

Sermon Title: **“United Methodists Stand Against Racism”**

Bible: **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, September 13, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for your grace and love. Even though we are weak, even though we are vulnerable, you sent your only Son to give us your love and grace. You have started your Kin-dom on the earth with love and justice. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

1. “Amazing Grace” & Slavery

Last Sunday, we learned about the backstory of the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace.” John Newton, who used to be the captain of some slave ships, composed its words in 1779.

Twenty-eight years later, the British Empire’s abolition of the African slave trade was approved, in 1807. “Amazing Grace” was an inspiration that came to life in the middle of a long story toward abolition. We were able to have a glimpse of the history of abolition in the British Empire. And I wonder, how about us?

2. Body of Christ

“We” means Gilroy United Methodist Church, which was established in 1853. We are 167 years young (old). I hope that you remember my retirement plan. As a retired pastor, I would like to be invited to Gilroy United Methodist Church (my first loving church)’s 200th anniversary in 2053. At the 200th anniversary, I might need to mention the year of 2020, which

has many challenges in many ways, but we care for each other, and get through it together, with God's love and grace. As we read today's Scripture, we are the Body of Christ. "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." We are one body with Christ. And this is the same to me, even when I look back at our history. I cannot be here without our faith ancestors. I want to look backward with gratitude. And I do not want to hide our mistakes and faults, but to cover them, because our faith ancestors are not others, but they are us as well, as we all have been one body of Christ. I do not want to say "I have no need of you." I want to say "I need you. I love you. We are one body of Christ." So, please keep this intention or this attitude in our minds during this message. Without love, it is nothing. Let me see. Even through YouTube, I can imagine your presence, and I feel your love and our love in God's grace and love.

3. Gilroy UMC History & Slavery

With love, let us look backward at our history. Gilroy United Methodist Church was established in 1853. But our name was different, and it used to be two churches. There were two churches, Methodist Episcopal Church South from 1853 to 1917 and Methodist Episcopal Church from 1857 to 1917. These two churches had a joint pastorate from 1917 to 1939, for 22 years. In 1939, these two churches became one church until 1968, which was called Gilroy Methodist Church. In 1968, finally, we became Gilroy United Methodist Church. Can you guess what made us two churches at first? What led us to become one church? Unfortunately, this is related to our church's history of slavery and racism.

When we look back to the whole United Methodist Church's history, we can have some hints. John Wesley is our founder of Methodism and he was well known for his opposition to slavery. In 1773, he wrote a pamphlet, "Thoughts Upon Slavery." He described slavery as evil, and called for slave traders and owners to repent and free their slaves. I am proud of having John Wesley as our founder. However, racism has been a systemic and personal problem in our church. At the 1840 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, James O. Andrew was elected bishop. This bishop owned slaves, even though we had the anti-slavery stance from John Wesley. At the following General Conference in 1844, the bishop's owning slaves was the big debate, and we could not reach an agreement. A plan of separation was adopted, and two years later, the Methodist Episcopal Church South was formed as a separate denomination in the states where slavery was legal. In 1939, these two Methodist denominations became one as Methodist Church, in five jurisdictions with a Central Jurisdiction. While white conferences were placed in five regional jurisdictions, Central Jurisdiction was a combination of nineteen black annual conferences, which was a racially segregated structure. This was kind of a compromise that the Methodist Episcopal Church South could agree upon. In 1968, this Central Jurisdiction was abolished, when we became the United Methodist Church, when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church became one. Because the Evangelical United Brethren Church was not segregated, it led us to abolish the segregated structure within us. In the 2000 General Conference, there was a service of repentance for racism, and in the 2004 General Conference, there was a service of appreciation of African Americans. We would not be here without those African American Methodists who stayed despite institutional racism.

Let us look back again at our Gilroy United Methodist Church's history. At the beginning, there were two churches, because there was a split, because of the 1840 and 1844 General Conferences, where there was a hotly contested debate on the issue of the bishop's owning slaves. In 1939, two churches became one as the Methodist Church; however, our black Methodist churches were in a racially segregated jurisdiction. After we became a United Methodist Church in 1968, we were able to worship, and serve the church and the world together with our African American sisters and brothers.

4. United Methodist Stand Against Racism

Racism is a sin, a systematic, systemic, and personal sin within the States, and in the United Methodist Church. So, United Methodists stand against racism. Thankfully, after I came to Gilroy United Methodist Church, I was able to celebrate Black History Month with you. I hope that we keep this meaningful tradition in our local church.

Have you heard of GCORR or GBCS? For disasters, like the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires, we have *UMCOR, United Methodist Committee on Relief*, which is the humanitarian relief and development arm of the United Methodist Church dedicated to alleviating human suffering around the world. Likewise, as a whole United Methodist Church, there are two agencies to dismantle racism today. **GCORR, General Commission on Religion and Race**, created in 1968, is an agency of The United Methodist Church, responsible for resourcing local congregations, annual conferences and denominational structures in areas of racial equity and inter-cultural competence. **GBCS, General Board of Church and Society** is dedicated to the work of living faith, seeking justice, and pursuing peace. The board is called to seek the

implementation of the Social Principles and other policy statements of the General Conference on Christian social concerns. In other words, GCORR is against racism within the church, and GBCS is against racism in our society.

5. We are one Body of Christ

We are all one Body of Jesus Christ. We need all of us. During this difficult time, let us remember that we are all one Body. This is our identity, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” As you see our history, it takes time. We could turn away. We could fail. But God’s love never fails. Let us love one another more and more!

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we are one body of Christ. We need all of us. As much as you love us, please lead us to love each other. Beyond race, beyond language, beyond culture, your love and grace may be overflowing within us and through us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

References

- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-does-the-united-methodist-church-say-about-racism>
- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-responsibilities-for-eradication-of-racism>
- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community#racial-ethnic>
- <http://gcah.org/research/site-of-the-organization-of-the-methodist-episcopal-church-south>