

Sermon Title: **“Healing and Growing Faith Community”**

Bible: **1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 & Luke 2:41-52**

When: on the first Sunday after Christmas, December 26th, 2021

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

Opening Prayer

Emmanuel, you are with us. Please lead us to be healed, to be loved, and to grow. 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. Holy Family

Our little Lord Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph were there. The animals were there: cows, donkeys, and sheep. The angels and shepherds were there. More special guests, the wise men, were on the way. And there was God, Emmanuel, God with us. This was the first Christmas. Last Christmas, we were here together. We sang carols, lit candles, and shared our joys and sorrows. Like the holy family at the very first Christmas, we are the holy family here and now.

2. Readings about Church

While I was preparing today’s message, I found this reading, or litany, from the liturgy website, The Ministry Matters.¹ I would like to read and think about our church. Can you be reader number 1? I will be reader number 2.

¹ <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3445/worship-connection-december-26-2021>

Reader 1: I like going to church. It's the place where God is. It's the place where people are nice to each other. I like the music; the preaching; the worship; the fellowship, and even the coffee hour after church. I like church!

Reader 2: Are you nuts? Those people are only pretending to be nice to get in God's good graces. Just look at how they behave outside the church building. At work they lie, cheat and steal. They are abusive to each other and to the creation. They don't care about others, but only about what they can get for themselves. I wouldn't set foot in church with those hypocrites!

Reader 1: Wow! I'm sorry you feel that way. My experience is a little different, I guess. I need to be in church, in the place where people gather. These people are not "holier than thou;" they struggle and fall short. But they keep on trying; they keep asking God to help them be better. And it's reflected in all that they do. In our worship, we know that God is with us, working with imperfect people; helping us to grow. We know that God continually forgives those who sincerely seek forgiveness and who want to be better people. Here, we are trying to live as God would have us live. Sometimes we do it better than at other times.

Reader 2: Yeah, but what about how these folks live outside the church? How are they any different from the rest of us? Don't they fail? Don't they fear and do some things wrong?

Reader 1: Of course, we fail, we fear, and we do some things wrong. The church isn't a hotel for saints you know. It's more like a hospital for "sinners", people who know that they stand

in continual need of God's love and forgiveness. It is here that we again learn how to live out our faith a little better. What is it that you are looking for?

Reader 2: I don't know. I guess that I thought the church should be a place where people were perfect; where they didn't fear or fail; where they understood all that God wants from the people. I was looking more at people in judgment; than at God in love. I need to rethink this. Church and worship are like "refueling stations"? I mean, it's where people can go to receive hope and forgiveness; and get ready for the time ahead, right?

Reader 1: I think you're on the right track. It's an opportunity for each of us to be present to each other in forgiveness, love, and peace; to learn the great lessons of Jesus which will help us to be people of hope in this world. It's a growing place; a forgiving place; a love-your-neighbor place; a place of hope and encouragement. At least, that's what it is for me. And I love coming to church!

3. Healing and Growing

Today's scripture readings are about two boys, Samuel and Jesus. I can see that there was love, healing, and growth. What does the church look like to you? And how do you experience our church? Is there healing? Is there growth? I do not think that our church is the perfect place. I am so sorry, but it is true. We are not perfect. But I can say that our church has God's love and grace. Because we are not perfect, we need God, who is love. We come to the Lord day by day. Then, we can be healed, we can be loved, we can be forgiven. And we can grow. That's why I still have a hope for our church. How about you? Do you see hope in

our church? Or at least, can you see God in our church, who is healing, raising, and loving?

Can you see God?

Closing Prayer

Emmanuel, God with us. Even though we are neither perfect nor holy, because we are neither holy nor perfect, we come to you. We ask for your presence in love and grace. Please come and be with us. In Jesus' name. Amen