

Sermon Title: **“Trust and Hospitality”**

Bible: **Genesis 22:1-14 & Matthew 10:40-42**

When: on Sunday, July 2, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we are so thankful and joyful to be called to serve this church and serve this community! Please be with us with your love and grace! 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. New Year & (Re)Appointment

Happy New Year! As a church community of the United Methodist Church, we celebrate New Year's, because July 1st is the beginning of a new year for the pastoral appointments made by the Bishop. Today is the first Sunday of this new year. We love something new! We love a new T-shirt. How about new shoes? We love new kitchens and new houses, right? How about new vehicles? Something new gives us fresh and happy feelings. How about a new pastor? Fortunately or unfortunately, I am not a new pastor anymore. I am an old pastor. It is my sixth year as a pastor of Gilroy UMC and my third year as a pastor of Hollister UMC. But I hope that my RE-appointment is good news to you all. If not, no worries, you just need to wait for another year, because all clergy appointments are fixed yearly! Even though I am an old pastor, I would like to say that I have a new passion and a new love for all of you, for this church, and for this community! I wonder how we can celebrate this new year? We have had a special ritual in previous years. Mihyun and I wore Korean traditional clothes— Hanbok—before. Hanbok is for special days like New Year's Day. Today, I wear this

new shirt to celebrate my new appointment with my wife, Mihyun, and to reflect my new heart. I hope that you also have a new heart and mind for this new year!

2. Trust

I believe that you might hear references to today's scripture reading of Genesis from time to time. God asked Abraham to give his son Isaac to him, whom he loved. Who was Isaac? Abraham and Sarah were waiting for their son Isaac for a long time. They were so happy to have Isaac because he was a child of promise from God. Surely, every day for Abraham and Sarah was a new day full of joy and smiles. But now, in today's scripture, God tested Abraham, and asked Abraham to offer his loved son Isaac as a burnt offering. This must have been a shock to Abraham and Sarah. In ancient times, some people sacrificed their children. But Isaac was the fulfillment of a promise of a child. To offer this child as a burnt offering could not be God speaking. But Abraham knew that it was God. Can you imagine how Abraham felt? I cannot imagine how Abraham felt when he cut the wood for the burnt offering. Within these lines, Sarah is not mentioned at all. What about Sarah's feelings? Sarah's absolute silence here represents her indescribable deep despair and sadness.

How about Isaac? Abraham heard God's voices and obeyed them. Abraham left his hometown when God told him to leave. Now, Abraham prepared the fire and the wood for the burnt offering, as God told him to do. Abraham heard God speaking. But how about Isaac? It was not Isaac who heard God's voice. It was Abraham. What do you think about how old Isaac was in this story? Many scholars believe that Isaac was in his mid-twenties in

this story. Isaac was neither a child nor a boy who could not think and act by himself. Isaac was an adult here, and Abraham was a very old man. Isaac could have resisted Abraham when Abraham bound Isaac and laid him on the altar to be a burnt offering. But Isaac did not. Even though Isaac had the power, he did not. I still cannot understand fully why God told Abraham to give Isaac as a burnt offering. God might have been able to test Abraham in another way. Why with his son Isaac? But, what we can see here is the trust between Abraham and Isaac as well as the trust between God and Abraham. Even though Isaac could not hear God's voice directly, Isaac trusted Abraham and followed him, even with a lot of questions. As Isaac trusted Abraham, Isaac gave up his own power and followed Abraham.

One of the unique characteristics in our denomination is the appointment system. Other churches in other denominations have their own ways of choosing pastors. Some churches choose the pastors by themselves and hire them. Likewise, some pastors choose the churches where they want to serve and apply for the positions. But in the United Methodist Church, pastors commit to the itinerancy. I also commit to this itinerancy. I will go and serve wherever our bishop sends me. I am not sure if our bishop hears God's real voice like Abraham. But I believe and I trust the Bishop's appointment as Isaac trusted Abraham, just like God's voice and God's calling. I trust God's calling to this church. I will serve you and this church with my whole heart for another year. Probably, I have a lot of questions again like Isaac asked questions of Abraham. But I am bound to this church and I am more than happy to serve you. How about you as a congregation? To be a United Methodist Church

member is not easy. You might need to give up the most important thing, your preferences about the pastors. During the SPRC training before, I heard that some United Methodist Churches expressed their wish to have a pastor who is a white male married pastor with three children. But unfortunately, you cannot choose your pastor. All you can do is to receive the pastors. Are you willing to receive the appointed pastors? Or is there any hesitation in welcoming the pastors? Many United Methodist Churches celebrate their anniversaries for more than 100 years. We celebrated our 170th anniversary, which was a great blessing that many other churches cannot reach. I believe that because we gave up our preferences about the churches and the pastors, the Lord provided this amazing church history. Every new year's day, I hope to reconfirm our commitment to the appointment system. I will go and serve anywhere and anytime!

3. Hospitality

Our commitment to welcome others is exactly described in the second scripture reading from the Gospel of Matthew. You welcomed me not as a stranger, but as your pastor. Even though there have been many challenges, we are still alive, and we are growing slowly and steadily. While I take English pronunciation tutoring at least twice a month, I still have my Korean accent. But your listening ears overcome this challenge. Of course, I will not be too lazy to improve and hone my English in order to communicate with you without any language barriers. My prophetic messages for social justice could be heavy to listen to and accept, and hard to chew and digest. But I witness your courage to listen. This is a great

blessing to me. Thanks to your courage to listen, I am learning the hearts and minds of the prophets between God and God's people. Sometimes, I am fearful and trembling in this pulpit, because I am speaking up for uncomfortable and controversial issues. But as always, I am humble and thankful for this pulpit. Without your presence, my message is nothing and I am nothing. You make me a humble and bold pastor, a better pastor Sunday by Sunday. Thankfully, I witnessed your hospitality. So, I am looking forward to our hospitality to welcome others and to give even a small cup of water to a little one in our community. Surely, God's love and grace will be overflowing through our church to our community.

4. We Are Called Together!

Today, we will have communion. We have one loaf of bread and one cup. It means that we are one body of Jesus Christ. It also means we are all called together. We are one with Christ, we are one with each other, and we are one in ministry to all the world. We are here to follow Jesus. We are called to thrive in this community. We are called to heal the world. When we take bread and share the cup, let us reconfirm our mission, our vision, and our commitment, as one body of Jesus Christ!

I would like to close this message with a prayer from the UM Book of Worship. This is a part of "An Order for the Celebration of an Appointment." I edited this a little bit for our prayer today. I will pray for you and this church. Please pray for me. I need your prayers. Let us pray together with one voice.

“Almighty God, you still call us to go into your service
and spread the message of the salvation of your Son.

Bless richly, we pray [I pray], your servant’s [your church’s] entrance into our fellowship.

Fill him [this church] with the power of your Holy Spirit
and let him [her] find with us [me] an open door for the Word.

We also pray for your Church on earth.

Equip us all with a spirit of willingness,
that we with courage can witness about you
by the profession of our mouths and through our way of living.

Grant us all to partake in your strength and joy,
so that we can enter into the anxiety and suffering of the world,
to be radiating and make alive that hope which Christ gives.

All this we dare to pray of you;
for you are to us the Father of mercy and the God of all grace;
you are the Son, the Savior and the Redeemer;
you are the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Helper and the Giver of Life.

Blessed by you. Amen.”