

Sermon Title: **“The Kingdom of Heaven (1)”**

Bible: **Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 & Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

When: on Sunday, July 23, 2023

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

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, we come to you, because we belong to you, and because where you are is your kingdom. 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. Seven Parables in Matthew 13**

Based on the Gospel of Matthew 13, I plan to share some ideas about the Kingdom of Heaven today and next Sunday, so the title for today is “The Kingdom of Heaven (1).” And next Sunday will be “The Kingdom of Heaven (2).” Chapter 13 has a total of seven parables. Last Sunday, we talked about the parable of the Sower with my favorite hymn, “Jesus Loves Me.” Today, we will talk about the parable of weeds among the wheat. Next Sunday, I plan to talk about the other five parables.

What is a parable? Jesus often used a simple story-telling method to give us a message or a lesson. This is called a parable. The purpose of the parables is to give us the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Then, what are those secrets? Something between you and me. If I share something only between you and me, it is not a secret anymore to us, but to others, it is hidden. That’s why to read and hear the parables is something like playing hide and seek or

treasure hunt to me. The parables are great sources for understanding and tasting the kingdom of heaven. With God's unfailing love and God's amazing grace, I love to understand and interpret them. To me, God is love, and God's love is full of grace and mercy. But please remember that my understanding is neither the absolute nor the only one truth. There are many other understandings and interpretations. But I hope that you can taste the kingdom of heaven through my understanding and my message, as you have great listening ears.

## **2. The Parable of Weeds Among the Wheat**

Today's Gospel reading of Matthew is about the parable of weeds among the wheat. The wheat was planted in the field. While everybody was asleep, the weeds were planted, too, by the enemy. Weeds were among the wheat. The slaves asked the master if they needed to go and take the weeds out. Surprisingly, the master told them no. The master wanted both the wheat and the weeds to grow together until the harvest. The master's plan is to take care of them at the harvest. Can you understand the master's plan? Can you follow the tale the master told? How could waiting until the harvest be the kingdom of heaven? We already knew what the weeds were. Even our Master knew the weeds. It is not an issue of preferences. It is the matter of right and wrong. We all know what is right and wrong. But our Master tells us not to take them out. Can we follow what our Master said to us? Have you been in this situation before? Then, which one was your choice, to take the weeds out, or to follow what the Master said?

## **3. Kingdom of Heaven**

What is the kingdom of heaven? Is it a place where there are no weeds at all? To me, the kingdom of heaven is the place where “thy will be done.” I know what is right and wrong. I believe that God knows what is right and wrong. But the kingdom of heaven is the place where it is not my will be done, but where God’s will be done. If there is no God, it cannot be the kingdom of heaven. Even though there are golden streets and pearly gates, it cannot be the kingdom of heaven without God. That’s because where God is present is the kingdom of heaven. In this way, even though our lives have many struggles and suffering, and even though we witness injustice and hatred, because God is with us, our lives on the earth can be the kingdom of heaven. What is most important is God’s holy presence. As God is with us, we can taste and experience the kingdom of heaven here and now. Of course, God’s kingdom has not been completed yet. There is so much suffering, and various forms of evil, injustice, and oppression. But God’s kingdom has already started in us. God’s love and grace is in us. God’s suffering and crying is with us. God sent Jesus to us, not only to save us, but also to be with us on the earth. Our God became a human being to suffer with us. God is with us. Then, is this the kingdom of heaven?

I still cannot fully understand what the Master said in this parable of the weeds among the wheat. Why did the Master want both the weeds and the wheat to grow together until harvest? But I will try to follow what the Master said. That’s because I am not the Master of my life, this church, or this world. Our God is my Master and our Master. When our God is our Master, that is the kingdom of heaven. If I were the master of my life, it might look good

to me, but that cannot be the kingdom of heaven. I hope not to put myself in charge as my Master. Unfortunately, I have met some pastors who put themselves in charge as their master, and whose endings were ugly in the United States as well as in Korea. Probably, God wants to give us a second chance, or seventy times seven chances until the harvest, because God is willing to forgive anyone and anytime. Rather than spending my energy or emotions on blaming them, I just keep Psalm 139 in my heart and think of it one more time, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” And please watch me with your love and grace, while you remember me in your prayers.

#### **4. Love Your Enemies**

I would like to introduce our church’s “Holy Conferencing.” What our Master said in the parable reminds me of this holy conferencing. It might be helpful for us to grow together with the “enemies” in the field until the harvest. Not only in our meetings but also in our normal conversations, how we talk is as important as what we say. It can be holy with God’s presence. This “Eight Principles of Holy Conferencing” was written by our interim Bishop Sally Dyck in 2012. I would like to share some of these.

The number one principle is “Every person is a child of God.” Do we really believe this? This is a related question: “Have you ever experienced the sense that a person with a different opinion than yours no longer saw you as a child of God? How did you feel?” With some

people whom I have met before, I have had this experience, and maybe I am still there. I was somewhat speechless and very sad.

The number six principle is “Speak about issues; do not defame people.” We talk to each other, not about each other. But this is very difficult for me. These are some questions: “Try taking a position that you disagree with and stating it as clearly and rationally as you can without defaming someone or becoming inflammatory. Was it easy? Or difficult?” “Now take a position that you hold deeply and imagine yourself defending it in front of someone who disagrees with you. Can you state it clearly and rationally without defaming that person or becoming inflammatory?”

The number seven principle is “Pray, in silence or aloud, before decisions.” The question is “Do you believe that through prayer your “enemies” can actually bring out the best, not the worst, in you? Have you experienced that in your life or observed it in someone else’s life?” Maybe, there are some benefits of having our enemies.

I would like to close my message with the most difficult teaching of Jesus, which is from Luke 6:32-33, 35-36. Jesus said “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ... Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

I know that to love our enemies is impossible by ourselves. We cannot love our enemies when we put ourselves in charge as our Master. But it is possible with God's grace. When we put our Lord in charge as our Master, we can love our enemies, as God's love is unconditional, and God's grace is overflowing. Can we trust our Lord? Can we put our Lord in control as our Master, beyond ourselves, our thoughts, our righteousness, and our will? Then, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, you are our Master. You have the ultimate authority. Please lead us not to put ourselves in your position of the master. We are just your servants. Please help us to receive you as our Master and live in the kingdom of heaven even on the earth. In Jesus' name.

Amen.