

Sermon Title: **Built Together**

Bible: **Ephesians 2:11-22 (NRSV & CEB)**

When: on Sunday, July 18th, 2021

Where: about 30 people (including YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC & about 40 people (including Facebook Live viewers) at Hollister UMC

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for sending us Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our cornerstone. He is our peace and hope. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Jesus Christ is Our Peace.

My name is Hwapyoung. It comes from “Peacemaker” in the Korean Bible. Fortunately or unfortunately, it is my destiny to meditate on peace and to be a peacemaker. How or where do we feel peace? If we go to the beach or the mountains, we might feel peace. Silence can be peaceful. Birds singing can be peaceful. Beautiful music can be peaceful. Anything else in your mind?

But, today’s scripture reading from the lectionary describes Jesus Christ as our peace. Our Lord, our peace, might not be what we expect. The peace here is not kind, not gentle, not passive. Somewhat, it is very active, somewhat aggressive, and challenging. Jesus is our peace. He makes us one. Jesus is our peace. He breaks down the walls and the barriers between us. Jesus is our peace. He abolishes or cancels any laws or any rules that divide us. No more hostility is in us, when Jesus is our peace.

2. Boundaries Vs. Walls

Please do not misunderstand our peace as breaking boundaries. I distinguish boundaries from walls. We need boundaries, healthy boundaries. For example, when the homeless slept in our church building, I asked the homeless to leave. Of course, I really support homeless ministries. But, it is an issue of boundaries, not walls. So, I asked the homeless to leave. As a pastor, I want to and need to provide safe places for our church.

But if I hear that because I am an Asian, I should leave this country, I will say that is a wall. That wall should be broken down and would be broken down. I have not experienced this wall yet. But I learned that many of my Asian friends have experienced this wall of racism, in their normal lives. When they were in line at the grocery store, the wall of “Go back to your country” was there. To break down this wall is our peace, like our Jesus Christ broke down the wall of hatred.

3. Unity Vs. Sameness

Thanks to our Jesus Christ, we become one. It is not sameness. It is a unity. I still love to eat kimchi and a lot of Korean food. I also like to eat hamburgers, pizza, and spaghetti. But I cannot live without kimchi. English is my second language. I practice and study English, because I really want to communicate with you. Let me try this tongue twister, “How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?” Korean is my first language. I do not want to forget or give up my mother tongue, Korean. I do not expect you to talk to me in Korean, but I want you to remember or practice my Korean name, Hwapyoung. And I would like to say this. Who makes a great speaker? Great listeners. You are already great listeners,

listening beyond my accent. So, I believe that I am closer and closer to becoming a great speaker Sunday by Sunday. I think that preaching is not done by my own work only, but is possible through the work of all of us. Without church, the pastor cannot exist. Without a congregation, a preacher cannot exist. When you listen, and when I speak, we become one beyond the language barriers in this time of the message.

4. Open Itineracy

When I had a SPRC - Staff Parish Relations Committee - training, I learned that a few churches would request to have this pastor for their churches: a male, white, married pastor, with three kids. And I was surprised that it was not a joke, even in our United Methodist Church. What do you think of this? It is a wall or a barrier. Our Jesus Christ will break it down with us and through us. In the United Methodist Church, we have the idea of open itineracy. This means that appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, or age, except for the provisions of mandatory retirement.

Because of this concept, I am here. Because our peace is not to keep the status quo, but to challenge the status quo.

5. Build Together!

I need to confess. I have walls in my mind. I am not white. English is my second language. I do not have children (yet). One day, I doubted myself. I could not be a pastor in the States. I could not serve the American churches. I put myself in the walls. But, I am here as a pastor in a foreign country. Thanks to our Jesus Christ, our peace to break down the walls, thanks to the church who builds each other, I am here. You might have some walls in your mind. You might

experience barriers in your normal life. But we are the church, which was built by the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. Can we break down the walls? Can we build our church together? Can we be peacemakers?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to break down the barriers and the walls. O Lord, please be with us, and guide us to follow the way of Jesus Christ's peace. Please lead us to become one in you. Please use us for this church to be built together. In Jesus' name. Amen.