

Sermon Title: **“For the sake of the gospel”**

Bible: **1 Corinthians 9:16-23**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on Sunday, February 7, 2021

Audience: about 30 YouTube Viewers

## **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, in our faith journey, we are looking for your wisdom, your guidance, and your love, as we need you, and as we need each other. You called us not only as your children, but also as your body of Jesus Christ. Please be with my mouth in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **1. Situation of Corinthian Congregation**

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

This is from chapter 13 in 1st Corinthians. I believe that this is the most famous part from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. It looks like this church is an example of overflowing love. However, this is not true. This congregation has many difficulties and challenges.

When you read chapter 1, you see that there were divisions in the church: “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” (from 1 Corinthians 1:12). When you read chapter 12, you see that there are many spiritual gifts: the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. But what the Apostle focused on was one and the same Spirit and the same God. So, he described the church as one body of Christ. There are many members, but we are one body of Jesus

Christ. This does not mean that the spiritual gifts are not good or not necessary. But what he said from the last sentence of Chapter 12 is “But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:31) And in chapter 13, the Gift of Love, is followed; “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

## **2. How do we understand the Gospel?**

In this context, how do we understand today’s Scripture reading? Can we understand what Paul said? Even though he was free, he decided to be a slave to all, for the sake of the gospel. What he did was to serve one another. I cannot be a child. But I can play with children. I do not want to be homeless. But I can feed the homeless, and listen to them, and change the system to end homelessness. I cannot live without kimchi. But I can enjoy many American, Italian, Mexican, Peruvian, and Palenstinian foods. I cannot become another race. But I can learn about others’ histories and cultures. To me, it is all because of the Gospel.

How do we understand the Gospel? To me, Gospel is not only for my own salvation. Of course, Jesus Christ came to the earth, to be with us, and died on the cross, in order to save us. But the Gospel does not stop there. The Gospel also means that we are one body of Jesus Christ, we are a faith community, even though we are all different. We are not alone. We are together. We are not isolated. We are connected and we are in mutual or multiple relationships. This is a sacred or unavoidable truth.

## **3. Individualism is destructive.**

Today, we will have communion. When we take the bread and drink from the cup, we participate in the body of Jesus Christ. I hope for us to remember that we are one with Jesus Christ, and we are one with each other.

I will close my sermon with a poem. I learned many resources from my last continuing education course. [Enfleshed.com](http://enfleshed.com) is one of them. There, I found this poem. The name of the poem is "Individualism is destructive."

Individualism is destructive.  
Send greed and selfishness away.  
That learned refusal to acknowledge  
your own need for help -  
let it be gone as well.

When possible,  
counter all impulses towards privatized survival  
with acts of love - collective and expansive -  
with caring for others and accepting care.

Remember we need each other.  
Remember the needs of your neighbors (literal and metaphorical).  
Remember the vulnerable.  
Remember, we are in this together, even when we don't act like it.

People depend on your choices -  
you depend on the choices of others.

This, a Sacred and terrible truth woven into our flesh.

So let this time be an opening  
to all the sources of connection we have lost in this era of  
pushing-down,  
pushing-through,  
pushing-away,  
and pushing-the-pace.

Let all that is soft, all that is slow, all that is gentle,  
all that is kind, all that is care-ful,  
be welcome home in each of us.

We have such creative, powerful, generous and brave capacities within us.  
We can choose to do things differently.

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, we are one in your love and grace. We are one in the body of Jesus Christ. We are one with each other. Please lead us to serve one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.