

Sermon Title: **“Are You Blessed? Are You Saved?”**

Bible: **Genesis 12:1-4 & John 3:1-17**

When: on the Second Sunday in Lent, March 5, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, our Jesus Christ, we come to you as you are our blessing, and our salvation! Please guide us in your love and grace during this time! 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. John 3:16

Today’s Gospel reading in John is very famous! John 3:16 is probably the most famous Bible verse, which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Do you like this John 3:16 verse? I still love John 3:16. This led me to be a Christian, and still guides and inspires me to try to be a good and better Christian in my faith journey.

2. Questions About Salvation?

Have you had any questions about salvations in your faith journey? When I was young in Korea, I was taught that if you believe in Jesus, you will be saved, and that if you do not believe in Jesus, you will not be saved. The literal translation would be “If you believe in Jesus, you are going to heaven, but if not, you are going to hell.” Have you heard of this

slogan or this teaching? This slogan might have seemed powerful and when I was young, I accepted it as it was. But not any more. To me, this slogan is a kind of half-truth. I believe only the first part, but I do not believe that the second part is what the Bible teaches us. I believe only that if we believe in Jesus, we will be saved. But the first part does not make the second part right. If the second part is right, it is not consistent with John 3:16, and John 3:17. Does Jesus come to condemn us, or does Jesus come to save us? God sent Jesus; Jesus came to the earth, not to condemn, but to save! So, I do not believe the second part that says that if you do not believe in Jesus, you will not be saved. I assume that this second part came from our faith ancestors' and our own misunderstanding or hasty conclusion as to what the Bible is teaching us.

3. My Understanding About Salvation

One day, a pastor friend of mine let me know that she understood my theology of salvation as Progressive Christianity, even though I did not know what Progressive Christianity looked like. Probably, like open communion in the United Methodist Church, my theology of salvation can be understood as open salvation. I do not want to, and actually I cannot, limit God's overflowing grace to bless us, love us, and save us.

In this sense, I am still a Christian, who believes in Jesus, and follows Jesus! God sent Jesus Christ to bless us, to save us—not to curse us, not to condemn us. Jesus Christ is my salvation, my blessing, and my way of life. This does not mean that those who do not know Jesus and those who do not believe in Jesus are not saved, not blessed, and are cursed. Maybe, some

Christians might reach out to others because they believe they are not saved, not blessed, and are cursed. But I do not want to reach out to them in that way. Because God's grace is unconditional and overflowing, not only for me, but also for others, I would like to reach out to new people and to others. Can you tell the differences?

4. How to Read the Bible?

In our Christian history, sometimes our faith ancestors and our Christian forebears would use Jesus and the Bible to condemn and to curse others, especially non-believers. Do you really think that to condemn, to destroy, and to curse is the reason why Jesus Christ came? How do you interpret the Bible? The Bible is still our primary source for our Christian faith and life. The Bible is the source of all that is "necessary" and "sufficient" unto salvation. It is about salvation. Period. God did not bless Abram in order to curse others. God blessed Abram to become a blessing for others. It is about blessing. Period. I hope for us not to fall into the temptation to make a hasty conclusion or misunderstanding about blessings or salvation, especially when it comes to non-believers. In the same way, I hope for us not to fall into the temptation to forget or to lose the Bible. The Bible is still speaking to us about God's love and grace!! The Bible is a "salvation book," not a science book, a history book, or a book with guidance for specific forms of civil government. Yet it is still valuable for teaching us about the salvation offered by God's grace through Jesus Christ.

5. You Are Blessed, Saved, and Loved.

Our United Methodist Church's focus is grace. God loves all of us even before we know God. God's prevenient grace welcomes us and prepares us. When we encounter God, when we accept God, there is justifying grace, which leads us to our faith journey. We sing and confess amazing grace! Because we are weak and fragile, because we are on the way to perfection, God's sanctifying grace shapes us, molds us, and leads us to follow Jesus. We become better Christians day by day. We become better disciples of Jesus Christ day by day by God's grace.

You are loved by our Lord Jesus Christ. You are blessed by God's love. You are saved by God's grace. During this season of Lent, please remember that God loves you as you are. When we join Communion today, please take and eat God's love and grace to you! God's grace and Jesus Christ is a gift to you and me.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, humbly, we receive your love. With gratitude and joy, we receive your grace. You are our savior and our redeemer. In Jesus' name. Amen.