

Sermon Title: **“Personal Piety and Social Holiness”**

Bible: **Micah 6:1-8 & Matthew 5:1-12**

When: on Sunday, January 29, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we come to you, as you call us and as you lead 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. Back from 2023 Gathering of Spiritual Leaders

Last week, from Tuesday to Thursday, I attended the 2023 Gathering of Spiritual Leaders. This was a kind of pastors’ annual retreat of the Cal-Nev Conference. It was the first in-person gathering after COVID-19. Our spiritual leaders are passionate and energetic even during this pandemic. And our church leaders, pastors, need time to rest, relax, recharge, and learn more. It was held in Asilomar. Have you been to Asilomar before? It is about an hour away by car. I did not know that this beautiful place, Asilomar, is not that far from where we live. So, did I have a great time to rest, relax, recharge, and learn more? Yes and No.

I came back from the retreat with a little exhausted body and with a grateful spirit for our tech team! I attended this retreat, and I helped with this gathering as a tech person! I did not have time to see the beautiful Pebble Beach or 17-Mile Drive. What I saw was screen and audio/video equipment. If we rent the equipment from the Asilomar Conference, and if we hire tech persons, it might cost as much as \$20,000 to \$30,000. It is way beyond our budget. So, our tech team decided to borrow the equipment from the churches. I borrowed some equipment from our church, too. As you might know, technically speaking, my membership

belongs to the Cal-Nev conference. Just like our tech team, I volunteered as a tech person for the retreat. It was not easy to set up the equipment for about 300 pastors in the big hall. It consumed my energy to stand by to provide tech support. I believe that most of the pastors came back from the gathering with refreshed souls, minds, and bodies. But I came back with an exhausted body. I also came back with a grateful heart! I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our tech team! Your support and presence is awesome! We all really appreciate you!

2. Personal Piety

Just as I attended the retreat, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus and the crowds went to a retreat on the mountain. I wonder if there was a mic for Jesus. In our image, Jesus' voice is soft and gentle, neither loud nor strong. Jesus might need our tech team. Anyway, today's scripture reading is known as the first part of "the Sermon on the Mount." It contains the expressions: "Blessed are..." How many "Blessed are..."? Nine. So, today's passage is called "nine beatitudes." Among nine beatitudes, which one do you like most? And which one do you want to avoid? I would like to share only two: the first one and the eighth one, because both have the same reward. The first one is "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The eighth one is "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Which one do you like better, if you can choose? The first one? Or the eighth one? Both are blessed, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Do you want to be poor in spirit? To be poor in spirit does not mean to be

poor literally. In Luke 6:20, it says “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” There is no “in spirit” in the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of Matthew, the phrases “Blessed are the poor” and “in spirit” are added. This is kind of soft and gentle. Do you want to be poor in spirit? Or do you want to be persecuted? Both have the kingdom of heaven. Is there anyone who would choose both?

When I was raised in Korea as a Christian, my choice was the first one. Now Korea is one of the greatest countries, but Korea has a very sad and somehow shameful history. Korea went through military dictatorship for about 30 years in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. At that time, many Korean churches and Christians seemed to only choose the first one. With poor hearts in the spirit, we prayed a lot, while closing our eyes and ears to society and the world. “Do not protest, but pray” was the teaching of many Korean churches, even though many people were persecuted for righteousness’ sake during the military dictatorship. Many churches ignored our social responsibilities, and focused only on individual and inner spirituality. I cannot blame my fellow Korean churches and my fellow Korean Christians, because I am also afraid of being persecuted, and losing my family and my life. But I met some Korean pastors who made the confession of how they did not hear the cry of the needy, and did not hear the call for justice! I am still afraid of the situation in the eighth beatitude. But I do not want to close my eyes and ears to the world. When God’s love and grace, and God’s justice is overflowing through me, I hope to follow it! I hope this will be joyful obedience.

3. Social Holiness

According to our founder, John Wesley, there is no religion, but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth, they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world. Our church exists not only for ourselves but also for the world. Our ultimate purpose is to serve the world. Of course, our Lord loves our prayers and answers them. Our church needs our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. But these are not all. As we read the prophet of Micah, to do actions is also what God wants us to do: To do justice; to love kindness; to walk humbly with our God.

4. Two Wings

Prayer in spirit and in body. Prayer and Action. Personal Piety and Social Holiness. These are our two wings for our faith journey. It is not either, but both. I hope that this church gives you and me blessings; meaning and joys. And I hope that our church gives this community blessings: more justice and more kindness. That's because we are all children of God who walk humbly with our Lord.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we are all your people, and your children. Please pour out your love and grace upon us, as we are loved ones. Please guide us with your justice and kindness to serve this community and the world. We want to see you when we walk humbly. Amen.