

Sermon Title: **“Conflicts and CALM”**

Bible: **Genesis 21:8-21 & Matthew 10:34-39**

When: on Sunday, June 25, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we come to you with our humble, heavy, and open hearts. 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. After the 175th Session of the Cal-Nev Annual Conference

Today’s message is about my pastoral reflections after the 175th session of the Cal-Nev Annual Conference, while reading the scriptures from today’s lectionary. The scriptures themselves are not that comfortable to read, even though sometimes we can face similar challenges and conflicts in our lives. In ancient times, a conflict arose in the family of Abraham. Abraham sent away Hagar and his firstborn son, Ishmael. Even though God intervened to give Abraham counsel, it was not a pleasant situation, and he might have had mixed feelings and felt stressed. We might expect that Jesus came to the earth to bring peace; however, in today’s Scripture reading of Matthew, Jesus came not to bring peace but a sword. Moreover, this sword was against families, not against outsiders. We want to be kind and peaceful with our close family members. But, Jesus’ teaching here was not about peace, but a sword. Can we take up this cross and follow Jesus?

Abraham, our first and great ancestor in the faith, faced conflict in his family. Somehow, or at least in today’s scripture reading, Jesus came to us, not just for peace, but for conflict. This

is not comfortable. Likewise, the 175th session of the Cal-NeV Annual Conference made a decision, which was uncomfortable and unavoidable, and which gave us mixed emotions. Of course, there were many grateful, joyful, and hopeful moments! But today's lectionary readings guided me to reflect and to share this message.

2. Disaffiliation in the United Methodist Church

As you might hear, while the Cal-NeV Annual Conference approved the recommendation for four local churches' closures, we also approved the recommendation for six local churches' disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. This process was taken according to the new paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline. This new and will-be expired on December 31, 2023 paragraph allows a local church to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church over issues related to human sexuality. As we are METHODISTS, we have methods and processes. The whole process was long; the discussions were hot and heartbreaking; the approval for the disaffiliation was not made lightly. This disaffiliation was not only in our annual conference, but also in the other annual conferences. I learned that in the United States, about 16% of local churches will be disaffiliated, and about 84% of churches will stay committed to the United Methodist Church.

As you might know, this kind of conflict related to human sexuality has not only been in our denomination, but also in other denominations such as the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the PCUSA - Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Even though

there has been a lot of pain and trauma, they went through these moments. We, the United Methodist Church, are still in the process and under construction.

At the Cal-Nev Annual Conference, a “Resolution on Supporting the Removal of Discriminatory Policies” was passed during the session. This resolution is for the Cal-Nev Annual Conference to support the removal of all discriminatory policies and harmful language related to sexual orientation. For example, it removes the language in the Book of Discipline, “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Hopefully, this resolution will be submitted for the next General Conference in 2024.

We welcome you as you are. We welcome all to our church and to the table of the Lord. But when it comes to the ordination and same-sex marriage, there has been harmful language used and the risk of punishment. So, Western Jurisdiction United Methodist bishops, including our bishop, have offered Safe Harbor since November 6, 2019, which intends to set aside complaints against clergy accused of being gay or performing LGBTQ+ weddings. In our ordination process of the Cal-Nev Annual Conference, there has been a kind of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, related to sexual orientation. The “Resolution on Supporting the Removal of Discriminatory Policies” will be another step towards full inclusiveness.

3. Past Conflicts in the United Methodist Church History

In our lives, we cannot avoid conflicts. Unfortunately, conflicts are part of our lives, and part of our church history. Thanks to the featured speaker at the session, Rebekah Simon-Peter, I learned that there have been many past conflicts in our denomination:

conflicts due to discrimination; conflicts over slavery in the United States; conflicts because of different theologies; conflicts surrounding the social gospel and polity, and more. Now we are facing the conflict about inclusion. Who is fully included in the life and ministry of the church?

Thankfully, there was not a big conflict or split against female pastors in our denomination's history. In June this year, I heard that the Southern Baptists expelled two churches, because they have female pastors. I know that there are many stories of challenges and sexism against female pastors even in our local churches. But we know and witness that God calls women to preach and lead the church.

Furthermore, there was no big conflict or split against foreign pastors in our denomination. We know and witness that God calls foreigners to preach and lead the church. I am here as your pastor. As I am reappointed to this church; I will serve you and this church one more year. Sometimes, my Korean accent and culture can be a challenge. But we are learning together through this Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural appointment. I pray and do my best in order that there will be more blessings and fruits. I am not a new pastor. I am an old pastor. But I still have the passion for this church!

Who has the authority or the power to call? God has! God calls us! We cannot dare to limit the authority and the power of God to call people. We are humble, we are thankful, and we are joyful for God's calling.

4. Take Up the Cross and Follow Jesus

The featured speaker at the annual conference session, Rebekah, shared what to do when we face conflicts. CALM: Calm yourself; Assess your automatic thoughts; Listen to what was said; Make a new choice. Some examples of automatic thoughts are “I need you to like me,” “I can use intimidation to win,” “If I admit a mistake, I’ll lose my credibility,” “You’re not in charge of me,” “If I make you mad, it could ruin our relationship.” These thoughts can come to us by themselves. It is not easy to assess these automatic thoughts, but it is possible when we calm ourselves. And eventually, we can make a new choice!

We cannot avoid conflicts, splits, and disaffiliation. There have been different theologies about inclusion. With a heavy heart, I shared that six churches in our annual conference and about 16% churches in our denomination would be disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church. Unfortunately, they did not have peace, but a sword. Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, could not be together. But as we read in Genesis, God cared for Ishmael and Hagar as well as Isaac and Sarah, beyond the conflict. God’s grace was there, unconditional grace.

After we approved the disaffiliation of six churches, we prayed and blessed each other. These are parts of the prayer: “**Board of Trustee Chair:** And there are seasons where out of deep discernment, we believe God is leading us to go in separate ways. We trust each other to provide an expression of the Christian church, worshiping and serving the one God. May we seek to faithfully follow Jesus in our respective ways. **All:** We bless one another in our faithful discernment and give thanks for the many ways each congregation here has served the mission given to it by Jesus Christ. We are grateful for the love and support we have

received from one another as we shared in our life together. We ask forgiveness of one another for the ways we have fallen short of who God has called us to be, and pray God's blessings for the sake of our common mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. **Bishop:** Eternal God, whose steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting, we give thanks for these congregations who now take their leave of the Cal-Nev Conference of the United Methodist Church and commend them to your care as they move in new directions. Keep us anchored in your love forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Very interestingly, after Jesus talked about there being a sword, not peace, in the family, probably in our church families, Jesus called us to take up the cross and follow him.. We might have mixed emotions here and there. But we have our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And our annual conference shared our visions: following Jesus, thriving in the community, and healing the world. Let us calm ourselves, and follow Jesus. Let us thrive in this community and heal the world. God is still calling us!

Closing Prayer

With humble and heavy heart, we come to you, Lord, as you call us to follow you. With your love and grace, please guide us to thrive in this community and heal the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.