

Sermon Title: **“Commandments, Love, and Joy”**

Bible: **John 15:9-17**

When: on the 6th Sunday of Easter, May 5, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube 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. Love and Joy

Thanks to the presence of all of you, especially the support of our church leaders and members in covering the worship and church office responsibilities, I had a wonderful vacation in Korea. I came back safely and healthily. But I am not getting over the jet lag yet, because Korea is sixteen hours ahead, and maybe because I am still savoring the precious moments in Korea. As some of you know, my wife Mihyun could not visit Korea with me, because she couldn't take that long of a vacation from her new preschool position, and because she was taking two classes. Someday, I hope to visit Korea together with Mihyun again.

Today is the 6th Sunday of Easter. This means that we are still celebrating the joy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to the Gospel of John, when we love one another, there is joy. Jesus gave us a new commandment, which is to love one another. The reason why Jesus gave this commandment is so that Jesus' joy may be in us, and our joy may

be complete. Since we are not only God's servants, but also Jesus' friends, Jesus shared this secret of joy, while giving us this new commandment.

When we love one another, are we joyful? In the faith community of John, there might be betrayers as well as persecutors. Then, how could they love one another within their community? And as we experience in our faith community, sometimes, it is not easy to love one another within the church, because we are different, because we have different opinions, and because we are not open-minded. Sometimes, we might be certain that we are right, and that others are wrong. Nevertheless, can we still love one another? Jesus gave this commandment, not to test us, not to give us another burden, but to give us joy, at least according to today's passage from the Gospel of John. I cannot fully understand what Jesus says to us here. To give us joy? To me, the new commandment to love one another feels like a test or a burden. When we love one another, are we joyful? I know that joy is more than happiness, or something beyond happiness. But how can our joy be complete when we love one another? I do not know what it means that my joy may be complete. But occasionally, I taste a little joy when we love one another.

2. My Vacation in Korea

It has been twelve years since I saw my family in Korea. It was back in 2012 when I got married. Even though Mihyun could not visit Korea this time together with me, I decided to visit Korea by myself. After a long time of seminary, religious visas, and the immigration process, I had a great opportunity to see my family in Korea. It took just short of 12 hours by

flight after a long 12 years. My top priority was to see my grandma who is 94 years old with dementia. Thankfully, I met her twice, and she recognized me, even though I have become a chubbier grandson. I made a joke that I ate a lot of burgers in America. When I visited her the second time, I had time to pray and sing her favorite hymns with my mom and my grandma together. One of the hymns is called “Since Christ My Soul From Sin Set Free.” I tried to find this hymn from the United Methodist Hymnals, but I failed. But I would like to share its lyrics in English and in Korean: “Since Christ my soul from sin set free, This world has been a Heaven to me; And 'mid earth's sorrows and its woe, 'Tis heaven my Jesus here to know. O hallelujah, yes, 'tis heaven 'Tis heaven to know my sins forgiven; On land or sea, what matters where? Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there.” “내 영혼이 은총 입어 중한 죄짐 벗고 보니 슬픔 많은 이 세상도 천국으로 화하도다 할렐루야 찬양하세 내 모든 죄 사함 받고 주 예수와 동행하니 그 어디나 하늘 나라” I almost cried when I sang the refrain, “On land or sea, what matters where? Where Jesus is, 'tis Heaven there,” because my grandma’s life on earth is close to rest in heaven. But we felt heaven on earth when we sang together, as Jesus was there. When we love one another, are we joyful?

I have a niece, HyoJu, who is 9 years old, and a nephew, MinJae, who is 7 years old in Korea who are the children of Mihyun’s older sister. They are less than twelve years old. So, it was the first time to see them face-to-face. At first, we were shy around each other. But I brought gifts. Mihyun and I went shopping and prepared gifts for them. They were not English books, but clothes and toys. After I gave them the gifts, they wore the clothes, and

celebrated with their favorite dance. This dance was a famous one in their generation. I would like to share this video. I followed and danced together, and we laughed a lot, and we became friends. When we love one another, are we joyful?

As I shared before, it has been twelve years since I visited Korea for my marriage. This means that it has been twelve years since I saw my parents-in-law face-to-face, too. I was a little nervous, but I spent about three days with them. Because my father-in-law is a taxi driver, we drove together to enjoy the Cherry blossoms in Korea.

Feeding a son-in-law a lot is the way to express love. How about here? Is feeding a son-in-law a lot also the way to express love? Even though I cannot get away with eating so much anymore, I really enjoyed a lot of authentic Korean food, because I would like to receive a lot of love along with the food that I could not receive for twelve years. There is an old Korean saying, “When my son-in-law comes, I catch him a hen.” To give a hen means to sacrifice eggs, because the son-in-law is more important. So, one of the highlights is to have a big chicken. I needed to eat the whole chicken, but I saved half for the next visit someday. When we love one another, we are joyful, right?

4. Updates from General Conference

April was a significant month for me, as I visited Korea after twelve years. It is also a significant or historic month for our United Methodist Church. We had a General Conference which was postponed from 2020, because of COVID-19. And we had many historic decisions. Among them, I would like to share three decisions.

First of all, our United Methodist Church decided to repeal the harmful words against LGBTQ+ people after fifty-two years. For example, by a vote of 523 to 161 after about an hour and a half of debate, General Conference delegates eliminated the 52-year-old assertion in the denomination's Social Principles that "the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching." And there are no more required punishments against our LGBTQ+ people in our church ordination process and against United Methodist pastors who officiate at same sex marriages. It took 52 years and there are tears of joy. Rather than explaining the details, I would like to share some photos from our UMNEWS website. When we love one another, we are joyful. And if you want to know more about this decision, please come to me.

Second, Eurasian conferences got the go-ahead to form their own church. The conferences encompass churches in Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. As you can imagine, these conferences have faced many challenges and hardships in their geopolitical areas between superpowers, economic ups and downs, and theological controversies. This is a very sad and unavoidable decision. Bishop Eduard Khegay of the Eurasia Area expressed gratitude for our support of their decision. Sometimes, to love one another means to do what they want, not what we want. When we love one another, are we joyful?

The last one that I would like to share is that the United Methodist Church approved full communion with the Episcopal Church. This is one of the ecumenical movements. If the Episcopalian Church affirms the agreement, probably in their meeting in 2027, it will mean that the two denominations recognize each other as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church

in which the Gospel is rightly preached and taught.” We do not know what it looks like yet in detail, but probably, in practice, we recognize each other’s baptism and communion, and we can have Episcopal pastors, and they can have our Methodist pastors. But we will know better after 2027. And I believe that when we love one another, we will be joyful!

5. Love!

Jesus told us to love one another in order that our joy may be complete. Can we love one another? Then, we may be joyful. And there is a Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And I also want to share a Platinum Rule, “Do unto others as they would have them do unto them.” During this May, I hope for us to love one another. And our joy may be with us, may be overflowing, may be complete.

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, we are your servants, and your friends. Please guide us to love one another. We are your people and your beloved children. In Jesus’ name. Amen.