

Sermon Title: **Love and Church**

Bible: John 17:20-26 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Where & When: Sunday Worship Service at Gilroy UMC on May 5th, 2019

Audience: about 35 English-speaking Church Members

## **Opening Prayer**

Creator God, thank you so much for creating us in your image. And You are still creating us toward God's image. Please do not stop creating us. We are here, Lord! Mold us! Guide us! Please use my lips in your grace and love. In Jesus' name, Amen!

## **1. Tears caused by the Church**

Have you cried, because of the church? I love the church so much. So, I have tears in my eyes and my mind. My church life is not simply happy all the time. Of course, I have many joyful and thankful stories. But I also have sad and painful stories. The first church that I met when I was a college student makes me feel sorrowful. I can say that at this church, I met my first mentor. I was loved a lot and I loved him. It was my joy to serve the church. However, there was a division in the church. My mentor had to leave the church. And I was not able to attend that church any more. I assume that this church might remain as my permanent pain.

## **2. Jesus' Final Prayer**

These days, when I hear the news of a possible split in the United Methodist Church, my heart is heavy. It looks like it is too late to talk about unity. Chapter 17 in the Gospel of John is a so-called “high-priestly prayer.” In the Gospel of John, this is Jesus’ final prayer before his crucifixion. I read this as the will of Jesus. It is about the unity of His disciples, “so that they may be one, as we are one.” The love of God may make the disciples one. This is the last prayer of Jesus for our unity, but where are we now?

## **2. Corinthian Church and Love**

The famous first part of 1st Corinthians, chapter 13, is lovely to read and hear. This is Paul’s letter to the Corinthian congregation. But its context is not that good. And when we read the first chapter, we discover that Paul wrote this letter, not out of joy, but because of his concern. In the Corinthian church, there was breakdown. There were divisions: “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” So, Paul appealed to the church to be united in the same mind and the same purpose. How can we have the same mind and the same purpose? In chapter 13, Paul suggested the gift of love. Without love, we are a noisy gong. Without love, we are nothing. Without love, we gain nothing. Do we have love?

### **3. Christian Conferencing and Gilroy UMC**

Love is a gift, like grace. God is still pouring out love to us. I hope we love each other more and more, even though we are different. At the level of the General Conference, it might be too late. There are over 40,000 United Methodist churches in the world; USA, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Gilroy UMC is one of over 40,000 churches. However, can we try God's love in this small church? I dare to hope that our love spreads out to our district, our Cal-Nev Annual Conference, and General Conference, like when I flip over my thumb, the whole hand gets flipped over together. Do not underestimate our church. We are small, but we are God's people, and God's love never ends.

I want to introduce one idea of Christian conferencing in the United Methodist Church. Christian Conferencing or Holy Conferencing is the practice of having conversations with love. We can grow together and seek to discern God's voice through conversations with love. So, Christian Conferencing is a means of grace.

Bishop Sally Dyck shared 8 principles of Holy Conferencing;

1. Every person is a child of God
2. Listen before speaking
3. Strive to understand from another's point of view

4. Strive to reflect accurately the views of others
5. Disagree without being disagreeable
6. Speak about issues; do not defame people
7. Pray, in silence or aloud, before decisions
8. Let prayer interrupt your busy-ness

Which one do you like most? Which number is most challenging to you?

(Everyone? What is most challenging? To me, number 5 (or 6) is challenging).

Our founder, John Wesley said, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” If there is only one opinion from all of you, it should be wrong. But if there is one heart, it is a taste of Heaven. And I love to feel this one heart! Can we love?

### **Closing Prayer**

Creator God, you are great in creation. You are still creating us. Pour out your love and grace to us. Let us have one heart, one mind, and one purpose for your kingdom! In Jesus’ name. Amen!

### **Possible Qs.**

1. Do you have tears about the church?
2. What do you think/feel about Christian Conferencing?