

Sermon Title: **I Owe You**

Bible: **Romans 13:8-10**

Where & When: Sunday at Gilroy UMC on Feb. 2, 2020

Audience: about 34 English-speaking Church Members

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us your love in our hearts. We want to love you more and more. We also want to love our neighbors more and more. Please pour out your love and grace upon us. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Black History Month

Since coming to Gilroy United Methodist Church, I have learned awesome things, and I am still learning many things. Learning about Black History Month is one of them. In Gilroy, there is an Annual Black History Month Exhibit. This year will be the 6th one, and it will include some of Louise Shields' artwork. This coming Friday evening, we will watch the movie "Hidden Figures" to celebrate Black History Month. In the movie, the talents of 3 women scientists working for NASA are kept hidden. Next Sunday, we will enjoy our discovered figure--she is not hidden--our talented and loving guest speaker, Beverly Blount. Please come and see!

2. My African-American Brother

How do you observe Black History Month? I came to America in 2010 to study at Seminary. Actually, I was in the USA for my summer internship program in 2006 for college students, who were majoring in theology and church music. The college students experienced churches, seminaries, and various ministry settings. I met an African-American person for the first time.

His name was Flip, F-L-I-P. Flip, I owe you a big love. This message is one of my payments for your love.

I would like to share my story about African-Americans. Do not hesitate to judge me. It is okay to judge me. But please, please cover me in your love and grace. For about 45 days, I did my summer internship with my college friends. For about 30 days, I volunteered at Goodwill Rescue Mission in Newark, New Jersey. Goodwill Rescue Mission Center is a shelter for the homeless and drug addicts. They provide meals and shelter to the homeless, and provide residential recovery programs to drug users. With my two friends, we stayed there for about one month. We worshipped together and enjoyed Bible Study. We played ping pong and basketball. We cooked, served, and ate meals together. For Goodwill, we sorted tons of donations, and cleaned and organized them. There, I met Flip. He used to be one of the homeless and drug users. While recovering, he was taking job training programs and working for the center. So, he took care of us, the interns.

Let me say this again. Do not hesitate to judge me. It is okay to judge me. But please cover me in your love and grace. As you saw in the photos, most of the residents in the shelter were African-Americans. Before starting this internship program, I had received some education about fear toward Black people. One of the teachers advised us not to be surprised to feel the fear. Facing Black people was totally different from watching them in a Hollywood movie, or from reading a book about Martin Luther King. He shared his own experience of the fear from an unconscious level. He was not able to sit next to a Black person, even in a public place,

because he was afraid. At that time, I had not realized the power of this fear. I thought that I would be different, because I had a big love and compassion in my heart. The first time I was introduced to Flip, I was not able to shake hands for a couple of reasons. His handshakes were not regular ones, but special and intimate ones. Frankly speaking, I was afraid to touch him. Because I stayed for one month, Flip made handshakes with me at least once a day. Flip's love and care changed me. Sometimes, some bros in the shelter were surprised at my Asian-African hybrid handshakes. My fear slowly and steadily disappeared.

Even though I am a Korean, I feel fear toward African-Americans. Where does this fear come from? I thought that I had love in my heart toward every human being, regardless of skin color. But, it was not true. At the shelter, I discovered this fear in my body. Thankfully, I met this African-American Bro, Flip. Thanks to Flip, I was able to start fighting against this fear, and nurture my love for all people. I owe you, Flip.

3. Elevator in a Movie Theater

Let me say this one more time. It is okay to judge me. But please, please cover me in your grace and love. In 2014, about 6 years ago, Mihyun and I went to see a movie in a San Francisco movie theater. After watching the movie, we were on the way to the parking lot. There was an elevator in the movie theater parking lot. The elevator door opened. However, we hesitated to get into the elevator first. My foot did not move. My foot did not listen to me. Somehow, both this Korean couple and this African-American couple hesitated to get in. It was not waiting for the other couple to get in first. Even in the movie theater, I still had the fear,

based on skin color. The Black couple got into the elevator first, and we got in next. They were the icebreakers. They greeted us first, and asked what movie we had seen, and how it was. We started to talk to each other, even though it was for a very short time. But it was a warm enough exchange. After this elevator incident, I was shocked that I still felt the fear in my body toward Black people. And I was also so sad about what made the Black couple hesitate to get into the elevator first. I was thankful that they were gentle and warm in response to our awkward hesitation. I owe them a big love.

4. Owe No One Anything, Except To Love One Another.

As you see, I am not that good a person. My body does not listen to my heart. My body somehow still has the fear, based on the skin color. Probably, in some situations, the fear tries to come out and control my body and my heart. I am so sorry about this shameful fact. But can you cover me, like Flip or the Black couple whom I met in the elevator? Can I still give the message from the pulpit? In my heart, I want to love one another. I want to love my African-American sisters and brothers as myself. However, I still have this shameful fear in my body. Can I still be your pastor with this fear? Do not hesitate to judge me, but please please cover me in your love and grace. I owe you.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you create all people beautifully. However, our eyes and our bodies do not follow your love. Oh, Lord, please have mercy on us, in order to love our neighbors as you love us. We want to love more! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions.

1. How do you observe Black History Month?
2. Do you have your own stories, related to African-Americans?