

Sermon Title: **Grace: by their faith? Or by His faithfulness?**

Bible: Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 3:17-19 & 2:4

Where & When: Sunday Worship at Gilroy UMC on March 24th, 2019

Audience: about 35 English-speaking Church Members

Remembering Patience Walker

Our beloved church member, Patience Walker, known to us as “Pat,” passed away on Saturday, March 16th, 2019.

Opening Prayer

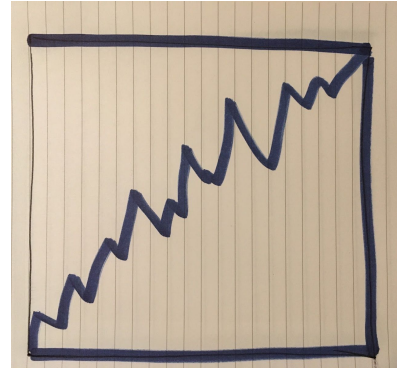
Thank you so much for calling us your children. Your love and grace are always with us. In this Lent season, we hope to touch your love and grace more and more. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

1. Different Understanding of Faith Journey

In Christianity, there are many denominations: many different beliefs and traditions. The United Methodist Church is one of them. Each denomination has its own understanding of what a faith journey is. I am not the exception. Even though I am on the way to becoming an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church, I have my own understanding of God and the faith journey. I have to say that my theology is not THE ONLY ONE theology. My understanding is just one of many

theologies. However, with you and in this faith community, my theology and my faith journey will be made more abundant and more mature.

I would like to share three perspectives of how to look at our faith journey. This is very rough analysis, but I hope you will discover your own understanding, and others' understandings, because we love each other, even though we are different.



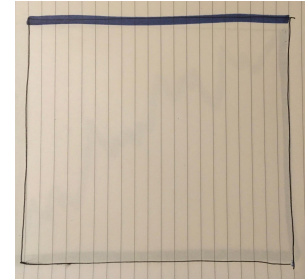
Before looking at this faith journey graph, I would like to mention a little about my seminary. My seminary is PSR, Pacific School of Religion, which is one part of GTU, the Graduate Theological Union.

In GTU, there are several denominations, including Presbyterian, American Baptist, Dominican, Jesuit School, Lutheran, and Methodist. So I was able to take many

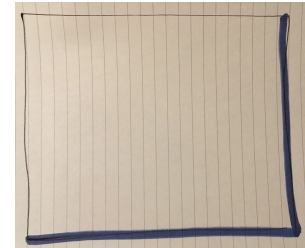


classes from different points of view. I learned this graph from one Presbyterian professor, and ironically, this is one of the reasons why I became a Methodist. The bottom of the left is the beginning of our life, and the top of the right is the end of our faith journey.

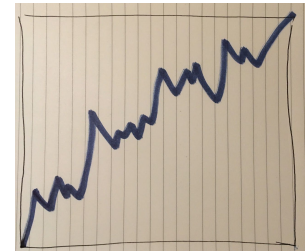
In the first understanding of our faith journey, the focus is upon the grace and love of God. God's grace and love are bigger than ourselves. We are blessed ones all the time.



The second understanding is that human beings should be humble in front of God's greatness. We have sinful natures, but in the end, God will save us.



The third one is a balance of the first and the second. It looks like stock market prices. Sometimes, we follow God, but sometimes, we do not follow God, but overall, our faith is growing little by little.



These are variations of our understandings about faith journeys, so there is no right or wrong answer. Only the focus is different. Which one is close to your understanding of your faith journey? The first one? The second one? The third one?

2. Four Gospels in the Bible

In the Bible, there are four books of the Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of these Gospels talk about the life of Jesus Christ. However, the focus is a

little different, if we look at each book of the Gospels closely. I believe that that's why many artists describe each Gospel with different figures: human, lion, ox, and eagle. Not all of the Gospels have the same story. For example, some Gospels do not have the story of Baby Jesus' birth. Even though some of the Gospels share similar stories, the meaning could be different. To study each Gospel could be fun, like digging out the hidden treasure.



3. Different Translations of the Bible

Just as we have four Gospels, there are a lot of different English translations of the Bible. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. Depending on how to interpret, there are many English translations. Which translation do you have? NIV, New International Version? The Message? King James Version? In Methodism, we choose the NRSV; New Revised Standard Version. Some translations focus on word for word. Some are based on thoughts or meaning. Let me explain this more. At the Gilroy UMW meeting, I learned the phrase, “White Elephants.” To my wife, I cannot say that Gilroy Church has a lot of big and cute white elephants. I need to translate white elephants into another phrase to explain it refers to used but almost brand new

items. Likewise, many scholars translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek to English; sometimes it is based on word for word or sometimes according to the meaning or ideas. That's why we have so many English translations of the Bible.

4. By their faith or by His faithfulness?

Today's first scripture reading is Romans 1:17. If we look at this verse with different translations, it reads like the following:

- The one who is righteous will live by faith. (NRSV)
- The righteous will live by faith. (NIV)
- The just shall live by faith (KJV)
- The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives. (The Message)

Can you find out any differences?

How about Habakkuk? The second reading is Habakkuk 2:4. Probably, Paul knew Habakkuk 2:4 and used it in the letter to the Romans. If we look at this verse with different translations, it is like this;

- the righteous live by their faith (NRSV)
- the righteous person will live by his faithfulness (NIV)
- the just shall live by his faith. (KJV)

- the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, *really* alive. (The Message)

Can you see any differences? “The righteous people? or the righteous person?”

The subject can be singular or plural in these translations. In the last few words, there are several possibilities; “by their faith”, “by his faith”, or “by His faithfulness.”

In my understanding of Hebrew, the subject should be plural, so the subject is “the righteous people.” And then, for the last words, there are two possible translations, “by their faith” or “by His faithfulness.” “His” means “God’s” in this context. So, it can be read like these following two sentences:

The righteous people live by their faith.

Or the righteous people live by God’s faithfulness.

Can you see the differences? Which one makes more sense to your faith journey?

I prefer the second one; The righteous live by God’s faithfulness. I cannot rely on my faith. I thought that my faith was strong and mature. But when there is a trouble in my life, my faith is weak, and easy to break. Why me? I get mad at God. I cannot feel the presence of God. Only silence comes to me. However, I realize that even when I cannot understand or feel God’s presence, God’s faithfulness is always there. Even in the time of problems and trouble, even when I cannot see the

hope with my eyes, God's love and grace is in me. God's faithfulness, God's love, God's grace is the foundation of my life.

I am still weak and fragile. But God's love and grace covers me. It is just a blessing to live with my family, to serve this church, and to love each other. In this Lent season, I would like to say with my lips like the prophet of Habakkuk; Regardless of my situation, *I will rejoice in the Lord! God, the Lord, is my strength.*

Closing Prayer

God, thank you so much for your faithfulness. Even though our faith is weak, you are still with us. Your grace and love covers us all the time. You are the source of our joy and strength. In Jesus' name. Amen!

Possible Qs.

1. Among these three understandings of a faith journey, which one is closest to yours?
2. What translations of the Bible do you have? Any reasons?
3. Can you trust and rejoice in God in the midst of trouble?