



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Surrender to Him" - Raise the Sails Sermon Series

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

We are in week five of six in our Raise the Sails Sermon Series. Next week in Joshua Chapter 6, the walls of Jericho will come tumbling down. Next week is also Commitment Sunday. This week we're looking at Joshua Chapter 5, when a number of fascinating things happen relating to surrendering to God. Our sermon title today is, "Surrender to Him."

To set the scene, the people of Israel have crossed the Jordan River, into the promised land. They've made a memorial of stones to honor and remember what God has done. And now, they're camped in the shadow of the great city of Jericho, and it's formidable, impenetrable walls.

Joshua Chapter 5 verse 1 says that the Canaanite kings are melting in fear because they've seen and heard about the miracle that God has done, Israel crossing the Jordan on dry ground. And as the Israelites look at the walls of Jericho, this city they're to conquer, maybe there's a mix of emotions among them—some maybe wondering *if* God will come through, others excited to see *how* God will come through. We'll see in today's passage how God prepares Israel.

We, as a church, are in a similar place. We've been on a journey of faith these past five weeks. God is growing us in our faith and in our understanding of His generosity.

Last week, we remembered what God has done for us. As that slide show rolled last week of members who have passed away, I was crying and crying, remembering all those great giants of faith whom we have walked alongside. I had to leave the 8:00am service to compose myself and someone was standing in the hallway waiting for the 9:30 service. I was a mess, crying, and he looked at me and said, "Wow. Must be a really good service today."

So, we've remembered our past and we are positioned for whatever the future holds for this amazing community of First Prez. Commitment Sunday next week may look like the walls of Jericho to us. And we, as a community, might have the same mix of emotions just like the Israelites—some wondering *if* God will come through, others excited to see *how* God will come through. Maybe you're going through something else in your life right now, and you're staring up at those walls, wondering if God will come through.

Someone came by the Raise the Sails table last week and asked for some extra wristbands. He said this wristband was his stone of remembrance and that the verse, "Be strong and courageous" from Joshua 1:9, has been a great encouragement to him throughout his life.

When we started this series, he googled "raise the sails," and started watching Youtube videos of people preparing the sails on a boat. Just watching and meditating on all the preparation that needs to be done to raise sails. He appreciated the time we've taken these past weeks to prepare for the journey, to consecrate ourselves. He said he knows there's a money commitment at a certain point, but that's later. He said that the important part is the spiritual work we are doing now, to consecrate ourselves, to prepare to raise the sails.

I told him, "Yes! This guy gets it!"

There is a prophesy in the front of this Raise the Sails Navigational Guide. On the inside cover, are the words Pastor Pete Grieg shared at the HIM Conference three years ago, for all of Hawaii. Pete Grieg has written a number of books on prayer and has spoken at our church. Take a look at the inside cover.

Pete said, in his fancy British accent, which I won't try to replicate:

"I was "in the Spirit" and God showed me Hawaii. He kept saying "the wind is coming" to Hawaii. It is offshore at the moment but the wind is coming soon.

"God told me that the church in Hawaii is beginning to see a change in the atmosphere, but more is coming and you're to listen for it and look for it and be ready for it. This isn't going to be business as usual.

"What He is wanting to do is bigger than that, and the key to unlocking it will be unceasing prayer in Hawaii. I cannot underline how significant and important this is. God is calling you to unceasing prayer because the winds of the Spirit are coming."

This whole journey is named Raise the Sails because of our conviction that the winds of the Holy Spirit are blowing, and we want to catch that wind and go wherever the Spirit of God leads us. Amen? Amen.

Today, we'll see how God meets the Israelites as they prepare before Jericho, and how God meets us as well.

As we go through our sermon today, ask yourself, "What is God saying to me and what does He want me to do about it? What is God saying to me, and what does He want me to do about it?"

Joshua 5:2: *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."*

What is God saying to you, and what does He want you to do about it? If you are worried that

God wants your money, man, I've got bad news for you. God wants way more than your money. He wants your whole life.

The Israelites have just crossed the Jordan. They're right outside Jericho. This clearly would be the best time to attack Jericho. They have the advantage: take Jericho by surprise. And what does God tell Joshua to do? Perform a medical procedure that will incapacitate your entire army. Render them all unable to fight and leave them completely vulnerable to attack for days.

From our point of view, the Israelites should be preparing their weapons and their supplies. But from God's point of view, He wants them to prepare their hearts.

When we were writing these books a few months ago, at one point I actually thought, "Ha ha! Who's the poor sucker who has to preach about circumcision during week five?! Glad that's not me!"

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. But after the Israelites escaped Egypt, the entire generation born during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness had not been circumcised. That's what the "again" refers to in the passage—that the community hadn't done it for 40 years.

Circumcision isn't just a physical mark. It is a spiritual mark. Moses, 40 years earlier, before he dies, before he commissions Joshua as his successor, says this to all of Israel:

Deuteronomy 30:5-6: *The Lord your God will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous*

than your ancestors. 6 The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

What is God saying to the Israelites, and what does He want them to do about it? God wants them to prepare their hearts so they might love Him with all their heart and all their soul, and live. That they might remember the covenant God made with them, and sit and think while they healed.

At the literal doorstep of their enemies, He wants them to renew their commitment, and for them to know that the battle isn't theirs, the battle is the LORD's. I think we have to remember the same thing—the battle is the Lord's.

So what did Joshua do? He obeyed: Joshua 5:3: *"So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites..."*

Joshua heard God, and he obeyed.

Once everyone was healed, then did Israel attack Jericho? No. They sat down and had a multi-course dinner together.

⁸ *And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed...¹⁰ On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.*

The Passover is a celebration of remembrance of how God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and delivered them across the Red Sea. A celebration of how the angel of death "passed over" their lives.

It's a communal celebration and remembrance. The Israelites hadn't done it for 39 years.

I imagine there's this one Israelite guy who's all excited about going into battle. He's got his sword sharpened, armor on, and as soon as they cross the Jordan River, he's like, "Let's go get Jericho!" And then Joshua says, "No, no, no, first we're going to make this big pile of rocks, to remember what happened here." And our guy's like, "Okay, seems reasonable."

After the rocks are piled up, our guy's like, "Now, let's go get Jericho!" And Joshua says, "No, no, no...now everyone's getting circumcised." He's gotta be like, "Wait...what!?" But he does it, and he heals and then he's like, "Now? Let's go get Jericho?" And Joshua says, "No, now, all of us, the whole community, we're going to sit down and have this big celebration dinner that we haven't done for 39 years, with lots of food and prayers and we'll remember and celebrate how God has come through for us." Our guy's gotta be thinking, "What is going on? I thought we were going to battle?"

What's going on is clear. God is showing the Israelites that taking Jericho isn't a military exercise. It is a spiritual exercise. It is an exercise in trusting God in asking, "What is God saying to me, and what does He want me to do about it?" And then obeying.

Our sermon title is, "Surrender to Him." Let's be clear: God doesn't want Jericho to surrender—He wants Israel to surrender. God wants Israel to surrender to Him.

In the same way, God wants us to surrender to Him. We've said it all along: Our Raise the Sails journey isn't primarily a financial exercise. It's a spiritual exercise. Is

there a financial component? Yes, we want to raise money, just like Israel wants to defeat Jericho. But the more important thing, for Israel, and for us, is growth in our relationship with God.

The Israelites stacked rocks in a pile, circumcised adult men had a celebration dinner. We've got these wristbands and study guides, we formed new small groups and had worship nights. It's for Israel and for us, to remember how God has come through for us, again and again, to remember His promise and covenant with us, and to listen to Him and to obey Him. That we may love Him with all our heart and with all our soul, and live.

What is God saying to me and what does He want me to do about it? These aren't just sermon questions. These are everyday life questions. To hear a God who still speaks today, and still seeks our worship and our obedience. Not just for 27 minutes of the sermon, but for 168 hours a week.

Joshua Chapter 5 shows us that the point isn't always the outcome. Sometimes the point is the preparation, and the process of listening for God's voice and then obeying. "What is God saying to me, what does He want me to do about it?" Can we ask ourselves that question, all throughout the week—take that question into our everyday lives, to hear God and obey, in our office, in our school, in our home and in our neighborhood.

The answers are going to be unique to you. It may involve risk; it may involve sacrifice. I don't know. I'm not you. And I'm not God. So, I'm not in that conversation. That's a conversation between you and Him. I'm going to be over somewhere else, eating peaches,

having my own conversation with God.

Joshua 5:11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. 12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

Manna was God's provision for Israel while they wandered in the desert. For 40 years, manna would appear—enough to provide what Israel needed every day. Six days a week, just enough for each day. On the sixth day, double would appear, enough for that day and also the Sabbath day on the seventh day.

God provided miraculously for Israel every day for 40 years until they got to the promised land. And once they got there, the manna stopped, and they started eating the food from the promised land. The manna stopped, *but not the miracle*. Because it's all a miracle. Not just the manna that appeared like frost, but the food that grows from the ground, too.

God's provision for us in all ways is a miracle. Whether it's manna or whether it's the produce of the land. It's a reminder to us of God's love and provision in our everyday lives. We just need to open our eyes to see it.

A few weeks ago, we had the Life in the Spirit Conference here. And I got to witness one of the most amazing things I've ever seen in my life. God still speaks today. People were physically healed, my shoulder got healed, but something even more amazing happened that I've never seen before.

Pastor Alan Scott, from the Anaheim Vineyard Church was the speaker. And on Friday night, he was teaching from Matthew 10:7 where Jesus sends the 12 disciples out.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:7-8: *7 As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."*

Alan was teaching about being generous with our prayers for healing for others.

He continued to teach and then paused at one point and asked, "Does anyone have \$20?" And Keani, one of our youth group leaders immediately went running down to the front with a \$20 bill in her hand. He takes the \$20 and asks, "Does anyone need \$20?"

One of the kids from our youth group, raises their hand, and Alan Scott gives them the \$20. Then he asks again, "Does anyone have \$20?" Someone else from our church walks up and gives him \$20. He asks again, "Does anyone need \$20?" Another one of our youth raises their hand, and he gives them the \$20.

He does this a few more times, and then asks for \$20, and \$20 again. Then he asks, "Does anyone need \$40?" And this time an older gentleman down in front, raises his hand, and slowly walks up and takes the \$40. And it gets kinda quiet now, 'cause you sense it's someone who actually needs the money.

Then Alan Scott asks, "Does anyone have \$20?" a few times in a row, collecting bills, then asks, "Does anyone need \$80? I think there's a woman here, whose name

begins with B, who needs \$80." As he's saying that, another one of our youth group leaders walks up and gives him another \$20 and says, "She needs more than \$80."

So, Alan Scott says, "I think there's a woman here, whose name begins with B, who needs \$100." And nobody moves. It's dead silent.

And from the very back, I see someone waving their arms, pointing. And they're pointing at a young woman with a cast on her arm, who is absolutely weeping. Just crying and crying as she walks up to the front. She gets to the front and Alan asks her, "What's your name?" and she says, "Rebecca." And he asks, "What do your friends call you?" And she says, "Becca." He says, "You're my woman whose name begins with a B who needs a \$100." And she nods her head, just crying and crying. Then he says, "Becca, actually you need more than \$100, don't you?" And she continues crying and nods her head again.

Then Alan says, "As the Lord leads you to give, I invite you to give to Becca." And she's shaking her head, crying, saying "No," and he says, "I know it's hard for you to receive, but it's actually a great joy for us to give." And every one of those youth group students gets up and gives her their \$20, and the older gentleman goes over and gives her the \$40, and people from every direction start walking up to give her money. There was a line of people like a Filipino wedding giving Becca money. Joyfully.

At one point, Alan Scott says, "This is what it looks like when the church is the church."

Bills are overflowing out of her hands onto the floor. Someone gave her a box to put the money

in. Someone runs over and gives her a Starbucks gift card. Everyone is laughing and crying watching this miracle unfold. I've never seen anything like it.

God is a generous God. Freely you have received, freely give. Alan was teaching about healing prayer; he had no idea what we're doing with Raise the Sails. The next day, I thought about asking Becca what the backstory was. But I didn't. Because I realized the point wasn't, what did Becca need the money for. It's that God is generous. He hears our prayers. He still speaks today. He knows our name and our needs. And there is great joy in generosity.

God is generous. Can we be generous? Not just with our money, but with our offers to pray for other people. Generous with our compliments, and our encouragement, and our smiles? Generous with our praise. Generous with our driving, waving people in. Generous with our invitations and our calendar. Generous with our time, and our talents, and our hearts.

Our journey is called Raise the Sails. We want to raise our sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit and go where He leads us.

Our journey is not called, "Paddle Harder." We could have called it "Paddle Harder" but the point is not that we grit our teeth and sweat and move the boat.

Kathy Makuakane paddles and said she was paddling once in a canoe and it had a sail. And once they put the sail up and wind caught it, they just took off. And they were moving so fast, that they couldn't even paddle. If they tried, they'd lose their paddles.

We are not paddling harder, we are raising our sails. Because our God is gracious and generous and He is at work in our world. May you hear these words of assurance from the prophet Joel today:

“Return to the LORD, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.”

Amen? Amen. Let’s keep going in Joshua.

Joshua 5:13: *Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” 14 “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.”*

Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” 15 The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

What a perfect verse for our times. Joshua says to God: “Are you for us, or for our enemies?” And the response here in Hebrew is literally, “No.” No. I am the commander of the Lord’s army.

We live in tumultuous times, and people are constantly picking sides: impeachment, TMT, gun control, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, Mac or PC, Waiola Shave Ice or Matsumoto’s, brown rice or white rice.

And our human tendency is to ask this question of God that Joshua asks: “God, are You for us (and our political party, our group,

our interest) or are You for our enemies?”

And God replies, No. I am the commander of Lord’s army. This great big thing that is way bigger than your concern. The question isn’t, “Is God on our side?” The question is, “Are we on God’s side?”

During the Civil War, someone supposedly asked Abraham Lincoln, “Is God on our side?” And Lincoln replied, “My concern is not whether God is on our side, my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”

Joshua falls on his face in worship. We don’t worship angels or created beings, just God—so the fact that the commander of the Lord’s army doesn’t tell Joshua to get up, suggests this is an appearance of God Himself.

And what He tells Joshua is fascinating. He says, “The place you are standing is holy.” This isn’t the temple, or the ark of the covenant. This is just some field outside Jericho. And it’s holy ground. Why? Because God is there—that’s what makes it holy.

And so it is in our lives today. If you are a follower of Jesus, the place where you are sitting right now is holy. Not because it is in a church.

When you go to your car, that’s going to be holy ground. When you go home, that’s holy ground too. When you go to the coffee bar, that’s *Holy Grounds*. Not really—it’s HeBrews. But just for today, let’s call it Holy Grounds.

Why is it holy ground? Because God is there. God lives within us, through His Holy Spirit,

and so our bodies are temples and where God is, it’s holy.

1 Corinthians 3:16 says: *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?... God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

We modern people think there is somehow a divide between secular and sacred. Church is spiritual, my work place is secular. Bible study is spiritual, but my parenting, or my sexuality, or my money, that’s secular. Can I tell you, it’s all spiritual. It’s all sacred. Where God is, it’s holy. And God’s Spirit is everywhere you are. Nothing is secular; everything is sacred.

Abraham Kuyper, the prime minister of the Netherlands in 1905, wrote, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”

When God appears to other people in the Bible, there’s a similar pattern: God appears, the person worships, God gives them a task and assurance that they’ll be successful. But not here. Here it’s just the first two. God appears, Joshua worships.

The only task God tells Joshua is to “Take off your sandals.” Joshua’s act of worship was to take off his sandals. Joshua obeys.

What is God saying to you? What does He want you to do about it? Can we, like Joshua, take off our slippers and worship God? Can we hear God’s voice and obey, whatever He asks—big or small. God’s got the outcome—the battle is the Lord’s. He’s got Jericho. Does He have our hearts?

Today, is Communion Sunday. As the elders and deacons prepare to distribute the elements, let's look at Joshua 5:13 again for one more detail I love.

*Joshua 5:13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, **he looked up** and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.*

Joshua is outside the walls of Jericho, and our text says, Joshua looked up. Joshua looked up. Whatever you are going through in your life right now, whatever hard or difficult thing, can I give you one piece of pastoral advice? Look up. Look up. The Lord is standing before you and the battle is the Lord's.

As we celebrate communion, we remember that the presence of God always transforms the ordinary and the secular into something holy and sacred. The night before Jesus was crucified, He celebrated the Passover meal with His closest friends. He invited them into communion with Him, to remember God's faithfulness and to celebrate a new covenant. A covenant in which the angel of death "passes over" our lives.

Jesus took ordinary bread and wine, and made them sacred, so that when we partake of these everyday things—Jesus Himself is fully present with us. Jesus Himself invites us to this table. To celebrate and remember as a community the great things that God has done for us, and to anticipate the great things to come. To remember the sacrifice of Jesus for us, and to expect His return in glory one day. We obey.

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