

Sermon Title: **“For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere”**

Bible: **Psalm 84:1-12**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, August 16, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, we are hungry and we are thirsty for your presence. You gave us many artists and arts to experience your love and grace. And you gave us this beautiful sanctuary to remember you. Please help us to see you more and more during this time. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **1. Sanctuary, Tradition, and “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Rembrandt**

Our church buildings have been closed for about five months, since the shelter-in-place order was given. Today, I would like to do a virtual church tour of our sanctuary and some of our Christian arts. Our Methodists have four sources to do theology: Scripture, Experience, Tradition, and Reason. Like hymns and praises, the beauty of our sanctuary, stained glass windows, and arts can be part of Tradition. Through Christian art, we can think of and remember who our God is.

Before talking about Christian art, I need to say that I am not a specialist in Christian Art. But, I took a class in Christian Art at the seminary. In the class, the textbook was called, “Signs & Symbols in Christian Art,” by George Ferguson. Based on my learning and the book, I really enjoyed many Christian artworks, and I enjoy our Sanctuary a lot. I hope that today's message gives us the opportunity to look at our sanctuary and see some hidden meanings. Before I start the virtual church tour, I want to show a famous painting, “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Rembrandt. I saw this painting at our church member's house. In the Gospel of Luke, there was the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This painting describes the last moment of the parable: the return of the prodigal son to his father. The father embraces the son gently and tenderly. My

focus is on the hands of the father. When we look at the hands closely, the hands look different. One hand is big and tough, and the other hand is small and soft. One understanding for the hands is that God's love is like parents' love, not only the father's love, but also the mother's love. The love of the mother was hidden, but not absent. So, Rembrandt wanted to include the love of the mother, when he described the love of God. Likewise, I hope for us to discover the hidden meanings through the arts in our Sanctuary.

## 2. Virtual Church Tour

Are you ready for the virtual Church Tour? To give you a feeling of entering the church, I made this video from the church parking lot to the main church door, through the narthex, and into the Sanctuary. Let us start! (Video of Virtual Church Tour: from church parking lot to the sanctuary - <https://youtu.be/yqLd5-VN5E0>)

## 3. Meanings of Each Art in our Sanctuary

Now it is a time to look at the meaning of each art. There are three letters on the cross on the altar, the altar banners, and the pulpit scarf - **IHS (iota, eta, sigma)**. IHS are the first three letters of Ihsus, the name of Jesus in Greek. And we have a very **special cross** on the altar. It has Jesus' hands, a dove in the middle, and God's hand on the top, and our hands at the bottom, according to my understanding. This cross shows the Triune God and us together.

Above the altar, we have a symbol of the United Methodist Church and a stained glass window of Jesus Christ. **The symbol of the UMC** has a cross and a flame with dual tongues of fire. This symbol has been used since 1968, when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church became the United Methodist Church. It means our relationship to God

through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And Gilroy United Methodist Church added a **stained glass window of Jesus Christ** into the middle of the symbol of the UMC. Usually, many stained glass windows depict some stories of the Bible. Can you see the shape of the descending dove behind Jesus? When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended like a dove. So, I assume that this stained glass window describes the moment when we recognize Jesus as the Son of God. It is our faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

In our sanctuary, we have **6 hexagon lights**. In our Christian tradition, the number 6 has the meaning. For example, one means unity, two means the two natures of Jesus Christ, the human and the divine. So, we light two candles on the altar. Three means trinity, and twelve means 12 Apostles. How about six? Any ideas? God created heaven and earth in six days. The number of 6 means creation. It symbolizes divine power. When we sit on the pews, we are under divine power!

I believe that some of our church members know the real story or have their own stories of Christian Art in our church buildings, especially about **our floral windows**. When we meet together at Zoom Fellowship or later face-to-face, please let me know. Based on my research, I share the meanings of the four stained glass windows in the Sanctuary, which have flowers. **Iris** means Mary, Jesus' mother. There are two flowers for Mary, Jesus' mother in Christian Tradition: lily and iris. As the name 'iris' means 'sword lily,' the iris symbolizes the sorrow of Mary at the suffering of Jesus Christ. **Poppy** means fertility, sleep, and death. Sometimes, the red poppy means the Passion of Christ, because of its blood-red color and its meaning of sleep and death. **Red Geranium** means visitors coming, because according to the legends, the red

geranium would turn and point to visitors. Usually, **lilies** are the symbol of purity, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. So, when you see the paintings of Mary and the Angel Gabriel, you can see a lily in the paintings.

Traditionally, Gilroy United Methodist Church decorates our Sanctuary with flowers for two important seasons. The first one is Easter. We display **Easter lilies**. The white color symbolizes purity, hope, and a new life. Can you hear? Through the trumpet shape, Easter lilies shout out “Jesus is risen!!” For the season of Advent, we have **poinsettias**. The shape means the star of Bethlehem that led the wise men to Jesus. And the red color means the blood of Christ.

#### **4. How about Your Story of God?**

There are many meaningful traditions in our Christian history. There is a **quilt** in our fellowship hall. We have our arts and history in our lives. I hope that some of our church members can share the history of our artworks in our church buildings. What is your art, which is related to your faith journey? I believe that each of you has your own stories and experiences about God. What is your story? What is your memory? During this time, I hope for you to remember and discover God’s love and grace through your life.

#### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us the tradition of Christian Art. Thank you so much for giving us our beautiful church buildings. You walk with us in our lives as well. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.