

Sermon Title: **“If any want to become my followers”**

Bible: **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 & Mark 8:31-38**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the second Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2021

Audience: about 30 YouTube Viewers

Opening Prayer

O Lord, you came to us first. You loved us first. You became our God first. We come to you as who we are. Please guide us to be your people. Please lead us to follow you. You are our God. We are your people. Please be with my lips and mouth in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Ice Breaker - This or That

Have you done any ice breakers? Let me start with “This or That.” You have two options. Which one do you prefer? You can type your choice in the YouTube live-chat now, or you can leave comments after this YouTube Worship. *Dog - Cat*. Some people like a dog best. Some people like a cat. Some people like both. But this time, please choose just one. When I was a middle school student, my family used to have a dog, a chihuahua. I miss him. So, I chose a dog. *Morning - Evening*. Are you a morning person or an evening person? I need tea or coffee in the morning to wake me up. And I like to see the sky at night. So, I chose evening. *Email - Text*. It depends on each situation. But we need to choose one. Because email gives more time to think and write, I like email. *Prevention - Vaccine*. I heard that several church members received vaccinations. Other than COVID-19, which one do you prefer, prevention or vaccine? Because I am afraid of shots with needles, I will choose prevention.

What are your choices? I hope that at the zoom fellowship, we can share which one we chose and why. In our life journey, we need to make many decisions. Some decisions are simple and

fun, like what we just did, This or That. Some decisions are complex and not easy. Our values, personalities, goals, and situations are all different. Sometimes we cannot tell which decision is right or wrong, or good or better. But I can tell you that you made a wonderful decision to be here, because we worship together this beautiful day.

2. Before Today's Scriptures

Today's Scriptures came from the lectionary for the second Sunday in Lent. It would be better for us to know the stories that came before these scriptures. Right before Mark 8:31, there was a conversation between Peter and Jesus. In Mark 8:29, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Many people did not know who Jesus was. They regarded Jesus as John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. However, among many disciples, Peter answered that Jesus is the Messiah, which literally means "anointed one" in Hebrew. This was a right and excellent answer, because Jesus is the Christ, our Savior, the Son of God. Then, in today's Gospel of Mark reading, Jesus began to teach about his suffering, death, and resurrection. However, Peter did not understand these. To Peter, the Savior should not endure any suffering, rejection, betrayals, or even death. Peter could not understand the paradox or the mystery of God's love and God's way, even though Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus rebuked Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Today's Genesis reading started when Abram was ninety-nine years old. Actually, God had appeared to Abram before, when Abram was seventy-five years old in Genesis 12. God called and blessed Abram and his family. God promised to him, a blessing, a great name, and a great

nation (Genesis 12:2). Then, twenty-four years went by. Almighty God made a covenant. Abram became Abraham, and Sarai became Sarah. This was a big identity change. In the Old Testament, names are very important, because they show the character or destiny of people. In my imagination, it could be like changing the family name in the States, when a woman gets married. Some people fall in love at first sight and get married. But generally speaking, it takes time, energy, and patience for a couple to know each other and to be ready to become a new family. And then, the couple can say “I do,” and have the same family name. To me, changing the names in the Old Testament feels like being an ordained pastor. I know that God has called me and I trust God’s calling. But this does not mean that I can be an ordained pastor right away. It takes time to discern, learn, grow, and be fruitful.

3. God or god?

We are on our own faith journey. I believe that even atheists have faith. To them, “the absence of deity” could be their faith and belief. How about our faith journey? Who is our God? Do we trust God or make a small god? Do we want to see God, who is silent or hidden in suffering and on the cross? Or simply do we make a small god, the kind whom we want or expect? When we encounter God’s self-revelation, are we ready to accept it? Instead, like Paul, do we want to reject and rebuke, because God is not what we expect? To accept God wholly might take many, many years, like the case of Abram and Sarai. There are many challenges and unknowns, because of the effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on all, because of another postponement of the 2020 General Conference in our United Methodist Church, and because of our personal problems. But please remember that God is with us on our faith journey. Let us examine for

ourselves which deity we follow! Do we want to follow the small god we make? Or do we want to follow the God who reveals God-self, even in suffering or challenges? What do we want? If we want to become Jesus' followers, let us deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus.

4. Ice Breaker and Self-Denial

I will close my message with another This or That ice-breaker. Sometimes, we are like ice, which is cold and stiff. Which one do you want to choose? *Faith - Certainty*. Because of COVID-19, we really want to have certainty. We want to know when we can travel, when we can meet each other, when we can meet at the church. But we know that faith is not certainty. *Hope - Optimism*. Everything is going to turn out well. But we know that hope is not optimism. *Love - Painless*. Have you loved someone very much? Then, we know that love is not painless. *Cross - Crown*. We celebrate this Lord's day as a little Easter. Surely, there is a victory and the resurrection. But, we know that with no cross, there is no crown. During this season of Lent, what is your ice-breaker? Can we break the ice in us? Can we melt the ice in us? Can we deny ourselves?

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we want to follow you. You showed us your way to follow you. Please help us to deny ourselves, and take up our cross. Please be with us in our faith journey. In Jesus' name. Amen.