



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

November 10, 2019

"Say Yes to Him"

Raise the Sails Sermon Series — Pastor Dan Chun

Joshua 6:1-20 *Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.*

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.

"When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it."

And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord."

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them.

The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding.

But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!"

So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!"

"The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

"But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury."

When Bible passage opens, we see it was 40 year ago—yes, 40 years ago—Joshua had last seen Jericho. 40 years ago, he was a spy in the land. 40 years ago he and his friend Caleb were part of a 12-man special forces reconnaissance group to check out the Promised Land, but when they returned to report to Moses, 10 of them said they should turn away because there were giants in the land. Only Joshua and Caleb said they should move forward, cross the Jordan River, and take the city.

But the Israelites did not. God did not let them see the promised land because of their lack of faith in Him. All of them of that generation would not get to see it, except for Joshua and Caleb's families.

Because of their faith, God promised Joshua and Caleb they would indeed someday take the land and it would be theirs.

40 years later, their ten fellow spies and that whole generation had died and now Joshua and the next generation had crossed the Jordan River to lead an army against the fortified city of Jericho.

The stakes were high. This battle would be a tremendous sacrifice.

They had no military training or experience or technical know-how to go up against a fortified city. In fact, had they ever seen a city? They had been walking in the wilderness for 40 years!

They didn't know how to build siege towers or catapults or battering rams.

It's like Joshua is a football coach going into the Super Bowl and his team has never played football before. If they lose, they lose their lives and their women and children and, to boot, as we learned last week, just before the big game, they got circumcised. Bad, painful timing before a battle.

Yet God told them to take the city.

Point one of the sermon: There are times that God leads us into battle or a situation where we do not feel we have experience or the skills.

When God led me to become a TV news journalist, I had no journalism experience, no film-making experience, no on-air talent experience, but God led me into one of the greatest experiences I have had and what I learned there has lasted me for a life time in writing, producing, speaking, handling pressure, corporate

awareness, understanding how excellence serves people and God. God took me into an area that truly was out of my comfort zone but it was all for good.

When we say yes to God, it means we have to have patience.

Joshua had to wait 40 years to see God's promise to him of seeing the Promised Land unfold.

When we say yes to God, it means saying yes to an adventure that will often defy the world's logic. It may be scary, exciting, gut wrenching and it always involves sacrifice, obedience, and faith to say yes to God.

And so, it was when God gave us this house—God's house at Ko'olau.

In 2003, an elder named Don Parker had a dream, and he said he never dreams, and so this one was memorable and significant. He saw me preaching here at Ko'olau. We had been considering for years that God might be leading us to move from our Makiki campus because we had 83 parking spaces and about 800 people coming and were still growing. We had looked at hundreds of places, but had not found a suitable property.

In an earlier planning meeting, without knowledge of Ko'olau, I had said before an architect and church leaders that I felt the next campus would be large like a hotel, with wide hallways to receive thousands of people, and there would be lots of greenery and even water fountains. It would be elegant but not opulent. And it would have a fireplace.

The room erupted in laughter as it is a rare place indeed that would have a fireplace. I envisioned people gathering around it singing Christmas carols.

Much, much later, when Don said that his dream about Ko'olau might be significant, we decided to take a look.

And, lo and behold, it had everything that was in my vision. When the staff saw the fireplace near the atrium, they jokingly said, "It's a sign, a sign!" Little did they know that, just three years later in 2006, we would own the Ko'olau campus and on our first Christmas here would be singing Christmas carols between worship services near the fireside room with Eileen Lum leading them.

We moved in here in 2006, and ten years later we paid off the mortgage.

When we say yes to God, we see miracles.

Years ago, after we bought this place, I was praying by myself at the top of the stairs overlooking the atrium and the cross from our old church. I said to the Lord, "Golly, Lord, with all of these marble floors and marble walls and the size of it, maybe it's more opulent than elegant."

At that point, I heard a loud voice in my head. It sounded as loud as if you in the front row were shouting to me. And it said this, "Dan, this is my house!"

I immediately said, "I am so sorry Lord. Yes, it is your house." And I thought of how, in the Bible when the Temple of the Lord was built, it was with the finest cedars of Lebanon and had great metals and gold.

This is His house, made to be elegant!

If God chose this place as His, if God gave this to us as His house, then we must steward it well.

If we were to have constructed this from scratch and built it with the marble floors and columns and walls, people might say that is too much. But God chose this for us as His. Even when it was originally built as a golf club, His vision—His sovereignty—was that it would be built and then one day turned into a house of worship and a base of operation for ministry.

He gave this place to us, and now He wants us to maintain it. Our place is His place. Our house is really His house.

We only had \$200,000 in our capital account when we started to buy this campus, but the seller wanted \$20 million!

We tried to buy it anyway because God said to go ahead. We said yes to Him. And after several negotiations with the former owner, he finally agreed to sell. It was a miracle, like the walls of Jericho falling.

By God's grace, we were able to buy it because of God and the faithfulness and sacrifice of the people of this church. Just three years ago, in 2016, we closed the mortgage. People are always amazed when they find out we own the whole place debt free.

When we say yes to God, we will see miracles.

When we say yes to God, we see He uses objects—whether stones of remembrance, Jericho walls, or buildings.

When we say yes to God, we start on a journey with God that will be adventurous, scary, and seemingly illogical.

When we say yes to God, we realize that God is on a mission and it's our pleasure and desire to

get on His mission. That is where we will find the most fulfillment and satisfaction in life.

In chapter six of Joshua, it all comes together. The crucial challenge is this: when there are walls blocking our path, are we truly willing to obey God in a sacrificial manner, no matter how counterintuitive or crazy it may seem?

Each and every person here has challenges—with health, finances, relationships, school, work, or the loss of loved ones, to name a few. Some are challenges we have put on ourselves. Some are challenges others have put on us. Some are challenges that God has put before us.

When God is in the center of our lives, we learn how to face challenges and overcome them. That is much of what the story of Joshua is about.

God will lead us into challenges, but He asks us to trust Him and ultimately live a life of saying yes to Him. With God, yes, we can overcome the obstacles in life.

But what will it take, on our part?

Chris preached last week on how the soldiers were probably ready to take on Jericho, but God surprised them by saying, first, circumcise yourselves. (The women all said to the men. "He ain't talkin' to me, boy! Sucks to be you!")

Then God told them to celebrate Passover and worship.

Then they no longer had manna, the heavenly bread.

Then an Angel of the Lord, who might have been Jesus Himself,

wanted to make sure that the question on our hearts should not be whether God is for us or against us, but whether we are for God.

And then God says after all of this—making sure our bodies are holy through circumcision and that we *really* are worshipping God, and we have even changed our diet with no manna, and have really checked our hearts on whether we are for God—then and *only* then, you can go take on Jericho.

What God did to Israel in Joshua chapter 5 is parallel to what we're going through in our generosity journey.

We decided to walk through a six-week Bible study in small groups which, in a sense, is a sacrificial circumcision of our souls.

God wants us to make time to worship Him, study the Scriptures, and make sure we understand how generous He is and how we can be generous too.

We presently are on a 40-day fast. It's like living without the manna of our choice so that we could come to a very clear point that we can say we are on the side of God and will raise our sails to invite the winds of the Holy Spirit to guide us and we will say yes to whatever He asks us to do.

40 years Joshua waited to make this crossing with his people.

In a few months, it will be forty years I have been associated with this church, first as an assistant pastor and now your senior pastor. Not that I am Joshua, but now we are about to cross—not the Red Sea, not the Jordan River—but it's another crossing into a greater understanding of generosity and intimacy with God.

Walking through the Joshua study for the past 5 weeks, we started in chapter one, didn't we? It taught us that we need to *follow* God and, in order to do that, we will need to be strong and courageous and know that God is with us always.

In chapter two, we learned to *prioritize* God on what He cares about, for Him to be number one in all of our lives, how we spend our time, talent and treasure for His mission. Not "my life for my life," but "our lives for your lives."

In chapter three, we learned that we need to *trust* Him. God told the Israelites that, in order to get through the raging, overflowing waters of the Jordan river, they had to walk into it as the water was raging and trust God. When the hem of their garments got wet, when God could see that they were indeed risking and trusting Him, then, and *only* then, would the waters recede and they could walk through it on dry land.

In chapter four, we learned we need to *believe* God and *remember* Him. We learned that God is so generous that we should have objects, events and people to remind us of why we should believe Him. We should all have stones of remembrance.

Then, last week, in chapter five we learned we need to *surrender* to Him. When an angel of the Lord comes to us, the questions on our lips should not be, "are you on my side or my enemies side?" but "are we on the Lord's side?" Our prayers should not be "will You be on my side and help me accomplish my tasks for today," but rather "what is Your agenda for my life today?"

What are You saying to me, Lord, and what do You want me to do about it?

Give me Your voice to accomplish Your mission, not my mission. Teach me to spend my time and talent and my assets for Your mission, not just mine.

The 6-week study of the book of Joshua has been challenging. Are we people whose hem of our garments are always wet or do we live lives that want to keep all of our clothes safe and dry? How are we risking for God? We should be people ready to do whatever God asks us to do with stones of remembrance in sight to help us be strong and courageous, for we have prioritized God as our number one, our true Lord. Nothing in our life will be more important than following God making Him the *top priority* and being open to whatever He tells us.

This series has been life changing for some people. People are seeking God in new and fresh ways.

For me it has affected me *deeply*—I see God's generosity all over in brand new ways in people, nature, events. I desire to be more free with my money to help and bless others.

Chris mentioned a couple of weeks ago that there are many whose lives are being changed. I received an email two weeks ago that said, "I am seeing people really take heart to trusting God. The study has been heart-changing and life-giving and challenging. We've seen transformational answers to prayer. People who came in thinking, 'I have nothing more I can give,' are now saying, 'we can trust God and we will tithe.' The Lord is meeting people where they are and He is doing something in the hearts of the people in my group."

We know that, for some, they may have started with crossed arms

of resistance but, for many, those arms have dropped into wanting to be more open to God. And if you still have crossed arms, that's okay. We are all on a journey and we are all doing our faithful best.

Chris said last week, this generosity journey is about raising the sails, not paddling harder.

Some have felt this series was all been about raising money for a building. I would say, of course, we want to repair and remodel this building. Two Sundays ago, when I was preaching, the rain was coming down through the roof and down the walls over there while I was on stage! "Don't rain on my parade" has new meaning for me.

We have been upfront about the building needs from the beginning but, at the end of the day, it's the discipleship that lasts—the discipleship of the heart—and we want to expand our ministries.

Like the Israelites before the battle of Jericho, we knew this had to be about worship, first, and then Bible study and then small group community and then the sacrament of communion, our Passover observance, and fasting, *before* we crossed any river.

That is what counts! That is life-long—to know that God is on a mission and He calls us to be on it with Him. It's about the discipleship of our hearts, that we can know and see how generous God is and, as followers with Him on that mission, can we also be generous in all that we do.

That has always been the primary goal—to have 100% engagement to be in the process of having our hearts grown and stretched to trust God even more and make Him the main priority of our life.

Because, if we do this, if we learn to say yes to God, it will have way more important benefits than just fixing a roof. It will change our individual lives and change our church and change our community. That has always been the goal of these 6 weeks.

That, first, we would be strong and courageous.

That, second, there might be new priorities as seen in the prostitute named Rahab. In some ways, we can all be prostitutes if we follow the world and seeks its payment and rewards instead of following God.

That, third, when the question is asked, "Is our robe wet for risking for God," we say yes, our garments are wet from walking into a Jordan River with God when we thought we would drown.

That, fourth, we affirm there are stones of remembrance in our lives, events and people, past and present, that point to God.

That, fifth, the Jericho walls of our hearts might fall and be more open to God to say "Yes and we will obey You no matter what!"

By God's grace, the Lord has generously entrusted to us this sprawling property with a breathtaking, awe-inspiring view. And central to it is His holy house.

Here, within these walls, we worship, we pray for healing and offer hope and help and tools for living. Within these walls, we have had weddings and funerals and the sacraments. Within these walls we have cried and laughed in DivorceCare and GriefShare. We have dined and danced. We have found hope and help in the Marriage Course, the Parenting

Course, and the Alpha Course. We have been rooted in Rooted and learned through many Life Training classes on Sunday mornings. Within these walls children and youth have run and played hide-and-seek and sang and laughed and learned about Jesus. Within these walls hundreds have raised their hands to say "Yes, I want to dedicate or rededicate my life to Christ and be baptized!"

From these walls we have gone out to the community from Kaneohe to Kalihi to Waimanalo to Palama to help those in need. From these walls we have given backpacks filled with food for kids in Palama, supplies to Kaneohe Elementary School teachers, helped sex trafficking victims and washed the laundry of those in need. From these walls we have gone out to the far reaches of the world to China, Japan, Thailand, e-Swatini, Cambodia, the Philippines, South Korea. We have gone to urban areas and into jungles to give medical and ministerial help.

And now, within these walls, now more than ever, we come to answer the call that God's house, this church, this holy temple, needs some rebuilding. Like repairing the walls of the Holy City Jerusalem to which Nehemiah and his people took a sword and shovel in hand, so God is asking us to repair a place where the people of God meet, God's church in community, and to take His Gospel *from* this church to the people in the world, to build His global Church around the earth.

The Israelites in our Bible passage were ill-equipped, ill-prepared, with a lack of experience and knowledge, but God knew that and gave them a big lift in that He took the walls down. He told them to do things that seemed worldly illogical!

But they had to say yes to Him even though it meant walking around Jericho once a day for six days and then on the final day march seven times and then blow horns and yell and the walls then came a tumbling down.

That is why we can be strong and courageous. God knows when we are not skilled enough to fight our wars and He takes down the walls for us.

For these past six weeks, maybe God has taken down some walls; maybe showed us that we are never alone, even when we think we are; maybe showed us His generous nature; maybe showed us that we do have a scarcity attitude and we can change. Now we have the chance to respond, knowing it's our turn to be obedient and say yes!

Why do we give? How do we come up with an amount? It should not have come up with guilt or obligation. No, if we are at all generous, it is because we follow a loving, kind God. We obey because we want to, not because we have to. We give generously because God has been so incredibly generous to us!

King David says it so clearly:

1Chronicles 29:12 *Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.*

Now, our God, we give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name.

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand.

That's it! Everything we have comes from God and, whatever we give, we give back to the Lord with gratitude that His kingdom might be extended.

I love what Tim and Kathy Keller say in their devotional book on Proverbs, in speaking of Proverb 11:24, which says, "One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty."

The Kellers wrote this: "Think of farmers. The more they scatter seed, the more they will reap. And keep in mind that seed comes back in a better form, as harvest you can eat and sell.

"In the same way, spiritually wise people realize their money is seed and the only way for them to turn it into real riches is by giving it away in remarkable proportions. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

"This is not a promise that the more you give away, the more money you will make.

"Rather the more you give away wisely to ministries and programs that help people spiritually and physically, the more your money becomes the real wealth of changed lives in others and of spiritual health in yourself.

"And [hence] you will be walking in the footsteps of the One who was literally broken and scattered so He could gather us to Himself." [Nov. 2 devotional from God's Wisdom for Navigating Life Tim and Kathy Keller]

Therefore, we must have the faith to follow Jesus and to disburse and scatter our goods and time for others that our Lord will be glorified and people helped.

We want to be generous with all and especially for when He calls to build His church both spiritually and physically.

Two Sundays ago we had our Advance Commitment worship night where people had the opportunity to worship and sing praises to God. Some painted what they felt God was saying to them at that time. Then we had people come up to the podium to share openly from their hearts what God was saying to them. And then our people came forward to freely, willingly, wholeheartedly, joyfully, faithfully give their commitments to Raise the Sails in two bowls before a model of a ship.

And now it's our turn, here in this sanctuary, to say yes to God.

In a moment, I am going to give you three minutes or so to think and pray about what you want to commit and write on the commitment card that you have, to the great God who so abundantly loves us. No guilt—just give willingly, freely, faithfully, wholeheartedly. Give what you want to unto our generous God, to His church.

Remember, it's not paddle harder, but it's raise the sails. Let the Spirit fill the sails of your hearts and minds. What is God saying to you. And then say yes and obey.

Know what you do today matters. It matters in changing the eternities of people in Hawaii and beyond, reaching them with the hope of Jesus. What we do this morning matters.

Remember that your commitment is what you would normally give to the church, plus the sacrificial gift above and beyond that, and then multiply that by two

for the two years we're doing Raise the Sails.

Remember only the bookkeeper knows what you are giving, for tax reasons. No one else knows. So don't be concerned that I might know. Actually, we should be more concerned that God knows. Don't worry about me. I won't ever be told, unless you want me to know and you tell the bookkeeper to tell me. We take it seriously that your gift is between you and God.

For some of you, it might be the first time you have ever committed to something like this. I'm happy for you. This is incredible. I am so happy for you and God is smiling upon us this morning.

Maybe, for some of you, you are choosing to give in a way that you never ever have before. The Lord is also smiling about that too. Smiling for your obedience.

For the commitment card, you don't need to fill out all of the blanks. It's just a worksheet. The only number you need to fill out is the box at the bottom with your name on it. You can fill out all of the boxes, if you want, but the bottom box is the most important.

As Chris said two weeks ago in his sermon, it's "our lives for your lives," meaning our lives for the life of others, that they may know Christ and our life for Jesus who gave His life for us.

As we take three or four minutes to think, pray and write, feel free to talk with your spouse or whoever you are with. Talk with God, as well, for this is your holy offering to the Lord for His church.

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

Please join me in prayer.

Lord, this loyal fellowship of people are about to express their generous love for You. Praise God for their love and faith in You, Lord, from this day to the ending of the world. But we in it today shall be remembered—this band of brothers and sisters, adults and children. For we now come willingly, freely, faithfully, wholeheartedly. We give to You in love and obedience. To You, as we sing our highest praise to You, Lord of all. We now offer our commitments to You from the deepest part of our hearts. Highest praise to You, Lord. In Christ's name, Amen.

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