



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu

“Jesus and the Flying Buttresses of Notre Dame” (Artwork of God Series)

February 20, 2005

Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

Matt. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matt. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

We continue our sermon series on “Artwork of God” with only two more Sundays to go. For the last month or so we have walked and waltzed through the lives, paintings and sculpture of Michelangelo, Raphael, Van Gogh, Leonardo, and looked at the Church of Hagia Sophia. Next week it’s Rembrandt. Today we look at the structure and stained glass window of Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral.

When I was young and heard the words “Notre Dame,” the University of Notre Dame football team wasn’t the first thing that came to mind. Neither did I think of the Virgin Mary, of whom the French words “Notre Dame,” meaning “our lady,” referred to.

I only thought of Victor Hugo’s novel, *The Hunchback of Notre*

Dame, a story of a hunchback who was taken in by the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral and who later on became the church’s bell ringer. The hunchback was the story’s main character.

Using the hunchback, French author Victor Hugo, who lived in the 1800s, talked about the poor and disenfranchised in 15th-century Paris and how France did not have a place for them.

In the novel, the hunchback was found as a baby at the Cathedral on *Quasimodogeniti* Sunday, the first Sunday after Easter. And because of that, the baby was named Quasimodo.

Quasimodogeniti comes from two words: “quasi” meaning “almost like,” and “geniti” meaning “new birth,” as in the word “genesis.” So *Quasimodogeniti* means “like new born babies,” a phrase we are familiar with from 1 Peter in the New Testament in which the apostle Peter says believers should crave spiritual milk like newborn babies. It refers to newly baptized people or new communicants.

If someone were baptized on Easter Sunday, this new church member could receive communion the following Sunday. It is like the Sunday for new babies of the faith, or *Quasimodogeniti* Sunday.

So as a child, when I thought of the huge Notre Dame Cathedral, I would also think of the old black and white movie starring Charles

Laughton as Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame and him climbing the ramparts and flying buttresses of the Cathedral to protect the beautiful gypsy girl Esmeralda.

Similarly, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all churches and cathedrals, always makes a place for the disenfranchised and the sinner. His light shines in people’s lives and brings hope to them whether poor, sad, hurt, deformed or an outcast like a hunchback named Quasimodo.

Only later when I studied church architecture and specifically the building of Notre Dame Cathedral did I see the architects’ deliberate use of light and structure in designing Notre Dame.

Here’s a little architectural history. Romanesque architecture in the 10th and 11th century relied upon thick walls to hold up the heavy stone ceilings of churches they build.

Worship had a horizontal perspective causing the parishioner in the pew to focus towards the altar at the far end of the nave, the nave being the front area of a church, which we, Protestants today, call the chancel instead of the altar.

It was a horizontal view for the people from the pew to the altar because the ceiling could not be too high or it will be too heavy for the walls to support. This kind of architecture had so-called barrel-vaulted ceilings, not the tall ceilings that we know of today.

The feeling of the Romanesque church with its big, wide, heavy walls was one of massiveness, solidity, tranquility and repose. It was also dark because there weren't many windows. Too many windows in the walls would have dangerously weakened the support structure of the walls. Hence, interiors of churches were dark.

One hundred years later in the 12th century a style known as Gothic architecture introduced a better way to construct churches which caused an explosion of church construction.

In France alone 1,500 churches were built in the 12th century, including the famous Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Here was the new discovery in Gothic architecture: flying buttresses. These are erected stone scaffolding on the outside of the structure making it possible to build higher and thinner walls that did not topple over. They could now build sanctuaries with towering walls and what we now know today as cathedral ceilings.

High walls with greater surface area now allowed for the possibility of windows. It would mean more light coming into the church. And greater height in the sanctuary meant a vertical component in worship and not merely horizontal.

One could now look up to a high ceiling. The feel of worship went from massiveness to lightness, and from a sense of being grounded on earth to a feeling of soaring toward heaven.

Our physical experience in a place of worship gives us a sense of God. The quality and excellence we invest in a church sanctuary also says something of what we think of God.

Imagine this. For centuries builders put all the weight of building on massive walls only to discover in the mid-1200's that they didn't have to rely that much on these after all. With the help of flying buttresses their emphasis changed.

You may think, "What took them so long to figure that out?" But this is no time for us to look down on these 13th-century architects. We modern people have not fared so well in practicality of design either. After all, it took us 5,000 years to figure out that we could put wheels on luggage!

We modernists think we are so smart over the ancients. Experts built the Titanic and amateurs built Noah's ark. But which one lasted? Figure that one out. One needs humility in analyzing history sometimes.

It's true. Many of us put our weight on the wrong things and discovered that these things were not enough. These things still dragged us down and we sought something else, a flying buttress, so to speak, to give us the foundation and support to soar.

Many of us have discovered the flying buttress of faith through Jesus Christ. By allowing Him to pick up the weight of our burdens in life and by leaning on His love, grace, mercy and perspective, we have a lot more light in our lives for He is the Light of the world.

When stained glass windows were installed in the new Gothic churches, they literally brought in the light of Christ. Three things happened that brought people closer to God.

First, the windows added to the beauty and the aesthetics of the building. It became more dazzling, more gorgeous and more sacred.

Second, the windows allowed more light into the worship area. It made the place more cheery. And remember how light is associated with God, especially in the Middle Ages.

Third, the stained glass windows served as textbooks for the mostly illiterate congregations. Very few people could read during those

times, and this was before Gutenberg invented the printing press 200 years later, so there was no public access to Scripture.

Now look at the postcard you got this morning of the Rose Window of the Notre Dame Cathedral. The Rose Window normally means the best one.

This stained glass window of Notre Dame is centered on Mother Mary and the baby Jesus, with Jesus being our source of hope. Around the baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary are medallions containing images of the Old Testament, prophets and saints, people who told others about God and lived for others.

The entire stained glass piece is held together by a carved stone support. It was so well built that many of the rose windows survived 800 years of revolutions, world wars, bombings, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. The Gothic churches brought in more light for the people.

The Gothic churches brought in more light for the people. What great symbolism! When we have the light of Christ in us ... we change ...

What great symbolism! It is so rich in history and metaphor. When we have the light of Christ in us, we have God. We are unshakable even in the midst of earthquakes. We change as more light

from God goes into the various places, the dark corners in our souls.

Sometimes when we step back from living the way we always do it and build our life with different weight-bearing walls, we may discover a new way of living - a Christ-way of living.

When I think about people who had put their weight on the wrong things in life and then shifted to using the flying buttresses of faith, I think of 55-year old Joe Ehrmann.

Joe Ehrmann was a professional football player for 13 years with the old Baltimore Colts.

I just learned his story through a book given to me by church member Darryl Kan and his lovely wife Linda.

The book is called *Season of Life* by Jeffrey Marx, a Pulitzer Prize winning author. It's one of the best books I have read in a long time. It has changed my way of looking at things and inspired me to new heights. It's published by a secular publishing company and you could probably read it in a couple of hours.

In fact, we have ordered 600 copies of the book just for you in case you want to buy it today since as of two weeks ago every bookstore in town was completely sold out of it. Three hundred copies are here today, and another 300 will arrive next week. *Season of Life* is the kind of book you buy for yourself and for your family and friends.

I think the lessons and principles from the book are important for every man and woman to know, every mother or father and every young person.

Basically it tells the story of how Joe was a womanizer and a party animal. He was extremely close to his younger brother who later contracted a terminal illness and died.

His brother's death changed Joe's life. It made him decide to change his own way of life. He realigned his priorities. He decided he was putting the weight of his life on the wrong kind of weight-bearing walls.

He sought God, became a Christian and then an associate pastor of a large church. Then in addition to pasturing, Joe decided to become a football coach for Gilman High School in Baltimore, Maryland.

As a football coach he worked on changing what most people thought as the weight-bearing walls of being a man. Joe asserts that the world judges men by three erroneous criteria: athletic achievement, sexual prowess, and economic success.

Do we agree that this is how the world defines as a real man? Put down the quiche and say, "Amen!"

Joe Ehrmann says that most men have a trait that was cultivated in them since childhood. It is called "alexithymia," a word with Greek roots. It means the inability to put emotions into words.

According to psychologist Ronald F. Levant, a significant amount of research shows that males actually begin life more emotionally expressive than females. Infant boys are more easily startled and excited. They cry sooner and more often and they change moods more rapidly than infant girls do.

But then it happens. The socialization process takes hold of them and by the age of two, boys are showing the verbal signs of tuning out and suppressing emotions. (*Marx, Jeffrey, Season of Life, 2003, Simon & Schuster, p. 100-101*)

This is wrong, according to Joe Ehrmann. Men need to know that life is really about ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS that evolve out of the capacity to love and be loved. Relationships? We may say, "That is girly man stuff!"

No, says Joe. Relationship is the mark of a real man. A real man should live for others. He should be built for others.

In two Mondays I am going to talk about this during the Men's Ministry's monthly dinner meeting. My talk will be in the context of working in the marketplace. So men, please sign up today for this event. I want all of our men in the church both young and old to be there. It will be a very important talk and it will greatly affect how we view work, school and life in general.

In Gilman High's football locker room, Joe and his team of coaches would ask the players, "What is the job of the coaches?" To which the players yell back, "To love us!"

The coaches then ask, "And what is your job?" They yell back, "To love one another!"

What? A football team based on relationship more than touch-downs? Seems like a soft team!

Joe said it doesn't matter if they win football games for as long as they use all of their talents and go all out on the field. The score on the field does not ultimately count. The points he is looking for are accrued in the quality of the relationships his players forge.

He says, "Masculinity first and foremost ought to be defined in terms of relationships. It ought to be taught in terms of the capacity to love and to be loved.

"It comes down to this: What kind of father are you? What kind of husband are you? What kind of coach or teammate are you? What kind of son are you? What kind of friend are you? Success comes in terms of relationships and only relationships." (*Parade Magazine, "He Turns Boys Into Men," by Jeffrey Marx, August 29, 2004*).

Success may come from business but nothing is sadder than having economic success but no relationships.

Joe also says, "All of us ought to have some kind of cause, some kind of purpose in our lives that's bigger than or own

individual hopes, dreams, wants and desires.

"At the end of life, we ought to be able to look back over it from our deathbed and know that somehow the world is a better place because we lived, we loved we were other-centered, other-focused." (*Ibid., Parade Magazine*)

As mentioned earlier, Joe is an associate pastor of a large church and also works in the inner city with the poor. He has even helped found a Ronald McDonald House.

.... **nothing is sadder than having economic success but no relationships.**

As a football coach, he and his coaches bombard their practice sessions not only with football techniques but with stories and lessons about men being built for others. They use the Bible.

The boys are taught that their greatest impact in life is if they ask the question, "What can I do for you?"

In fact, when I read that I thought of Elder Mitch D'Olier who always asks me that question. See, he's a real man! "What can I do for you?" is a line used by men built for others.

Joe Ehrmann is trying to live out our Scripture for today about being a light for Christ in the world and doing good works.

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Matt. 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid."

Matt. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matt. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Good works. Light from a stained glass window shining into the dark where God's people look for grace, mercy and love.

We are God's stained glass, part of a long lineage of people whose images have been branded on our souls - like those on the stained glass in a cathedral -- pictures of Mary, Abraham, Sarah, David, Peter - letting God's light and love illuminate the lives of others. Light for good works.

But practically speaking, what are good works?

Joe says it is his rule that no Gilman football player should ever let another student sit by himself in the school lunchroom. Whether the kid is a nerd or some unpopular person who no one likes, the players must daily seek them out, befriend them and invite them to sit with them. No one eats alone. Good works.

Ehrmann's rules of relationship are:

No boy is cut from the Gilman team based on athletic ability. No matter how clumsy they may be.

Every senior plays in every game and not only in late, lopsided games.

Coaches must always build up and not shame or tear down. These are good works.

No football player is allowed to act cocky by dancing or boasting outlandishly after scoring a touchdown or making a great tackle. Good works.

Whenever Ehrmann speaks publicly about his "Building Men for Others" program, someone always asks about winning and losing. "Hey, all of this touchy feely stuff sounds great, but kids still want to win, right?"

And Ehrmann humbly says, "Well, we've had pretty good success. But winning is only a byproduct of everything else we do - and it's certainly not the way we evaluate ourselves."

Only if he is pressed for specifics will he mention that the Gilman High football team (the so-called soft, touchy-feely players) finished three of the last six seasons undefeated; that they were No. 1 in Baltimore, Maryland; that in 2002 the Gilman Greyhounds were ranked first in all of Maryland and No. 14 in the rankings of all high schools in the United States of America.

Businessmen and businesswomen, teachers and coaches, what if our organizations were built for others? It would help our employees and the community, and would probably make money along the way.

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I have talked about how churches should be built. Joe has talked about how people should be built, and I say today that we can be a church built for others. Why is our church working to move? Because we strive to be a church built for others.

The church is one of the few institutions where the members live for those who are not members. That's a church built for others. And maybe you are here this morning saying, "Yes I need to live a life for others but I need some help, a pastoral word."

Then hear this. First, a word of comfort.

As many of you know I took off the past week to catch my breath. The church gives five days for grieving when a staff member loses a loved one. I lost my mother around Thanksgiving but never really had the chance to grieve because I had to keep on working through Advent and Christmas Eve.

Then in January I had meetings and a conference to attend in the mainland. I haven't even had time to even finish thank-you notes for Christmas gifts received. Nor have I finished closing my parents' estate.

I was tired and at times depressed as waves of grief hit me, especially because my mother lived with us. We needed to take care of her. She was the reason my family and I moved back to Hawaii 13 years ago.

So you see, I needed to back off and catch my breath. But more importantly, I needed to back off and remember that the weight-bearing wall in my life could not be Dan.

It has to be Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I needed to make sure that that the flying buttress of God's love were holding me up, and not my own efforts. I needed to lean into His grace and rest my grieving, weary soul.

And I would encourage us all to do that. Maybe you came here seeking God's love. Then you have come to the right place.

Second, when we are in the midst of a bad circumstance or situation, it will really help us if decide to still live for others. That way we won't focus on ourselves and we will have great experiences of helping others. And when we have a backload of those they will help us in life even if just in memory.

When I was in California recently for a Presbytery meeting, I visited Edie Munger, the widow of Bob Munger. He was the pastor who married Pam and me here at First Prez. Bob Munger was my mentor in seminary and colleague at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church. He is also author of the booklet "My Heart - Christ's Home."

His widow, Edie, has lived in pretty nice houses in earlier years. But now she resides in a small assisted-living unit in a retirement community for Presbyterian pastors. She and Bob had 60+ years of marriage.

Edie told me that she really missed Bob. She said the small studio she lives in right now is so small but she has no regrets, only thanksgiving to God for all of the great memories and experiences of helping others; the memories and record of good works.

Senior citizens can look at their lives as a history of serving others. And if you are a senior who has not lived that way, it is not too late to start living for others now and making a lasting legacy.

And for the younger people, now is the time to work on your history of living for others.

Darryl Kan, who gave me the book *Season of Life*, is a physician. But besides that, he coaches the offense for Punahou's football team. He coaches young men to be built for others.

Recently, he heard that his son Brett, a starting quarterback for the school, was asked to help someone with his chemistry test. Brett spent a long time helping his classmate who eventually got a higher grade on the test.

Darryl discovered later that Brett helping his classmate meant less time for him to study for his own Spanish exam, which was on the same day as his classmate's chemistry test.

Darryl told his son, "Brett, I am more proud of you for what you did for your classmate than if you threw a touchdown pass. You are getting it. You are sacrificing and being a man built for others."

Can you and I cultivate our lives, our families to have a life built for others? To be a flying buttress for others? Friends, it can happen.

If like a flying buttress we lean on Jesus' love by being with His people, reading His word, and praying if we lean on Him by saying, "Any fear I have comes not from God, for God gives to His people love, power and self-control If we lean away from the shadows of darkness and on His light and choose to follow Him daily, then we will be born again as Quasimodogeniti, like newborn babies in Christ.

So welcome! For we are all Quasimodos, hunched up by fear or failure, but we can now be healed by Him. By God's grace, we WILL have stronger backs to bear our burdens and we will be built for others.

Amen. Let's pray.

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Sunday worship sermons can also be heard on "Strength for the Journey," First Prez's weekly radio show. Sundays at 10 am on KGU 760 AM.