

Sermon Title: **“By Water and the Spirit”**

Bible: **John 1:29-42**

When: on Sunday, January 15th, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, may your holy presence be with all of us in every moment of our faith journey. Your grace welcomes us, leads us, and transforms us. 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. Water?!

During this unusual time of storm and flood, it might feel challenging to talk about water and Baptism. Water itself can be very risky and dangerous. Last week, Highway 101, from Gilroy to Hollister, was closed because of the flood. And many people in California are still struggling with storms and floods. We know that we need water to live, and that nature needs rain in order to sustain life. But sometimes water reminds us of its uncontrolled and unavoidable power through storms and floods. When I was young, my family and relatives went on a picnic to a river during the hot summer. It was a great joy to enjoy the cool water. But I forgot how tall I was at that time. I was not as tall as my older cousins. I did not know how to swim, but I followed my older cousins into the water to play with them. My feet could not touch the bottom. I almost drowned. Now I know how to swim, but I prefer swimming in

a pool, not in a river or in the sea. Water can be fearful and dangerous. But we need water to live. We need to know the power of water and how to deal with water!

2. By Water and the Spirit

Today's message of "By Water and the Spirit" is about how we, the United Methodist Church, understand and practice Baptism. This message is based on the book "By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry." This book includes the full text of "By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism," adopted by the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. I will ask some questions. Is it true that United Methodists do not care about standards? Are we a church in which people can believe and do whatever they wish? Should we be such a church? You can have your own understanding about Baptism. As the United Methodist Church, we have our own understanding and practice about Baptism. Among many understandings and practices of Baptism from this book, I would like to focus on two.

3. God's Steadfast and Unfailing Love

We believe that God's love is steadfast and unfailing. Because of this belief, we do not re-baptize. We believe that there is one Baptism, and the power of the Spirit in Baptism does not depend on how we use water, the baptized person's age or maturity, or the minister who performs it. It is God's grace that makes the Sacrament of Baptism whole. We have three choices of how to baptize: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. We do infant or young child baptism. The minister who performed baptism could make a mistake or might not be the best

one. As your pastor, I hope to be the best one for you. But, I cannot measure up to our Lord Jesus Christ. Like the story of John the Baptist and his two disciples in today's message, the main reason why I am your pastor is to guide you to Jesus Christ, not to me. I am thankful and blessed that you know me, and I know you. But if you know me only, and if you do not know our Lord Jesus Christ, it is a very sad and heartbreaking situation. I hope for you to know and experience our Lord through me. It is totally fine to forget me. But please do not forget God's love and God's holy presence with each one of you. In our faith journey, we might doubt. We might be lost. We might be broken and hurt even by the church. But what is most important is God's steadfast and unfailing love and grace! So, we do not re-baptize. We remember our baptism. Sometimes, we forget that God's grace and love is always and everywhere for us.

4. Into the Body of Jesus Christ

We believe that Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incarnation into the Body of Christ. What or who is the body of Christ? It is the church, the congregation, all of us. So, Baptism is not a private event, but a public and communal rite of the whole church. It requires the participation of the gathered, worshiping congregation. Baptism is not only the celebration of the baptized person, but also the whole congregation's celebration. That's why we try to hold baptisms during our regular worship services. The sacrament of Baptism also reminds us of our own baptism, our commitment, and our mutual responsibility, as the Body of Jesus Christ. I would like to share paragraph 219 in the Book of Disciple, which explains

our mutual responsibility: “Mutual Responsibility—Faithful discipleship includes the obligation to participate in the corporate life of the congregation with fellow members of the body of Christ. A member is bound in sacred covenant to shoulder the burdens, share the risks, and celebrate the joys of fellow members.” Being a part of the Body of Christ means to shoulder the burdens, share the risks, and celebrate the joys of fellow members.

I would like to close my message with “THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT IV. Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant.” Through our two sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion, please remember God’s steadfast and unfailing grace toward us, every moment, even when we are lost and even when we are afraid. And let us remember that we are not alone, we are the one in Christ as the Body of Christ.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT IV.

Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant.