

Sermon Title: **“Our Misunderstanding & God’s Way”**

Bible: **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 & Mark 8:31-38**

When: on the 2nd Sunday in Lent, Sunday, February 25, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus Youtube Live 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. Names in the Bible

Names are very important in the Bible. And some of us have biblical names, like John, Steve, Sarah, Esther, Ruth, Deborah, Mary or Maria. Generally speaking, a change of name in the Bible means a significant change in identity or life. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is a good example. Paul used to be called Saul, the same name as the first King of Israel, the one King David followed. Saul in the New Testament used to persecute the Christians. At first, he was not a Jesus follower, but a follower of Christians in order to persecute them. On his way to arrest Christians in Damascus, he encountered a vision of Jesus Christ, who had been resurrected and had ascended into heaven. After this miraculous and profound experience, Saul changed his name to Paul. He became a passionate missionary. Generally speaking, the term “apostle” is used for those twelve disciples who met Jesus during the life of Jesus. But we also call Paul the Apostle Paul, because he met the resurrected Jesus, and because his influence upon the early church was so great. How many books are in the New

Testament? Twenty-seven books. Among the twenty seven, we think that thirteen books were written by this Apostle Paul.

In our modern life, when do we make a name change? Generally speaking, when we get married, we can change our last name. That's because marriage is a significant moment in life. This happened to a couple in the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 17, when Abram was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to Abram and his wife Sarai, and made a covenant, and changed their names into Abraham and Sarah. God also blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son of their own. How old was Abraham? Ninety-nine years old. And Sarah was ninety years old. Who could believe this blessing of God? To make a long story short, God's blessing and covenant were achieved. Abraham was not only the first great Hebrew patriarch, but also the founding father of the Abrahamic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Abraham became the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

2. Our Misunderstanding

If you were Abraham and Sarah, could you believe in God's blessing and covenant? What was the first response of Abraham? Let us read the following verses, Genesis 17:17-20. It says "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" God said,, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard

you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.” Ishmael was Abraham’s first born son, not from Sarah, but from Sarah’s Egyptian slave Hagar. A long time ago in that area, to have the offspring from many wives was the common culture. So, I think that Abraham's response was very reasonable. Don’t you think like me? But God’s way was different from Sarah and Abraham. God gave Isaac to Sarah and Abraham. And there is another story of God’s ways that we cannot understand. Later in Genesis 22, God tested Abraham by telling him to give up Isaac, the promised son. According to our reason, even though we may try to understand the different culture of that time and that area, we can hardly understand God’s way.

How about your faith journey? Can you understand God’s ways in your life? Do you have any moments that you cannot accept or understand? This happened to Peter in today’s Gospel reading of Mark. When Jesus taught about his suffering, death, and resurrection, Peter could not accept it at all. When Abraham could not understand God’s way, he laughed. But here Peter dared to rebuke Jesus! The verb “rebuke” is a very strong word in the Bible. Usually, it is used to rebuke an evil spirit or the devil. When Jesus replied to Peter’s response, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” To Peter, Jesus’ suffering and death were not what he expected from Jesus. Peter had experienced great miracles while following Jesus. He could not expect any suffering and death. What do you expect when you follow Jesus? Do you expect from Jesus miracles or joys only, like feeding many people, healing the sick, walking on water,

calming storms, and more and more? Is that God's way? Or our way?

3. God's Way

God's way might be different from ours. Jesus said to the disciples, and to us, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." We all know that our life is not easy. And to be Christians and to become the disciples of Jesus Christ is very serious and can be difficult.

In my faith journey, to become a pastor was not easy. But the most difficult part was not taking care of my family. Because of the complicated immigration and visa process, I had to live separately from my wife for three years. She needed to live in Korea, and I needed to stay in the States, because our visa and immigration process was pending. One year was okay. Two years was not good. But three years made me crazy. To wait without any due date made me not sleep well. Thankfully, I am here with my wife. When I talk about those three years, it still hurts me. I still cannot understand God's way fully. But it made me pray more and deeper about what I cannot control and even what I can control. How about you? Do you have any moments that you cannot understand God's way? God's way can be different from ours. Even at that moment, do you want to follow Jesus?

Closing Prayer

O Lord, you ask us, "Do you want to follow me?" We come to you with heavy and broken hearts and minds. Please guide us to follow you even when we cannot understand you. Amen.