

Sermon Title: **Talents? Nature? Nurture? Potential?**

Bible: **Matthew 25:14-30**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, November 15, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for what you have done through us. It is a tough year. But with you, we are here together. With your presence, we love each other, we care for each other, and we look forward together. In this time, please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. 2020 Annual Charge Conference

Last Sunday afternoon, we had the 2020 Annual Charge Conference virtually. Because of the time limitation, we just focused on the basic issues; membership report, 2021 pastoral compensation, and election of church leaders for 2021. I would like to mention that behind this annual conference, each committee leader was busy in preparing the reports to the church and the conference. All of these reports will be submitted to the District Superintendent and to the conference. Thank you so much for all of your time and effort! Let us give hands to our lay leaders!

2. Annual Celebration - What We Have Done

Because of many reports, we could be tired or bored of the annual conference. But to me, it is a celebration! It is the time to be thankful for what God has done through us and to hope what God will do through us. In our faith journey, sometimes, we need to stop and to check where we

are. We need some time to look backward with gratitude and to look forward with faith! The last part of the annual conference was Wesleyan House Meeting Questions. There are five questions.

1. What in your world has changed since your last regular annual church conference?
2. How have these changes affected your life and the life of your church?
3. What changes will your church have to make in order to respond to the changes in your community?
4. What will your leadership as a church and as individual disciples of Jesus need to look like going forth for you to continue your work of disciple-making for the transformation of the world?
5. What in your church's history of faith commitment can be a help to you and to the world in the days and years to come?

We do not make any decisions, but to me, just listening to our church members was meaningful. It is about who we are, our ministry and our outreach, not only to survive but also to thrive, even during this COVID-19. Yes, I dare to look forward with faith!

3. The Parable of the Talents - Nature Vs. Nurture Debate?

Today's scripture reading is the parable of the talents. One person has five talents, another person has two talents, and the other person has one talent. What makes people have different numbers of talents? Some people can make more talents with what they have, but some people do not make any talents, because they do not make any efforts. What image comes to you?

Have you heard of nature versus nurture debate? According to nature theory, our genes determine us. Probably, because of this, people have different talents; one person with five talents, another with two talents, and the other with one talent. According to nurture theory, the environment and life experiences determines us. Probably, because of this, those who had five talents and two talents can make five more talents and two more talents, while the one who had one talent cannot help but hide the only talent. What do you think of this nature versus nurture debate? My wife is one of the identical twins. They look similar, but they are different. I see both nature theory and nurture theory. But my focus is neither nature nor nurture.

4. Five Talents and Two Talents!

My focus is God's love and grace upon us. What makes us who we are? Genes makes us who we are? Environment makes us who we are? We cannot ignore those factors. But where is our living God, who makes us who we are? Where is our faith?

Our church has many talents. To care and pray for each other is five talents. We are so good at caring for each other. We are great at praying for each other. During the last weekend, when Mihyun had a car accident, Mihyun and I were so touched by your prayers and love. God might say to us, "Well done, Gilroy UMC, I will pour out more love and care upon you." To love our neighbors is two talents. We collected our offerings and sent them to many places during this COVID-19; the District immigrant church members, Navajo tribes, Heifer International, and Wildfire victims. And we are working on helping St. Joseph's Family Center more and during holidays. I believe that God might say to us, "Well done, Gilroy UMC, I will pour out my generosity upon you."

5. One Talent - Potential?

But what is our one talent? Where is our one talent? Is this one talent in the ground? We might be afraid and hide this one talent in the ground. I see this one talent as our potential.

According to Nature theory, my mother tongue is, according to Nurture theory, my first language is Korean. My second language is English. I do not want to say that English is my weakness, but one talent. As a pastor, English is not everything, but as a Korean pastor in the States, English is something important. I am not afraid of my one talent, my Korean accent English, because of you and God. Thanks to your listening ears, and thanks to God's calling to this church, I do not hide my one talent. It needs time and energy to take out my talent from the ground. But I am not afraid, because of your faith and my faith, and God's presence. I know that you are listening to me, beyond my Korean accent. It makes me a better preacher every Sunday. Through this message time, God is with us, God pours out God's love and grace, and God shows the way of life.

6. Can We Unfold Potential?

We shared about our church at the annual conference. Our church is good at loving and caring for each other. This is our five talents. We are good at serving our community. This is our two talents. But we might hide one talent in the ground. What is our church's one talent? How to meet new people, and how to grow church might be our one talent. Because we hide this talent in the ground for a while, I do not know where it is. I am sorry to say this, as a pastor, but I do not know where it is hidden. But I know that it is hidden. It needs time, energy, and discernment to seek and dig out this one talent. I believe that we have this one talent, how to meet new

people and how to grow our church together. That's because I am still looking forward to coming back to our church's 200th anniversary in 2053, as a retired pastor.

During this COVID-19, it is not easy to have this YouTube live-streaming worship. But we made it. Have you thought of this live-streaming worship before? Have you thought of zoom small groups and zoom meetings before? We thought online gathering was not ours. But we made it. We unfolded our potential to have online worship and online gatherings. Online gathering is our one hidden talent.

I am looking for another hidden talent - how to meet new people and how to grow our church together. When the suffering comes to us, we often say "Why me?" But God's answer might be "why not?" How about the blessing? How about this one talent? What about this opportunity to unfold our potential? Do you want to say "Why us?" "Why us, to grow this church?" And God might say to us "Why not?"

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us many talents. We are thankful for your talents and the opportunities of ministry and outreach. And we are thankful for one hidden talents. Because of you, we are not afraid. Please guide us with your courage, your vision, and your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.