

Sermon Title: **“Like Trees”**

Bible: **Psalm 1 & Mark 9:30-37 (NRSV)**

When: on Sunday, September 19th, 2021

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, our delight is in the law of the Lord. Please guide us to follow your way and your love. 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. Two Silences**

Today’s Gospel reading of Mark comes from the lectionary. There were two conversations between Jesus and his disciples. And we can find two silent moments. When Jesus shared his coming suffering, death, and resurrection, the disciples could not understand what that meant. Because of this unknown, they were afraid to ask more questions. Suffering and death were not the reasons why they followed Jesus. When we face suffering and death, fear is our natural response. Many times, fear makes us silent. There was another silence, when they had a shameful moment. The Disciples argued about who was the greatest, who was first, and who was last. They did argue with one another, but they could not share what it was with Jesus. So, they were silent. Sometimes, in our faith journey, we are silent, because of fear and because of shame.

### **2. Unknown and Fear**

How old were you when you got your first driver’s license? Do you remember the moment of your driving test? Were you afraid? Were you nervous? I have two driver’s licenses: a Korean driver’s license, and a California driver’s license. I still remember my behind-the-wheel driving

test in California. When it comes to traffic rules, there are some differences. For example, in Korea, there are no stop signs. South Korea is about 4 times smaller than California. Rather than stop signs, there are traffic signals at almost every intersection. The Korea DMV provides their own vehicles for the test drive. For the California test, I needed to borrow my friend's vehicle. I was very nervous about the California driving test. What if there is an accident with my friend's car? What if I cannot understand the English? What if I miss a stop sign? When I took the driving test, I was like a robot. When my DMV examiner told me what I needed to do, I repeated it. "Start." "Yes, sir. Start." "Turn left." "Yes, sir. Turn left." "Stop there." "Yes, sir. Stop there." Finally, she told me not to repeat what she said. "You do not need to repeat." "Yes, sir. I do not..." I barely stopped repeating. The unknown and fear sometimes come together and make us act differently. Now I really enjoy driving here and there. I can listen to music while I am driving. I can enjoy the beautiful scenery and sky while I am driving. I can talk and communicate with my passengers, not repeat like a robot. In the 11 years after I got the California driver's license, I received two tickets: one for not stopping and one speeding ticket. I had a car accident. I really want to avoid accidents and tickets, but I know that they are part of driving cars. Of course, I have my car insurance. I try to follow the traffic rules and drive safely. But I am not afraid of driving any more. And I wish not to have any tickets and car accidents.

When we start our faith journey, there are many unknowns, and maybe some fears. There can be some silent moments. Sometimes we cannot understand God. Sometimes, we cannot find God's presence. Sometimes we can have some tickets or some accidents in our faith journey.

But our faith journey still goes on, because our faith journey depends not only upon ourselves, but also upon God's grace, God's faithfulness, God's unfailing love, and God's unconditional love.

### **3. Shame**

How much do you remember when you were a baby? I remember when I was in kindergarten, I cried for many things. I cried for ice cream. I cried for toys for almost an hour. If I can exaggerate this situation, the whole shopping center was full of my crying: "Ice cream!" "This toy!" So, when my family went shopping, like at Walmart or Target, it was like a war. I was not a good child. But I cannot remember the moments when I wore diapers, thankfully. If I can remember when I wore diapers, maybe one of my feelings might be of shame. I do not want to share my privacy. But there was a time to ask for help in spite of my need for privacy. When I was in the seminary, I helped with the furniture fair. The seminary collects many items of furniture from the community, like sofas, tables, bookshelves, and household and kitchen utensils. Seminary students and families can get what they need for free. Delivering the furniture was one of my jobs. I delivered a lot of furniture. The next day after the furniture fair, I was not able to get up from the bed. I could not move at all. That's because I had serious back pain. I could not walk. Like a baby, I crawled, very very slowly. I could not change my clothes. I could not go to the bathroom by myself. When I needed to go to the bathroom, I needed to ask for help. I felt really ashamed. But I asked for help and showed my vulnerability. But thankfully,

my loved one embraced my vulnerability. I was able to get some treatment from acupuncture.

Now I can walk and sometimes, I can run.

In our faith journey, when we face our weakness and our vulnerability, we might feel shameful. But please remember that our God's love is unconditional. We are already God's loved ones. We are already God's children, God's babies. God will embrace our weakness, our vulnerability, and our shame.

#### **4. Like Trees planted by streams of water**

When I read Psalm 1, in my mind, a tree comes to me. It is not like a big, tall, straight tree. It is kind of small, not straight. But it might have many stories, many tears, many laughs, many bitternesses, and many sweets. Sometimes it is hard to see the streams of water, or rain for this tree. But I know that there is God who takes care of this tree. Surely, God is taking care of this tree. Like this tree, I believe that God is taking care of all of us, one by one. What is the law of the Lord? In my understanding, the law of the Lord is God's grace, God's faithfulness, God's unfailing and unconditional love to guide us toward God's way. There is our delight. Day and night, we are in God's love and grace.

#### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God, like trees planted by streams of water, we come to your grace. We come to your unfailing love, unconditional love. We come to you, because your grace is always welcoming us, inviting us, and embracing us, as who we are. We love you more and more. In Jesus' name. Amen.