

Sermon Title: **“Follow Jesus through Gilroy UMC”**

Bible: **1 Corinthians 1:10-18 & Matthew 4:12-23**

When: on Sunday, January 22, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we love you. As you gave us this church, we love this church as both my church and our church. 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. Do You Love?

Singing: “Deep deep down in my heart. Deep down in my heart. Deep Deep down in my heart. Deep down in my heart. Do you love my Jesus?” I will ask you again: Do you love Jesus? How do you know that you love Jesus? Can you feel something deep down in your heart? God’s love and grace towards you as you are? And your love back to our Lord? How about the church? Do you love the church? Do you love this church as your church? Do you love this church as our church? How do you know that you love this church? Unfortunately, when my heart was broken by the church, I was able to feel how much I love the church. Sometimes, when my body was aching, I felt my love toward the church. This happened to the Apostle Paul when he wrote a letter to the Corinthian church.

2. Corinthian Church

As we read today’s scripture, we learn that there were divisions in the Corinthian church.

That's because the Corinthian church members focused on who had baptized them. Each church member said things like this: "I belong to Paul" because he baptized me; "I belong to Apollos" because he baptized me; "I belong to Cephas" because he baptized me. Rather than remembering their baptism and being thankful for God's steadfast and unfailing love and grace, the Corinthian church members caused division in the church, according to who baptized them. Because of this division, the Apostle Paul worded his response like this: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel." Very very sadly, baptism was used not as a means of grace, but as a means of division. Paul even said it like this, "I thank God that I baptized none except two people." Where was the joy of baptism? Where was the gratitude for God's grace and love?

2. The United Methodist Church

As you might hear and know, our church, our denomination, the United Methodist Church, is going through another difficult time. That's because of the different perspectives of ordination and marriage related to sexual orientation. Some churches have disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church, while many churches, including our church, committed to remain a part of the UMC. Our church has gotten through many difficult times. One of them was due to the different perspectives on slavery. Actually, it led us to be divided into two denominations for a long time in the past. When we became the United Methodist Church in 1968, our church's formal segregation ended. We have confessed our sin of slavery. Even though we still witness and experience racism, even in our church, our church stands against

racism. Thanks to this legacy, as a Korean, I was sent to this church as your pastor. There are many pastors who are serving the church in Cross Racial and Cross Cultural appointments. And you are a great church to welcome and accept me as your pastor. Without you, I cannot be a pastor.

I believe that some of you have met a number of female pastors in the UMC. Sometimes, I have heard of some stories of sexism against female pastors. But thanks to our female pastors' presence, we are getting through this difficulty. They are not alone. Some of them have met this awesome church. Our church has had two female pastors appointed here and another one who served in ministry here, Gretchen Vandenberg. We have had a number of female pastor guest speakers as well. Thanks to your presence, our church and our denomination can stand against sexism in our real church life!

Now we are getting through another challenge. This will not be easy. We do not know how long it will take to get there. Our church will get through this together, step by step, and one by one. That's because we do not rely on our own wisdom and thoughts, but on God's love and grace. Racism and sexism still exist. But we stand against racism and sexism here and now. Likewise, many challenges and homophobia are present. But you and I, we, are present here and now to face many challenges and to get through them.

3. Follow Jesus

In today's Gospel reading, when Jesus started his ministry, Jesus called his disciples. Jesus said, "Follow me!" When Jesus says to you, "Follow me," what is your answer? What is your

response? The fishermen left their nets and followed Jesus. They left their boats and their families, and followed Jesus. This does not mean that you need to quit your jobs. This does not mean that you need to come out of retirement and go back to work. This does not mean that you need to stay away from your family. This does not mean that all of you need to become pastors.

When Jesus calls us, can we leave what we thought before? Can you leave what you believed before? When we had female pastors, what were your thoughts? After you had female pastors, did your thoughts change? Did you face any bias against female pastors? How about me? Before you had me as your pastor, what were your thoughts about a Korean pastor? What are your thoughts now? When I first came to this church, I had a lot of biases and misunderstandings about American churches and even about myself. But slowly and steadily, I left them and followed Jesus. Every Sunday, and every day, I am so blessed and thankful to have you.

4. Becoming a member of Gilroy UMC

As our denomination is not perfect, our church is not perfect. I am so sorry. I cannot say that our church is perfect. But what I can say is that we follow Jesus, even though there are many biases, many misunderstandings, and many challenges like racism, sexism, and homophobia. We follow Jesus, because we are not perfect. We follow Jesus, because our love failed, but because God's love will remain steadfast. We follow Jesus together, because we need each other. Let us look at each other. We are the witness and the disciples of Jesus Christ. God's

love and grace will surround us and lead us! So, I am proud of being a part of this church. If you are members of this church, please remember that you are also the disciples of Jesus Christ. We follow Jesus! If you are not a member of this church, and if you are interested in becoming a member of this church, please contact me. There will be an upcoming announcement for a new member class. As Jesus loves you, we welcome you as you are. We want to follow Jesus together with you.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, sometimes we think that we are perfect. Sometimes we thought that our love and our wisdom would win. But we left our own thoughts and our own wisdom. We follow you, Lord. Please lead us into your love and grace. Amen.