



FIRST PREZ HONOLULU
SERMON TEXT

“OUR VALUE OF COURAGE”

(FOUNDATIONS Sermon Series)

by Elders Paul Zukunft and Leona Larkin

Sunday, June 30, 2024

Pastor Timmy Fearer:

This is our fifth and final Sunday in our Foundations series, which is all about our renewed and refreshed statement of mission and stated values. Remember, a statement of mission answers the “what” question. What is it that we do here? What are we about here? Our answer being: Joining Jesus to restore and transform one another and our world. That's the business that we're in here. That's what we're about. And a set of values answers the “why” and the “who” questions. Why do we do what we do? Who are we as we go about doing what we do? Our values color everything that we as a church say, think, and do: prayer, humility, the grace and truth of Jesus, and courage. This is the posture that we take as we go about carrying out our mission.

In the last three weeks, we've covered prayer, humility, and the grace and truth of Jesus – what they look like as we go about carrying out the mission we feel Jesus is calling us to. This morning, we dive into courage, our final value. Elder Paul Zukunft is going to lead the way today, followed by a word of testimony from Elder Leona Larkin, and then a final brief word from me.

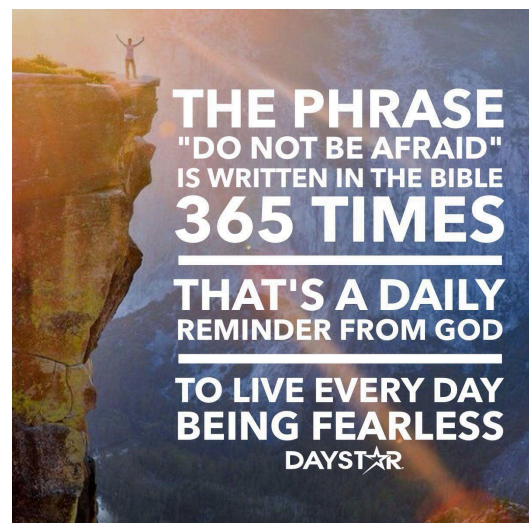
Let me pray. Father, again, give your power in the Holy Spirit to Paul and Leona as they share from the scriptures, as they share from their hearts, from their experience. And give us open ears and open hearts to whatever you want to say to us this morning. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Elder Paul Zukunft:

What a great lead-in by our worship team, “I will place my trust in Him alone and I will not be shaken”!

Today we close out our message series that has focused upon our mission and the 4 values that define WHO we are in fulfilling that mission: Joining Jesus to restore and transform one another and our world. Our four values that define each and everyone of us are prayer, humility, the grace and truth of Jesus, and today - COURAGE!

How might you envision courage when it comes to joining Jesus? After all, the phrase, “Do not fear” appears 365 times in the Scriptures, so it is only fitting that today and every day we focus upon the value of courage.



It is courage that undergirds our faith in joining Jesus and there is an introduction and launching pad that both occurred in Galilee over 2000 years ago.

Matthew 4: 18-20

"Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee. He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come follow me", Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people. At once, they left their nets and followed him.

The Sons of Thunder, John and James who were also fishermen immediately followed as well. So ask yourself, if you were at your workplace today in the 21st century, working on a spreadsheet and a person unknown to you said, "Log out and instead, come spread the gospel with me", how might you respond? If it was me, I would probably say, "Can't you see that I'm busy"? Or, "I have a family to support and bills to pay"? Or, "Can someone run a background check on this guy."

And what if this was truly the messiah, God incarnate...would I have the courage to commit knowing this might have deadly consequences as was the case with the first 12 disciples. I believe Jesus already knew that answer since not one of his disciples turned down the offer to join him to restore and transform one another and our world.

Again, in Galilee, there was what you might call, "Mission Impossible". The Great Commission after Jesus' resurrection.

Matthew 28:16-20 *Then the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told*

them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

These 11 disciples would suffer every hardship imaginable and persecution. And these were 11 ordinary men, fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot and a carpenter and they paid it forward in numbers that absolutely bogs the mind. For through their initial acts of courage, there are 2.6 billion followers of the Christian faith today. And are we not ordinary women and men as well?

Today, we live in a very secular and polarized society, and there is a tendency to compartmentalize our faith with a reluctance to invite others into a spiritual relationship with Jesus, otherwise known as discipleship. And the numbers speak for themselves. In the 1990's, about 90% of our nation's populace identified themselves as Christian. In 2023, that number was 68% and trending downwards with 30% of our population having no religious affiliation whatsoever. Might you have the courage to invite just one acquaintance into a spiritual relationship with Jesus?

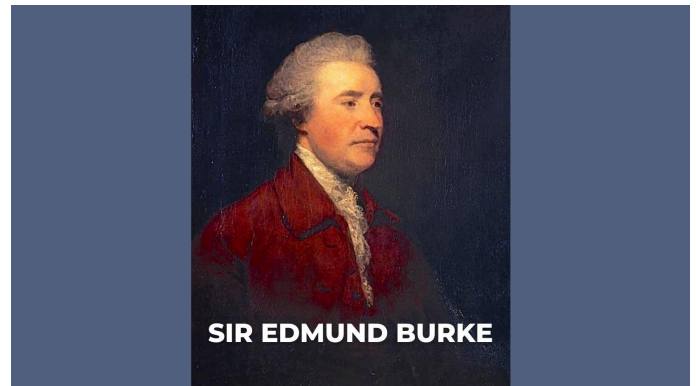
When it comes to joining Jesus, how might courage manifest itself within our midst here at First Prez? If you feel comfortable, I ask the men from Hope Center who are worshiping with us today and every Sunday to please stand up and be recognized. These men had the courage to cast off

a very destructive net that was impacting their lives to join Jesus and be restored and transformed. And we need not look any further than the ordination service that will be held for Chris Pan today.

As most of you know, Chris left a very lucrative career as an attorney to become our Executive Director. Shepherding us through the demise of the Koolau golf course and 246 acres of property that needs to be repurposed; COVID; on-line church; retirement of our senior pastor and transition process guided by our amazing interim pastor, Pastor Timmy; and all while speaking compassionately and transparently from the pulpit, from compression socks to his very personal life challenges that make Chris so relatable to the challenges in our lives and inspire us to join Jesus. And now Chris has attained the credentials as an ordained pastor in the ECO Presbytery. Now that takes real courage!

On a personal level, and unlike Chris, I have been less than transparent and courageous in sharing my shortcomings of which Jesus is well aware. It is one thing to be self-confident. But in my 45 years of active duty military service, I had taken self-confidence (that was really not courage) to the extreme and to the point of becoming arrogant which is nothing more than idolatry. Now isn't that ironic! I was becoming what I had detested most as I was rising through the ranks! And so I too had to lay down my nets to follow Jesus in a meaningful way after I retired from military service, devoting most if not all of my time in the non-profit sector and as an elder at this church to help restore and transform one another and our world.

There is another element of courage that perhaps is best reflected in the words of Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke.



"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men [and women] to do nothing".

These words were published in the 1700's while the Catholic Church was under persecution and slavery on a global scale had run rampant. Edmund Burke could not have been more visionary when you look at the works of our mission partners and two in particular.



This past January, Fran and I joined a group from First Prez led by pastor Timo to support the Agape International Mission (AIM) in Cambodia that was co-founded by Don and Bridget Brewster in 2006 and who currently reside in Oahu.

If you were to google child sex trafficking back in 2006, and sadly, many did, the village of Svay Pak would jump off the charts. It was THE global epicenter for child sex trafficking facilitated by underground tour companies to entice men and many of those from the U.S. to exploit God's children.

Through the courage and commitment of Don and Bridget, evil no longer thrives in Svay Pak. What had been a sprawling brothel is now a schoolhouse for over 800 children; a place of Christian worship in a nation where only 3% of the population are followers of Jesus Christ; a vocational program and now garment factory that provides affordable living for women who had been previously trafficked (and by the way, the First Prez T-Shirts worn by many of our youth as well as the HIM t-shirts are manufactured at this very same factor (just read the label); a SWAT team that intervenes against what is now a sophisticated, underground child sex trafficking enterprise in Cambodia to rescue and restore child-aged victims; Lord's Gym that restores young men in body and soul; and outreach to alleviate food insecurity among the impoverished brick factory workers' communities.

Let's raise our hands and say "Praise the Lord" for Don and Bridget Brewster for triumphing over evil!

I want to close on one final aspect as it relates to courage. And that is moral courage. There is a Pulitzer Prize novel titled *Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy that was published in 1956. If you had not read this book, you might think it was about Bunker Hill, Gettysburg and Iwo Jima judging from the title. But that's not the case. It profiles 8 U.S. Senators who had the courage to stand up for integrity and reject the popular opinions of their

political party and constituents. They were severely criticized and their political careers suffered, yet they courageously held their ground. As you look at our polarized society here in the U.S. today, you see a country divided across political parties. Yet we are all made in the image of God, and not as a Democrat, Republican or Independent. So in joining Jesus, we are Christians first and foremost and our political affiliation must not define who we are. It is our values of prayer, humility, the grace and truth of Jesus and courage that define who we are.

Moral courage simply comes down to doing what is right in the eyes of Jesus Christ our Savior. I used to wear one of those rubberized bracelets with the acronym, "WWJD" - "What Would Jesus Do." It was a constant reminder whenever I had to make a decision, no matter how big or small, and let integrity and Jesus be my guide.

Jesus clearly set the bar that no person will ever clear when it comes to moral courage and integrity. Our moral compass can point in one of two directions. There is no middle ground. You can either be a bystander or what I would call an UP STANDER. Perhaps someone wants you to "shade the truth" in the work place, or worse, provide top cover for thievery, fraud, sexual harassment and assault, promoting racism and just plain toxic leadership. Is that what Jesus would do? To be a bystander and enabler of evil? Is that what First Prez would do? I am here to say, unequivocally NO! Because we are a church of upstanders!

We are upstanders for Prayer, Humility, the Grace and Truth of Jesus, and Courage. These are our values and that is WHO we are!

So back to those 365 times that the words “do not fear” appear in the Scriptures. Is there anything holding you back today where you feel lacking in the courage to JOIN JESUS? BE RESTORED? BE TRANSFORMED?

If so, remember He is with you always as I close with this Scripture: Isaiah 41:10

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

And if you feel overcome by fear this morning, I invite you to have the courage to join our amazing prayer team to help restore you following this service.

Now I invite another one of our 16 elders, Leona Larkin, who will step up to the podium and share her testimony on courage with you.

Elder Leona Larkin:

Good morning, First Prez!

Joshua 1:9

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

In this moment, God is encouraging Joshua as he prepares to lead the Israelites across the Jordan into the promised land. If you remember, he and Caleb were the only two of 12 spies who had gone ahead to see what was in the land and report back to the rest of the nation. They had seen an abundance of provision and the giants who lived

there as well. Joshua and Caleb believed that they could easily overcome the giants and claim the land, unfortunately everyone else disagreed. That fear infected the rest of the Israelites, and they were forced to wander the desert for 40 years until that unbelieving perished. And now the time had finally come to make it happen.

As we get ready to embark on our mission with Jesus, I wonder what it was about Caleb and Joshua that made it easy for them to believe that defeating those giants was possible? It's easy to say, “faith in God,” but what does that mean exactly? As a church, we believe in God and that Jesus Christ is our Savior. So why do some of us struggle to surrender our will or to trust Him when he makes a promise that seems too impossible to be true? Wouldn't it be great to be one of those people that when he says, let's move that mountain, we just say yes, and we charge ahead?

I've been asking myself similar questions for the past six months as I've found myself embroiled in what feels like a sea of chaos. I've come to learn that the best way out of these tumultuous situations is through them, but right now the thought of that is completely gut-wrenching. Normally, I don't mind a bit of chaos, a little adventure never hurt anyone. I kind of roll with it, knowing that God is with me and that things will turn out as they should, but I've really been struggling to figure out what makes this time different.

Well, something amazing happened last week that helped me understand what was going on with me. I was reading the second chapter of Life's Healing Choices, which is about letting go of our need to exert control over situations that are

uncontrollable. Author John Baker states that “until we understand God’s true character, we can’t completely trust him,” and if we can’t trust him, we can’t surrender.

So I paused to pray, and I asked, “Lord, what am I not understanding about you? Why have I been having such a hard time over these past few months?”

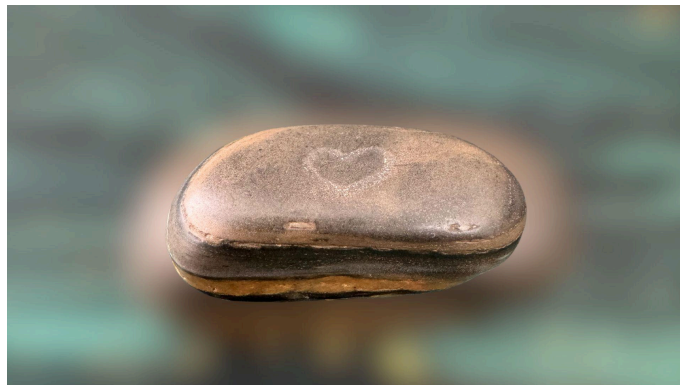
I waited, and King David came to mind, a warrior who spent a majority of his life fighting battles. He only stopped because of his age. I then said to God, “I don’t understand how David was able to fight as much as he did and not get tired. Here I am, it’s only been a few months, and I’m exhausted!” Our loving Father then said to me, plain as day ... “Your problem is that you don’t trust me.”

I was a little surprised by this. I know that God carried me through my divorce, the fear of starting my life all over again and not knowing where to start. He carried my mother and me through her cancer diagnoses and many other health complications. At one point, I even had a corner of my whiteboard at work dedicated to the many things that God had done in my life. So... huh?

He then proceeded to explain that I’m scared that he is going to forget about me. I’m worried that, when the chips are down, he’ll be nowhere to be found and I’ll have to fend for myself. He gently pointed out that he and I are not the same. To start with, he’s MUCH bigger than me. In fact, he doesn’t get tired, he doesn’t sleep, he doesn’t eat, he doesn’t do any of the things that I do. He told me that I am always firmly in his hand and I always will be.

My next thought was, “well... you say that but...”

Before I could continue, he told me to get up and retrieve this rock.



This beauty was given to me at work, by one of our lovely volunteer chaplains about a month ago. She told me that I should keep it for as long as I needed it, and when the time came, to pass it on to someone else in need of a little reassurance.

I pulled it out of my purse and sat down. He told me to hold this rock in my hand for a week. I was like, “Okay, Lord.” Honestly, I was a little excited to have had this interaction and for my assignment. When I went to bed that night, I did my best to sleep in a way that would guarantee that this little baby would be firmly in my grasp when I woke up.

The next morning, I woke up and proceeded to go about my morning routine. It eventually dawned on me that I was on assignment, so I raced back into my bedroom and my rock was nowhere to be seen! I lifted my sheets, and there it was, almost in the middle of the bed. I don’t know how that happened, because I have literally bragged to people that I sleep ... like a rock.

I was humbled that morning. I don’t think even eight hours had gone by. God gracefully pointed

out that in failing to trust Him to have my back, I wrongly believed that I had to “fight” this battle. So, I inevitably stopped focusing on what He was telling me to do in favor of focusing my energy on trying to “save” my own life. He helped me understand that this situation was going to help expose some of the wounds from my marriage that still need tending to. As I shared with a friend, all of this is going to unravel so he can re-ravel me correctly.

The difference then, between me and David, was that David trusted God with his life and I didn't. Joshua and Caleb did too. Their courage came from knowing that God would be there with them, and that He would deliver on His promises. They knew that walking in with God meant guaranteed victory and they were open to doing things His way.

As we move forward as a church into our own new territory, let's be like Joshua, Caleb, and David. Let our courage lie in the truth that God is much bigger than us. He most certainly doesn't lose track of things, and unlike ours, his plans are foolproof. Let's move forward knowing that, as we join Jesus in this amazing mission to restore and transform one another and this world, he holds us firmly in his hand, and he will never let us go.

Pastor Timmy Fearer:

That's right. We've got elders who can preach. Thank you both. That was just awesome.

It's been such a strong month as we focused on joining Jesus to restore and transform one another in our world. And as we join him, we join him with prayer, humility, the grace and truth of Jesus, and courage, as we were reminded this morning. So, this entire month, we've been beating this drum.

And from now on, we will be beating this drum to remind ourselves and to keep us from drifting off into what is not our mission, what is often called Mission Drift. We're not going to do that at this church. We also beat this drum to introduce ourselves to our visitors so they really know what we're about on a regular basis.

Let me offer a prayer now and let's all join in a prayer of dedication and consecration to this statement of mission and to these values as we wrap up the month and head off into our future week by week. Let's pray together.

Father, we so need you, as Paul and Leona made super clear. None of this happens without courage. That's the word we've chosen which is essentially faith, faith that's active, faith that steps out into unknown territory, faith that is not so concerned about self but is concerned about others and concerned about you. Help us to get this statement of mission and these values so inside of us that they are second nature. Walk with us as we join your Son, Father, in what he's doing in us, between us, around us, and not just on this island, these group of islands, but anywhere in the world that you take us. We commit ourselves to these things and, Lord, just make them true, make them real, make them powerful in us. We pray this together and all God's children say, “Amen.”

Spiritual Step of the Week:

What is one thing you will commit to doing this week to more fully live into FPC's value of COURAGE (as you are joining Jesus to restore and transform one another and our world)?