

Sermon Title: **“Let Us Build Our Church!”**

Bible: **Exodus 1:15-2:10 & Matthew 16:13-18**

When: on Sunday, August 27, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

O Lord, as you are the living God, we come to you here and now. 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. Life Cycle

Even though we still feel the last remnants of summer, autumn is coming. We were all born at different times and places. But thankfully we have shared our joys and sadnesses, and our good times and bad times with each other. We are all living and growing. And someday, we will rest and dwell forever with our beloved ones, our saints, and our Lord. As we move from birth to death, a church can do the same. Our church was established about 170 years ago. Our church has grown and has done many great things over the years. Even after COVID-19, our church is still alive and doing our ministries. But where are we according to the life cycle of a congregation? Where are we? Birth, Growth, Maturity, Decline, or Death? We cannot deny that our church passed the peak of vitality. Sadly, this is not only our church story, but also many other churches' stories.

This sad story also happened at the beginning of today's first scripture reading in Exodus. As we read, the first scripture reading is about the beginning of Moses' story. What made the king of Egypt command to throw the Hebrew baby boys into the Nile? That's because the new king did not know Joseph. God called Abraham, and blessed him and his descendants. God was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob's son Joseph saved his family from the famine and brought them into Egypt. After Joseph passed away a long time ago, probably 400 years ago, a new king arose over Egypt, and this new Pharaoh did not know Joseph. The Hebrew people had lived under a lot of oppression. And throwing the Hebrew baby boys into the river was one of the oppressive actions under which they suffered. Where can we put this Hebrew people's situation on this life cycle graph? Among Birth, Infancy, Child, Youth, Adult, Empty Nest, Retire, Old Age, and Death, where are they? Probably they can be placed in the empty nest category, since they were forced to give up the next generations.

2. Women in Exodus

And was this the ending to their story? No. Not at all! It was just the beginning of the Exodus story. There was threat, fear, and oppression. However, there were women who feared God more than the Pharaoh. First of all, the Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah did not follow what the Pharaoh commanded them. This does not mean that they feared what God would do to them more than what the Pharaoh would do to them. When you are afraid, can you take a big risk? No. In my opinion, they did not follow fear, but they followed

faith and life. When we have faith, we can take a risk, right? To the Hebrew midwives, the presence of the living God was more trustworthy than that of the Pharaoh.

Moses' mother and his sister loved Moses a lot. Because they had a love for Moses, they were able to hide him for three months at the expense of their lives. Even when they could not hide Moses anymore, his sister was not afraid of watching the basket on the river. She was not afraid to approach the daughter of Pharaoh, either. That's because she had a love for Moses. When we are afraid, we cannot take a big risk. But when we have love, we can take the risk.

Even the daughter of Pharaoh had compassion on the baby in the basket. She knew what her father's order was as the Pharaoh. But when she saw the baby, she felt compassion. At that moment, she decided to follow compassion, which went against her father's order. With the courage of compassion, she took the risk! Even though she could not save all of the Hebrew boys and comfort the Hebrew mothers, she protected Moses' mother as well as Moses. The women in this story took the risk, not because of fear, but because of their faith, love, compassion, and how they valued life.

3. The Living God

If Jesus comes to you and asks you something similar, like in the second reading of the Gospel of Matthew, what is your answer? Who do you say that Jesus is? Who is Jesus to you? I intentionally use the present tense here, because our Lord is the living God. This is from Matthew 22:29-32: Jesus answered them, "You are wrong because you know neither the

scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead but of the living.”

The living God is with us: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Joseph, the God of Moses, and the God of you, and the God of our church, Gilroy United Methodist Church. Do you have this living God in you? Do you have the faith that this living God is with you? And this faith is God’s gift, because flesh and blood could not reveal it. Flesh and blood here might mean our own effort or our own knowledge. We cannot know God by ourselves or through others. Even our faith is God’s gift. God gives us this faith. God gives us love. God gives us compassion. God gives us life. Then, what can we do? We can follow God as God gives us and as God calls us.

4. Let Us Build Our Church!

Let us look at the life cycle of the congregation again. As I shared at the beginning of this message, we cannot deny that our church passed the peak of vitality based on this graph. It is an inevitable fact. Our denomination, our annual conference, and our church are not growing. This caused me worry and fear. But I do not want to follow my worries or fears. That’s because I have the living God in me. Don’t you have the living God in you? Doesn’t our living God still give us faith, love, and compassion? Then, can we take the risk? Are we willing to take the risk for life, not for death?

As you might know, I am a shared full time pastor, but I work like a two full-time pastor. That's because I have the living God in me. I still see life in our church. And when I see this life cycle of the congregation, I fold it in half. By doing this, the decline matches up to the growth line. And I will work on the direction going upward, not anymore downward. I see our church like a living church, not a dying church. I know that it takes time, energy, wisdom, patience, teamwork, and priority to change direction. Do you have the living God in you? Do we have the living God in us? It might mean to take risks, to welcome our visitors, to reach out to new people, or to do something new that is out of our comfort zone. I believe that this church has not only this passionate pastor, but also this awesome congregation, each of you. As God established this church, our living God wants to build our church one more time! Let us build our church together!

Closing Prayer

O Lord, you are the alpha and the omega. You are the beginning and the end. And you are the living God and you are the resurrected God. As you give us faith, love, and hope, we are living today not for death, but for life. As you build your church on the rock of the faith, please use our faith and build our church. In Jesus' name. Amen.