

Sermon Title: **Grace and Hope**

Bible: Joel 2:28-29 & Matthew 6:33

Where & When: Sunday Worship at Gilroy UMC on April 7th, 2019

Audience: about 35 English-speaking Church Members

## **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, you are always with us whenever and wherever we are. When we cannot see you, even where suffering and violence are present, you are there with us. When we cannot understand you, even when we get mad at you, you are there with us. In your love and grace, I bow down to you, Lord. Please use my lips, heart, and my body to your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen!

## **1. Easter Lilies**

Easter is coming soon! Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays. That's because Sundays are always little Easters. Sunday Worship should have joyful expectations of the Resurrection. We will have Easter lilies next Sunday. In my home country, Korea, we don't get to see Easter lilies at the church, because we do not have this tradition. So, I looked into the meaning of Easter lilies. This is what I found out; the trumpet shape signifies the trumpet sounds of the message that Jesus has risen; the white color is the purity of Christ, free from sin; the nature of lilies represents the resurrection, because these beautiful flowers come from

bulbs, which are buried underground for three years or longer. Thus, lilies symbolize rebirth and hope.

## **2. Hope and Grace**

Like these beautiful and meaningful Easter lilies, I decided the theme of my sermons in Lent is Hope. My first sermon was “When We Were Created.” When we were created, we were all created in God’s image, and the breath of God was in us. That is the original blessing. My second sermon was “Grace: by their faith or by His (God’s) faithfulness?” Because my faith is weak, broken, and imperfect, I rely on God’s faithfulness. I hope that through my sermons, we, you and I, can find out the hope. Today, I would like to talk more about God’s grace, because grace is the foundation of my hope.

## **3. Grace: Welcoming Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace**

Grace is one distinctive emphasis of the United Methodist Church. I need Grace. I want Grace; the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God, in our lives through the ever-present Holy Spirit. Even though grace cannot be divided, there are three kinds of graces; Welcoming (or Preventive) Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace.

With Welcoming Grace, God's love surrounds all people and invites all into God's presence. It is like the sun, rain, and nature. God's grace is already with all of us. We cannot limit the grace of God. In this welcoming grace, it does not make sense to distinguish believers from unbelievers, because we are all God's children. This leads us to work with other denominations, and even with other religions. Welcoming grace can be one reason for serving this Gilroy community and transforming the world, because God's grace is already there.

Justifying Grace means accepting the love of God. There is a decisive change in our hearts when we accept God as Lord. This is so-called conversion. This conversion can be either sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. Many of my Korean friends have sudden and dramatic stories of conversion, such as speaking in tongues or healing of diseases. To me, it is gradual and cumulative. When I was a junior high student, I had the experience of accepting God as my Lord with a lot of tears and a warm heart. When I was in college, I doubted the presence of God, as I recognized the suffering in my life, and the injustice of my society and the world. I questioned a lot: Where is God? Does God allow this painful suffering? When God's love and grace came to me, I used to say, "No, thank you." To go into the light, to face the light was not easy to me, who was hurt by others, and who harmed others. It was hard to say "I am sorry." It was painful to

try to forgive others. It was almost impossible to forgive myself. Actually, I did not want to forgive myself. But the encounter of Jesus Christ on the cross changed me. Jesus Christ suffers on the cross instead of me, with me, and for me. After a long time of resistance and silence, I burst into tears, when I faced the cross and when I accepted the light. Finally, I said to God, “Thank you, Lord, for your love and grace!”

Sanctifying grace continues to nurture our growth for God’s kingdom. Accepting God as the Lord is only a new beginning. It is like saying “I do” at the wedding. Saying “I do” is not the end of the marriage, but the beginning of the marriage. The Holy Spirit guides us and leads us toward God’s love and grace. We want to practice God’s love and grace in our daily life. John Wesley described this faith life as “habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor.” Like professional athletes practice for the perfect game, when we practice God’s love and grace, it will become our habit. But this is God’s gift, because it is not guaranteed by our efforts, and because it is not limited by our weakness. I am the witness of Sanctifying Grace through my sermons. I try to do my best for my sermon. But my sermons have many weaknesses. It cannot be free from my Korean English. But the Holy Spirit helps us to understand each other and to listen to God’s message for

us, you and me. This moment is God's gracious gift to me. I hope that this moment is also a gift to you as well.

#### **4. Hope for My Church and My Denomination**

I believe that you have heard much news of the United Methodist Church these days. When I think of my church and my denomination, I have many thoughts and worries in my mind. It is in the darkness. It is painful. It is confusing. I would like to find out the hope, the solution, and the answer. Unfortunately, it is hard or impossible to see the hope right now. However, I believe that grace is all the time with us, whenever and wherever we are. As we read the book of Joel, the Spirit pours out upon all people, not only upon me, but also upon you. We are different, but we have one Spirit. I might not be the one who can prophesy. I would be glad to witness the dreams of old people. I want to be joyful to see the visions of the young people. Because you, God's children, are here in this church, I have hope. I believe that you have your own stories of grace in your life. With your gracious presence, I have hope for this United Methodist Church.

The Gospel of Matthew says, "Do not worry." I would like to read a couple of verses from Matthew in the same chapter 6, the most famous verses about lilies; "And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was

not clothed like one of these.” As God cares for these lilies, God cares about us. It also says, “but strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness.” How can we do this? What does this mean to us, Gilroy United Methodist Church?

We are God’s Children. We have one Spirit. This church is the body of Christ. God’s grace is already with us, and still with us. I dare to say that in this time of waiting, struggling, and discerning, God’s grace will lead us, you and me, this church, and the whole United Methodist Church, toward God’s love.

### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, your love and grace is with us. Your Spirit is upon all of us. Please lead us to your holy presence. For this church, for this United Methodist Church, your love and grace is what we need. We seek you first. We strive first for your kingdom. Help us to be ready for your gracious gift. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

### **Possible Qs.**

1. Can you share your story of grace? Is it welcoming grace, justifying grace, or sanctifying grace?
2. What gives you hope?