

SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

September 8, 2019

"I Am My Beloved's And His Desire Is For Me"

Where is My Church on Monday? - Sermon Series

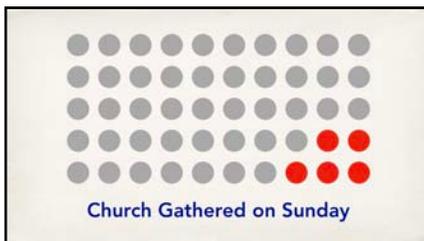
Christopher Pan



Good morning. I'm Chris Pan. I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

We begin a new sermon series today called, "Where's My Church on Monday?" For the month of September, we'll be exploring how to live out our faith every day at home, at work, at school, in our neighborhoods. How to live as followers of Jesus in ways that are not weird but practical, normal, and helpful to make a positive impact on other people's lives.

Where's my Church on Monday? Well, we know where Church is on Sunday. Here. Here's a representation of the church, gathered on Sunday:

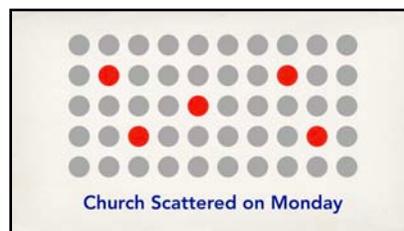


That's our island and those little red dots are us. It is good for the church to gather and worship together. But if we think that church is just this event, this gathering on Sunday morning, in this building, that people attend, then we're not going to be as reaching people in the world. You

know why? Because most people will never come to one of our events. They will never set foot inside this church building or any other church building. You know how I know? Because I've asked them! And they say, "I wanted to go listen to you speak on Sunday, but then I remembered that you would probably talk about Jesus. So I didn't go." That's an actual quote from my friend! And he's right, I am going to talk about Jesus!

But I have good news, for you and for my friend. God does not live here, in this building, only on Sunday mornings. God lives here, in our hearts, through His Holy Spirit, and God lives out there, in the messy, everyday things of life. And church is not a building, and it doesn't just exist on Sunday mornings. WE are the church.

Where's my Church on Monday? It's out there, in your office, in your classroom, in your neighborhood, because YOU are out there. This is a representation of the church, scattered around our community on Monday:



And it is good for the Church to be scattered on Monday. Same number of red dots, but now all those grey dots, are not so far away from the church. Let's open our eyes to see God at work out there, through you. Let's live out the gospel, intentionally showing people what it's like to live as a follower of Jesus in the messy, everyday things of life the other six days a week.

How? I don't want to offend anyone, but can I suggest that THIS is not an effective way to convey God's love in the messy everyday things of life. If you are listening to the podcast or can't see the screen, it's a photo of someone holding a sign that says "You're going to hell."

I think it's signs like these, and an approach like this, that makes my friends and yours reluctant to meet the real Jesus. Because they get the impression that God doesn't like them.

And nothing could be farther from the truth. God loves them. God loves you and me.

As we go through our sermon today, as yourself two questions:

What is God saying to me?
What does He want me to do about it?

Will you please join me in prayer? God, open our ears and our hearts to You. May Your Holy Spirit transform us. We are Your beloved, and Your desire is for us. In Jesus' name, all God's children say, Amen!

So, this is the church's mission statement:

Love God, Love People, and Reach the World for Jesus Christ.

That is a good mission statement, especially as we start a new series on reaching out to our community. But today, I want to take a step back first, because being a follower of Jesus never starts with what we DO for God. Being a follower of Jesus always starts with what God has done for us.

1 John 4:19 says, "We love because God first loved us."

So I want to start with God's love for us. But I want to take a step even further back than this, because it is a great truth that God loves us. But maybe we only know that up here, in our brain. Today, I want to get the truth of God's overwhelming love into our hearts, and into our very definition of who we are, so that it moves us.

I recently read about an interesting psychological trick. If you want to avoid eating potato chips, next time you're near chips, tell yourself, "I'm not the kind of person who eats chips." And supposedly, it'll be way easier to resist the chips, because you're not the kind of person who eats potato chips. Or if you want to run, tell yourself, "I'm a runner." Because what do runners do? They run. How we define ourselves affects what we do.

There's a quote from the author Neil Gaiman: "We do what

we do, because of who we are. If we did otherwise, we would not be ourselves."

So let's start with who we are.

Our sermon title today is "I Am My Beloved's and His desire Is For Me." That's good news. That's the gospel. Let's marinate on that this morning, let it soak in, and then see how it moves us into the world.

Our Bible passage today comes from the book of Song of Songs, Chapter 7:10. "I am my Beloved's and His desire is for me."

That's it. I'll read it slow! "I ...am my beloved's...and His desire...is for me."

If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember this verse. Memorize it! Pray it all week.

Our verse is from the Old Testament book of Song of Songs, also known as Song of Solomon. Song of Songs is a book of poetry. It's two lovers talking to each other about how much they love each other.

Can I confess something? I never read Song of Songs. It's poetry, which is difficult for me to understand. I like narrative, and explanation and argument. Also, Song of Songs is just too sexy. I get nervous and uncomfortable when I'm reading it. I don't know what to do with my arms. It's like really passionate stuff.

I was listening to Song of Songs on the audio Bible in the car the other day, and the version I have has Denzel Washington reading with his wife, and I had to turn it off. It was just too much.

But Song of Songs is in the Bible and it's in the Bible for a reason. And I think it's there to get God's love from being here, as a nice idea in our brain, to here—embedded in our hearts. An author wrote: It's easier to get Christians to believe that God exists than it is to get them to believe that God loves them.

Do you know that Song of Songs is an essential part of the Jewish celebration of Passover? The Passover Seder, the commemoration of God's deliverance and salvation for his people, concludes with the reading of Song of Songs. This personal and intimate recounting of passionate love, because Song of Songs is a reminder to us of God's passionate love for us. It's a reminder of who we are to God.

"I am my Beloved's and His desire is for me."

A few weeks ago, Pastor Dan preached from the gospel of John, about Mary, the mother of Jesus. In particular, he preached about Jesus, on the cross, with the disciple John with him.

John 19:26: *When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son."*

John, the author of this gospel, always refers to himself in this way: "the disciple whom Jesus loved". Six times in his gospel John refers to himself this way. And I always thought that it was a little goofy of John, or a little pompous. At another point, John refers to himself as the disciple who runs faster than Peter, so I always chalked it up to John being a little arrogant, or a little competitive with the other disciples. I'm faster than Peter, I'm the one Jesus loves.

But having marinated with our verse today for a while, I realize now that I had it wrong, and John's got it right. John calls himself: The disciple whom Jesus loved. That's his identity. That's the most fundamental truth about who John is.

- Not...my name is John.
- Not...I'm the youngest disciple.
- Not...I'm the son of Zebedee and the brother James.
- Not...I live in Patmos.
- Not...I'm a fisherman.

Not his name or his age or his relationships or his address or his job. John says, "I am the disciple Jesus loves." That is the most important way that I can identify myself.

How do we identify who we are? Our name or age or our relationships or our address or our job? How do we answer the question: "Who am I?"

Henri Nouwen says that we try to answer that question three different ways.

And the first answer is: "I am what I do." And when I do good things or have some success, then I feel good about myself. But when I fail, then I feel bad. So we try hard to do good, to rack up successes and trophies, so we can feel good. But those nagging doubts are never far away—that maybe I'm just not good enough. I have to do more, or do better. But we all learn, some early, some later, that we can never do enough, we can never be perfect or good enough.

Nouwen says the second answer to the question, Who am I? is: "I am what others say about me." When people praise me, or compliment me, I feel good. When they criticize me or talk behind my back, I feel bad.

Do you know that Michael Phelps, the swimmer, the most decorated Olympian of all time, struggled in school because he had ADHD. One of his teachers in school told him that he would never amount to anything, that he would never be successful. Michael Phelps has 23 Gold Medals but he still to this day remembers what that teacher said to him.

I never planned on being a "preacher," so when I stand up here and speak, there's one part that I'm not really prepared for: feedback. And you all are so unfailingly kind and supportive. But I preached once and someone didn't like what I had to say. So they told me. And I was crushed. I was devastated, because I thought at that time, "I am what others say about me." If they say good things, I feel good! If they say bad things, I'm devastated. And I want to be clear. That person's comment was absolutely fair, and thoughtful and constructive and correct. So please don't hear me saying: don't criticize the preachers; we all welcome the feedback. Hear me saying: I needed to grow so that I don't define myself by what people say about me...bad...or good.

Henri Nouwen says the third way we define ourselves is, "I am what I have." I've got a great job, and a lovely wife and wonderful kids and I'm healthy and drive a Prius. But the problem is when we lose any of those things we have: something happens to our family, or our health, or we don't have a job anymore—we despair.

I am what I do, I am what people say about me, I am what I have. When we define ourselves these ways, our lives and identity are a roller coaster—up and down, up and down, tied to what we do, to what others say, to what I have.

When I have lots of things, and do good things, and people praise me...I feel great! But when I lose those things or when I lose people, or mess up, or get criticized...I feel bad.

And so now, hear the good news of the gospel: This is not who you are. We are not what we do. We are not what people say we are. We are not what we have.

We are...God's beloved. That's who we are.

Who's the disciple Jesus loved? You are. I am. Can we let God's love for us soak in so deeply, that that is how we identify ourselves?

"I am my Beloved's, and His desire is for me."

I am the object of God's affection. I BELONG to God. And He longs for me.

Do you know that here, in your heart?

Our definition of ourselves, our image of ourselves, will radically shift when we take seriously the idea that God deeply, passionately, unconditionally loves us.

God rejoices over you with gladness. He exults over you. He sings over you. He dances with joy because of you.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Zephaniah writes in Zephaniah 3:17-18:

***17** The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you in His love; He will exult over you with loud singing, **18** as on a day of festival.*

You affect the emotions of God. And His emotion isn't mild irritation, or annoyance. God doesn't tolerate you and me. God is in our midst and He rejoices over us with gladness. He dances with joy because of us.

Earlier we sang the song, You're Beautiful. Singing to God – I see your face – You're beautiful. And as I reflected on our verse today, "I am My Beloved's and His desire is for me," it occurred to me, that as I sing that song to God, as I sing to God, I see your face – You're beautiful, God, He sings that song to me. He sings to me – I see your face and you're beautiful.

In Song of Songs, Chapter 2:14, God says to us: *Come now, my love. My lovely one, come. Let me see your face. And let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful.*

God says that to us! Who are we?

"I am my Beloved's and His desire is for me."

Brennan Manning, in his book *The Furious Longing of God*, writes about a time that he went on a 30-day, silent retreat at a retreat center. And the spiritual director there guided him to this verse, and had him pray just this verse for the entire 30 days of his silent retreat. "I am my beloved's, and His desire is for me."

Manning writes that he continued to pray this verse for the next 30 years and that it profoundly changed him. He writes that if you take this verse personally, like really personally, a number of beautiful things happened for him, and that they might happen for you too:

- The drumbeats of doom in your head will be replaced with a

song in your heart, which could lead to a twinkle in your eye.

- You won't be dependent on the company of others to ease your loneliness, because God is Emmanuel – God with us.

- The praise of others won't send you soaring and their criticism won't plunge you into a pit.

- You'll move from I *should* pray to I *must* pray.

- You'll become aware of a Father who not only loves you, but likes you.

- You'll stop comparing yourself to others, and will stop boasting about your importance or victories.

- You will know, off and on throughout the day, that you are being seen by Jesus with a gaze of infinite tenderness.

- You'll be moved, to share this love with others.

Can we pause now for just a moment – for you to pray this verse. "I am my beloved's and His desire is for me." Pray it now, let it soak into your heart.

I hope you continue praying this verse all week, and maybe longer.

Now that we all know who we are, can I tell you about compression socks? I love compression socks! They're socks that supposedly increase circulation in your legs. I'm always looking for things that will make the experience of flying less miserable, so I once bought a pair. And you know what?

Compression socks are amazing! The next time I flew, my feet didn't swell, my legs didn't feel tired. So, every time I flew, I wore my compression socks.

Then one day, I was extolling the benefits of compression socks,

and Pastor Dan said he wore compression socks when he preached, so his legs wouldn't get tired after three services. WHAT?! You can wear compression socks, not only on the airplane?!

So I started wearing compression socks when I preached. When I flew and when I preached. I'm wearing them right now. Then, Amazon had a sale on compression socks, like six pairs for \$20, so I got six more pairs, and started wearing compression socks every single day.

I started telling everyone I knew about compression socks. "Do you know about compression socks?" A few months ago I had some friends visiting from out of town, and they didn't know about compression socks. So on the way to the airport, I drove them to Longs so they could buy a pair.

A few weeks later I got this email from my friend: This is the actual text and the actual capitalization:

"I think of you guys every time I wear compression socks on the plane. They are THE BEST and you guys are THE BEST for suggesting them."

If you haven't figured it out, this is a parable about Jesus.

I love compression socks because they made a difference in my life, so I want to share the wonders of compression socks with other people, because I'm convinced they'll make a difference to them.

How much better than compression socks is the overwhelming, accepting love of God? How much more has the love of God affected and transformed my life?

It took me time to come around to compression socks, but once I experienced them, and how good they are, I wanted more, and gave over more and more of my life. It's a parable about Jesus!

It might seem like some people have no interest in Jesus. They might need to see the life-changing difference he makes in your life a few different times, or in the lives of others, before they become curious. When they do, maybe it'll just be for Christmas and Easter, like just wearing compression socks only for flights and preaching. But the more you experience the love and acceptance of Jesus, the more you want, until it's a part of your every day.

The real key, though, is that when you love something, when it is in your heart – like compression socks – or Jesus, the love will move you to bless other people.

John, the disciple Jesus loved, writes in 1 John 4:11: *Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.*

A few weeks ago, we had a very informal worship and prayer gathering at our future satellite campus called The Vine. And it was great. Maybe 75 people, singing and praying, and there was a powerful sense of God's presence. All these people experiencing the love of God, knowing that they are God's beloved, and that God's desire is for them.

And one point the air conditioning switched off, because we haven't renovated yet. So we opened the doors, and that singing and prayer drifted out and into the neighborhood. I went and stood outside, and was listening and singing, and looking in to all these people inside fully in the presence of God. There are these big glass

windows and as I stood outside the glass, by myself, looking in, I had a sense of God telling me, showing me, reminding me: This is what it is like for all those people who don't know Me.

All these people, on the outside of the glass, faces pressed against the window. All these people, in quiet desperation, in great pain, in loneliness and despair, who are not experiencing the overwhelming love of God. People searching for answers and hope and being told that all they are is what they do, or what other people say they are, or what they have. They can see in us the love of God, but they don't know how to get there. They don't see the door in.

I think sometimes we forget, what it's like to not know God. To not know the great truth: I am my beloved's and His desire is for me.

Whatever hard thing you might be going through right now, and I know many of you are going through hard things, imagine how much harder it would be if didn't know that God loves you.

And so this love that we have, this confidence, can we share it? Not to invite people into a physical building, but into the love of God. That's where the church is on Monday – out there, offering people a door into the love of God, a love that has redefined our whole lives.

Someone sent me another picture from inside after the worship was over. Look at that confidence in God's love. How they know in their heart: I am my Beloved's and His Desire is for me. And can you see the poor lonely guy over on the outside of the glass, over their shoulder, looking in, wanting to experience God's

love. Can you see him up there? [Picture of Chris photobombing the youth]

Can we share the extravagant love of God with that guy, on the outside?

We'll close with one last story. In college, I had a roommate named Carl. One night I was in our room studying, and Carl came bursting through the door, his backpack on, out of breath, panting and sweating. And I asked him, "What are you doing?" And he explained, kind of sheepishly: "Oh...well, I was at the library, working on a paper, when I decided to take a break and read my Bible. So I started reading from Song of Songs. And the more I read, the more I began to feel God's overwhelming love for me. So I kept reading, and this sense of God's passionate love for me kept building and building, and I didn't know what to do, so I thought...I have to run! So I got my stuff and left the library and started running. And I ran and I ran and I ran all the way back to the dorms."

Let's be overwhelmed by God's love for us. Let's know who we are and be moved, be propelled forward by God's love, and run into the world to share that love. I am my beloved's and His desire is for me. Let's pray.

Take a few moments, to pray this verse: I am my beloved's and His desire is for me.

God, we belong to You. May we be overwhelmed by Your love for us and share it tomorrow. In the name of Jesus Christ, all God's children say, Amen!

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