.

John 20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.

Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have

taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If

you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio and video recordings of sermons, also are available at fpchawaii.org by clicking the eSermons tab.