

Sermon Title: **“Not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved”**

Bible: **Numbers 21:4-9 & John 3:14-21**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2021

Audience: about 30 YouTube Viewers

Opening Prayer

O Lord, during this season of Lent, we remember the reason why you sent the Son of God to the world. You love not only us but also the world. Please guide us to see your love and grace, and your way. Please be with my lips and mouth in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. My Faith Journey & Questions

Are you Christians? What made you become a Christian? If you continue to be Christians, have you asked any questions about salvation? Today's message is somewhat about my personal faith journey, and my own answers. This is neither THE truth nor THE answer. But I hope that you have time to think about your faith. If you have similar questions as I had, you might be able to glean some ideas.

Today's Scripture Readings come from the lectionary for the fourth Sunday in Lent. John 3:16 was the first Bible verse that I memorized at Sunday school. I memorized this Bible verse with a song in Korean. *(Sing a song)* “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

2. Because of Judgement or Punishment?

What made you become a Christian? I used to believe in Jesus in order to not perish. I used to believe in Jesus out of fear of judgement or punishment. I used to think if I did not go to church

on Sunday, God might give me something bad or cause a car accident. I had to go to church because of the fear. Like escaping out of Egypt, like escaping slavery, my poor but powerful faith had worked very effectively. I looked like a sincere Christian, because I went to church, read the Bible, and was kind to others. Occasionally, when bad things happened, I used to interpret them as God's judgement or punishment. "That's because I did not go to church last Sunday." "That's because I did not read the Bible yesterday." Oh poor Hwapyoung, I used to be like that. I looked okay on the outside, but I was experiencing neither joy nor life. Like the Israelite people, I might have escaped out of Egypt; I might have escaped from fear, but I might be out in the wilderness and complaining about it.

3. God's Grace & Love

What made you become Christian? If we believe in God, out of fear, judgement, or punishment, how can we understand Jesus on the cross? Was the cross for God's punishment of Jesus on behalf of us? If there were no sacrifices, does it mean that God would not forgive us? Does God need a scapegoat to save someone else? It sounds very logical. But, do you believe in this God? Then, where is God's love and grace? Where is God's unconditional love?

4. God sent Jesus to save us!

God became a human. God sent the Son of God, God-self to us. Jesus is God, the Christ, our Savior. Our God, Jesus, was on the cross, because Jesus Christ wanted to suffer with us. He wants to be with us, even in our suffering, and heals us, and saves us. We confess that Jesus is the Christ, and we are Christians.

When I was in Sunday school, I learned two big statements: 1. If you believe in Jesus, you will go to heaven. 2. If you do not believe in Jesus, you will go to hell. I think that only the first statement is true, and I believe the first statement only. As we confess with the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will will be done on earth as it is in heaven," when we believe in Jesus, and the joy and life of God's kingdom is here and now. We do not need to wait for the afterlife. But I do not think that the second statement is a message from God. Because it is based on our fear, I think that it is the wrong concept of God's judgement and punishment. We have God's unconditional love and grace. In the United Methodist Church, we learn about prevenient grace or welcoming grace. God is calling us, even before we know it. God is inviting us, and waiting for us, because God loves us, because God wants to go on a journey with us. That's why God sent the Son of God. That's why God became a human. God wants to be with us and to live with us.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, sometimes, we cannot understand your love. Sometimes, we misunderstand your unconditional love. But you still love us, and wait for us. Please guide us to be close to you, not with fear, but with joy and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.