



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

May 5, 2019

Youth Sunday

Introduction

Aloha, everyone and welcome to Youth Sunday! My name is Matt Yamamoto and I am the High School Director.

I can't tell you how pleased and honored the youth group is to have the opportunity to worship with all of you. This year's theme is "Diamond in the Rough." The diamond is the hardest mineral found on earth. It is also one of the most desired because of its beauty and reflective nature. It's shiny.

The adage speaks to the unfinished nature of the diamond. A diamond in the rough is still in the process of being developed into the thing of beauty that is highly desired. It points towards the potential that is found within, but hasn't yet been exposed. A diamond in the rough is seen as a hidden treasure that can only be brought out by someone who knows what to look for. They can see the finished diamond while it is still within its crude form, and will patiently cut away at the portions of the rock that aren't meant to be there, shaping its angles and surfaces until it perfectly reflects the light shining into it.

God uses the difficult times as a time of shaping to build character in our life. As this painful shaping occurs, what is exposed is who we are meant to be in Christ — a reflection of Him.

We are all at some step of that process, and no one is a completely perfect, finished product this side of Heaven because God is continually shaping and working on us. In today's service, we will be exploring how God sees our potential like no one else can and how he patiently brings it out. We hope that God will speak to you through what we have to offer.

Marshall Yi

Hi people. I'm Marshall and I like dogs, cows, dinosaurs, kids, and of course myself, but anyway....

In my younger school years, I was just like everyone else and, the older we got, the worse our behavior became. Over time, I was changing along with everybody else and I didn't even realize what I was becoming.

In seventh grade, things got really bad. It was so bad that it shocked me into realizing what was happening. I realized that if I continued on that path, I would lose every good part of me.

So, I made a decision that shattered my world: I decided to isolate myself. At break, I sat by myself. At lunch, I ate alone.

When the year ended, my parents asked me if I wanted to be homeschooled. It was a difficult decision for me because, on one hand, I didn't want to abandon the few friends I chose to keep, but on the other hand, I didn't like who I had become.

I chose homeschooling because I thought it would save me from who I didn't want to be, and it did.

My teachers used to say, "If you wouldn't say this in front of your parents then you shouldn't say it all." Well, now my mom was my teacher and I was in front of her all day long; so that part was easy.

Though it came with some positive results, it also caused one big problem.

I was really lonely. I wanted to hold myself to a higher standard, but isolating myself to do that had taken things a little too far. I had pushed everyone away. Not just my schoolmates, but everyone, even my friends in youth group. I wasn't connected anywhere.

Eventually I felt like everyone I loved was gone and I was walking through life completely alone. I expected God would talk to me in a booming voice or a swirling cloud of fire, and since he didn't, I thought even he had left me.

During all of that, I started to realize that God was actually helping me. He gave me a push in the direction of becoming more like him.

And He gave me my small group. My small group is the highlight of my week. It's a safe environment where we can be vulnerable with each other and in doing so, get the support we need.

At one of my most difficult times, I went out and sat alone under a tree for two hours. I felt hopeless, like I didn't matter to anyone. I texted one of my small group friends that I was done and I couldn't keep going. God used my friend to help me understand that they all love and care for me, which brought me back to reality.

I would like to say that this one experience forever changed my life, but I'm stubborn, apparently, so God had to show me a couple other things.

At our youth winter camp, we learned about how God reveals himself to us. God showed me, even though I couldn't see him, He was with me. And although I wanted God to show up in astounding ways, He often shows up in the quiet, little things. Now I could see I wasn't alone under that tree. He was there with me.

Also, at the HIM conference, God gave me some prophetic words through Matt and other youth leaders.

That was the last, tiny push I needed to change the way I felt about myself. I chose to let go of my feelings of abandonment and accept all God has for me.

God showed me that the straight and narrow is not a road meant to be traveled alone. It's wide enough for me, my friends, my family and Jesus to walk together.

Joshua 1:9 says,

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Through this experience I realized perspective plays a crucial role in the hard times. We can get lost focusing on the problem, or, we can look for what God is doing, and allow Him to teach us.

Staying with the "Diamond in the Rough" theme, keeping my eyes on God and allowing my

hardships to help me grow is just like how carbon accepts the pressure needed to turn it into a diamond. If I don't learn anything from the difficult times I go through, I'll end up as just a crushed, beaten up rock.

Jesse Makuakane

Good morning, church! My name is Jesse and, unlike my dear friend Marshall, who—I'm sure—has already caused the socks to be blown clear off your feet, I am a senior.

I opened the door to my dad's green RAV4 after a long day of 10th grade. This was an unexpected surprise. My dad didn't usually pick me up from school, especially not without letting me know in the morning.

After saying hello, we made plans to go see a movie later that night. I had been thinking about asking him that all day. By the time we finished making plans, we had already made the quick trip home.

We pulled into the driveway, coming face-to-face with a red car, one that belonged to a family friend. I got my bag out of the backseat and walked in through the garage.

When I came into the house, I caught a glimpse of my mom and her friend both sitting on the living room couch before I turned into the office to drop my bag off at my desk. My dad poked his head in the room. "Hey, so, when you get all settled, your mom and I want to talk to you in the living room."

My mind suddenly flooded with anxiety. This is exactly what they did when they caught me red-handed in stupid adolescent slip-ups. “Oh no,” I thought. “What did I do this time? Did I forget to turn my fan off? Did they find the text thread between me and that cute girl from school, the one filled with heart-eye emojis and gushy teenager emotions?”

I came to the horrifying realization that they might have busted me for something I didn’t even know that I did. “What did I do!?!”

I racked my brain, trying to figure out my mistake as I maintained my posture to seem like I was totally keeping it cool. I went to my bedroom, changed out of my school uniform, and rejoined my parents in the living room.

I took a deep breath, preparing for the worst and hoping for the best, as I nonchalantly plopped down on the couch next to my mom. “So, what’s up?” I squeaked, my inner dialogue getting the most of my steely-cool façade.

I looked at my mom, and she did not look pleased.

Great.

“Son,” my dad said shakily. I turned my head towards the adjacent couch, surprised that my dad was the one who started the conversation. “The reason we’re meeting right now is because I need to tell you something.”

He told me he was deciding to leave the family.

Have you ever seen a game of Jenga where someone takes a block from the bottom row and the whole structure topples over? When someone takes a block that is necessary for the integrity of the tower, and before you can say “Jenga,” the building you were constructing is a pile of rubble on the floor?

As I stared at the unorganized jumble of blocks that — just a few seconds ago — was my tidy life, you could imagine I had a few questions floating around in my brain.

Was part of it my fault? What was I supposed to do next? Where was God in all of this?

It wasn’t the warm welcome I’d always naïvely imagined life was going to give me.

It was real. It was raw. And it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me.

All my life, I had grown up “Christian.” I went to church every Sunday, I knew all the Bible stories, I could recite memory verses, but I didn’t know God on a personal level and that became very clear to me when all this happened.

I couldn’t piggyback on my parents’ faith anymore. I needed to decide what I believed in for myself. For about the next year, I was a whirlwind of emotions — confused, lost, scared, angry. I didn’t know where to go with my life at that point.

My main male role model was no longer there to lead me by example. I was unsure about how my mom and I were going to be able to make money to live. I found myself getting into even more arguments with my mom over things that were not a big deal at all.

But the emotion that won out over all the rest of them was bitterness. I was bitter that my life changed drastically. I was bitter that I didn’t have a dad anymore. I was bitter that God didn’t show himself to me.

And then He did.

Around 8:00 in the evening on September 24, 2017, I was with my girlfriend at the time, Elise. We were talking in her front yard, and I was getting ready to drive home.

It was a clear, crisp night; the gentle breeze made the palm trees in her yard sway ever so slightly. The stars sprinkled the black canvas of the sky, and the slight murmur of music from inside her house completed the relaxing atmosphere.

Despite the idyllic surroundings, I was having a pretty rough night. I was venting to her about life, family, and friends when I started to feel heavier than usual.

The weight grew until I felt like I was carrying a massive load on my shoulders. My legs started to become weak until I was finally compelled to fall on my knees by something much greater than myself.

That was when I heard it. A strong voice that said, "I am the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

I also felt an enormous sense of peace, calmness, and joy: things which, as I discovered later, marked the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit.

It was so powerful that I turned over and laid on my back on the grass. The mix of emotions overwhelmed me as I looked up at the stars, and I began to weep, out of pain, out of awe, and most importantly, out of a sense of belonging.

It was — to quote Mike Pilavachi — an "Oh, flippin' wow!" moment.

Through that experience, I was able to step back and take things in their true perspective, not my own skewed, self-centered one. I saw how big God is, how small my problems truly were, and how much a big God could care about my small problems.

I was filled with a new sense of gratitude. The God of the entire universe came and chose to meet specifically with me at that moment.

I was humbled. I realized that, as much as I'd like to believe it, I am no less of a sinner than my father. When it came to God's eyes, my dad didn't need any more saving than I did. We both fall short of God's glory.

I had another epiphany, as well. A month or so prior to this experience, I had returned from

a 2-week mission trip to Swaziland and I hadn't really processed the trip. But when God met me that night, I realized that, though my life was a bit hairy, it was a walk in the park compared to the lives of the children living in the Swazi countryside. I had so much to be thankful for.

I started seeking God on my own, desiring to be in that unexplainable presence again. After some waiting and digging, I found it once more at the Life in the Spirit conference.

I was introduced to the gifts of the Spirit, and I began to function in them. Speaking in tongues was especially helpful to me, because it let me express all the pent-up emotions that I had in complete surrender to Christ.

Along with the gifts of the Spirit, I learned to be expectant and joyful in all circumstances. God really was in control, and He knew exactly what He was doing.

What is supposed to happen will happen, and it will be in God's perfect timing, even though it may be hard to see at first.

When I learned to rest in that, my life became so much less anxious and so much more malleable to God's plan.

I became rooted in Him, like Psalm 62:5-6, "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken."

In my newfound peace, I was able to listen for God's voice more, and I felt like He was guiding me places that I never would have been able to go without His help.

I was able to go to England last summer to attend the Naturally Supernatural and Soul Survivor conferences, and I was able to make a bunch of connections with the people there.

More recently, my mom and I were looking at the daunting task of finding a college that was affordable as well as being one that would fit me well. Once I decided on the college I felt God was calling me to, countless doors opened up for me to be able to visit the campus, build relationships with the people there, and the finances fell into place.

God has proven Himself to be faithful again and again, and seeing His immense faithfulness, I am ready to go wherever He calls me, because I know that His plan is for my good.

At this point, I feel like God is calling me to full-time ministry, so I'm gleaning all that I can from our pastors and leaders in the church.

God took the mess of my collapsed life Jenga blocks and started creating something new and better. And in His reconstruction, He is giving me a new meaning, a new purpose, and a new identity:

His son. Son of the Most High King.

Of course, there will always be rough times, but now I know where I can put my confidence. Even though God is still in the process of building my life, I know I can trust in His perfect plan.

He will continue to cut away what isn't meant to be in my life, refine the pieces that are supposed to be there, and polish me into a beautiful gem that reflects His light for all to see.

Church, let my charge to you be this: Trust God.

Do not be anxious about your job or finances. Do all things unto the Lord and your treasure will be built up in heaven where it will have lasting reward.

Do not worry about tomorrow. There is no sense in trying to solve things with your own power in your own time. Wait for God to move and rejoice when He does.

And finally, let the Lord build you into the person that He wants you to be. Then you can proclaim **Hebrews 13:6** in faith:

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

A Big Mahalo

Aloha. I'm Karen Makishima the Family Ministry Director. Our team's job is to walk along-side of parents in their child's spiritual development. We know that from the time that a baby is born

until the time they are launched into the big world at 18 years old (like the seniors that were just on the stage) most parents have their child in their home for about 936 weeks.

There are 936 marbles in this jar to represent each week. Here you see how many weeks are left if you were to take out a marble each week of the child's life as they grow.

These dwindling marbles reminds us to be intentional and to focus on the character that really matters. The characteristics that we want our seniors to have when we launch them out into the big world whether they go to college or the military or choose to begin their career. These are the top 3 characteristics we desire for them:

1. That they would know that they are created to pursue an authentic relationship with their Creator.
2. That they would know that they belong to Jesus Christ and that their identity is defined by what He says.
3. That they would know that they exist everyday to demonstrate God's love to a broken world.

We know that in order to launch these young adults with these characteristics, we have to back way up to when there are so many marbles in the jar — when they are babies. We just want to acknowledge those who have had tremendous influence in our kids lives in Ohana Ministry.

If you have ever served in our nursery helping our babies have a wonderful first church experience by feeling safe and secure, I am going to ask you to stand — right where you are — and remain standing.

If you have ever served in our toddler & preschool classrooms helping to teach these young ones to know that their God made them and loves them & that Jesus wants to be their friend forever, then please stand.

If you have ever served in our elementary ministry helping our kids to navigate scripture and to hide God's Word in their heart then please stand.

If you have ever served in our middle school or high school ministry and have supported kids in making wise choices and help them to understand that our choices have consequences and that God loves us just as we are, then please stand.

And then if you are a parent or guardian, please stand. You have the most influence over your child. Thank you for desiring to model to your children how to love yourself and others as Jesus does.

Now, can everyone stand, since God has called each of us to help lead our children.

We just want to affirm you all in saying that what each of you do really does matter. Thank you for pointing our kids to Jesus!

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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.