

Sermon Title: **“Are You Listening?”**

Bible: **1 Samuel 3:1-10 & John 1:43-51**

When: on Sunday, January 14, 2024

Where: about 20 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, 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. What Made You Come to the Church First?

Before the Christmas Eve Service, I shared a slide with our congregation, in order to show the power of your invite. What first made you come to the church? Did you come to church on your own initiative? Like Samuel in today's first scripture reading, was God calling you? Did you like the clergy? It is about 8-10%. Pastors are important, but pastors are not the church: you are the church. So, I am not surprised by this percentage of 8-10%. And I am thankful that at least one person came to this church because of me, who is my wife! Has the church met your needs? Maybe the church has had some programs, like choir, small groups, Bible Study, or various ministries that meet your needs. Have you come to the church through evangelism? I am not sure how we define evangelism these days. Maybe some people came to the church because of the church signs or social media advertising. Were you invited to come to the church by your friends? In today's second reading, Philip invited his friend, Nathanael, to come and see. Eighty-three per cent of the people who come to a church

come because a friend invited them. You are the church, and you have the power of the invite! And thank you so much for still coming to church. It is a great joy to have you as a church. And it is a wonderful blessing to still have you as a church.

2. What Made You Still Come to the Church?

And what made you still come to the church? The data is clear. People are leaving the church in significant numbers. As we all know, our faith journey is neither challenge free nor temptation free. We can have questions. We can make mistakes. We can be doubtful. Our lives can be shaken. Among these moments, who was there for you? Like Eli to Samuel, like Philip to Nathanael, who was there for you, when you were in need? Was this church there for you, when you were in need? Is this church a safe place to share your tears, joys, concerns, questions, and doubt? If your answer is yes, thank you so much for being the church for you and others.

If your answer is no, I am so sorry. Unfortunately, the church itself or even the pastors can be the reasons why people leave the church. As you see, I am not perfect, and our church is not perfect. I heard that one reason why people are leaving the church was that people disagree with the church's stance on social issues. Some think that the church is changing too fast, and others think that the church is not changing fast enough. Do you think that the church reflects where you are at? Or is it ahead of you, or behind you?

What is our mission? To make the disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As Methodists, we want to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and we want to transform the

world. We talk about not only our personal piety but also social holiness. Our personal spirituality is important. And social justice is also important. Our founder, John Wesley has said, “There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.” Wesley goes on to say that without social holiness, we cannot exist. For example, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. can be an example, even though he was not a Methodist. When we follow Jesus, we cannot close our eyes to society, especially social injustice, the cry of the needy, the poor, and the marginalized.

Where we are can be different, according to our faith journey. So we might be disappointed with where the church is. The church can be way ahead of us, or way behind us. But our direction and our goal is to walk together, and to live together with one another, because we are the church together, and because we are the body of Jesus Christ together.

3. Are We Listening?

One thing I can promise to you is that our church is listening. We are Methodists, who have open hearts, open minds, and open doors. We are Methodists, who agree to disagree. So, we are listening to each other. Like Samuel listened to Eli, we are listening to each other. Like Nathanael listened to Philip, we are listening to each other. And most importantly, we are listening to God’s love and grace for which we cannot set the limitation and boundary.

Are you listening? You are listening to me, beyond my Korean accent, right? Listening seems easy, but it requires intentional and conscious effort. You have done a great job. And are you listening to God? That also requires our intentional and conscious effort. God is

speaking to us in many ways. We, Methodists, have Wesleyan's Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason. And the first primary way is the Bible. I know that we do not need to bring the Bible anymore to the church, because of the screen and the bulletin. But when was the last time you picked up your Bible at home? I hope that your Bible does not remain unopened under the dust. We can feel God's love and grace when we read the Bible. The Lord's prayer comes from the Bible, and the most famous psalm, Psalm 23, is from the Bible. Sometimes, or many times, the Bible sounds mysterious. We cannot understand everything. Sometimes it needs interpretation because we do not read it literally. But we can feel God's love and grace when we read the Bible. So, I am thinking of reading the Gospel of John together during Lent, a chapter a day, from Ash Wednesday up to Palm Sunday. When my plan for Lent is finalized, I will announce it.

Today, I would like to close my message with reading Psalm 139, which is one of the lectionary readings. And it is a prayer for God's help. I did not prepare slides for it. I would like us to open the Bible in our pews. This requires our intentional and conscious effort to listen to God. You are not alone. We are here together. So, please pick up the Bible and let us find Psalm 139, if you are able. (allow time to find Psalm 139 in the pew Bible) We will take turns reading Psalm 139. I will read the odd verses, and you can read the even verses.