

Sermon Title: **“The Gift of Christian Perfection”**

Bible: **James 1:17-28 & Mark 7:1-8**

When: on the 15th Sunday after Pentecost, September 1, 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. It is Not the End, but the Beginning.**

There once was a beast. He fell in love with a beauty. To make a long story short, he made a proposal, and they got married. And they lived happily ever after. I love the story of Beauty and the Beast, but my love story is different. Marriage is not the end, but the beginning of another love story. To live together takes doers as well as hearers. Who is going to cook? Who is going to do the dishes? Who is going to vacuum the rooms? Who is going to clean the bathrooms and toilets? Who is going to take out the trash? Who is going to pay the utilities? There are many to-do lists. I believe that you can make more to-do lists. But writing down to-do lists and checking each task off the to-do list is not everything. We take a solemn vow to be there in any circumstances. This is a part of the marriage covenant. “For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish.” And one more thing! There is God’s love, protection, and grace that we often forget.

### **2. Hearers? Doers?**

According to today's scripture reading of James, its focus is to be doers rather than hearers. This is one of the popular criticisms against Christians. What we say is not the same as what we do. So, the teaching from the book of James is to be doers of the word, not merely hearers. Here, you can make a to-do list, and check that off each to-do list.

According to the Gospel of Mark, who were the doers? Who observed to-do lists, the tradition of the elders? The Pharisees and the scribes followed the rules. They did not eat before washing their hands. During the COVID-19, we learned how important it is to wash our hands with soap for more than twenty seconds. Probably, a long time ago, not eating before washing hands would be the best way to practice good hygiene. But does this mean that they have the right to blame others for not washing their hands? To make to-do lists sounds reasonable and practical. Yes, we need them, and we need to follow them. But if we think that making to-do lists covers all of married life, is that a marriage life that you want? To check tasks off the to-do list is something, but not everything. What made us make a to-do list, rules, and guidelines? To love and cherish, we make a to-do list, rules, and guidelines, right? Do we love and cherish each other to make a to-do list, rules, and guidelines?

### **3. The Gift of Christian Perfection**

I would like to share a concept of the gift of Christian perfection. Isn't it very interesting that Christian Perfection is a gift? To us, Christian perfection is a gift. Perfection does not mean flawlessness or sinlessness. We cannot be free from mistakes, temptations, or failure, even after we know and accept God. Nevertheless, we can have the mind of Christ and walk

as Jesus walked. We can have a heart habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor, according to our founder John Wesley. Perfection is not a clean or sterilized status, but a healthy and mature process itself. We may not be there yet, but by God's grace, we are going on to perfection. Because there is Sanctifying grace, Christian perfection is a gift.

The word, Sanctification, means to set something apart and to make it holy. In the Old Testament, to set something apart means to distinguish the clean from the unclean. The unclean people or things cannot be together with the clean. So, there are many rules and to-do lists in the Old Testament. And only the clean person can meet God, like Moses, the prophets, and the high priests. But you know what? God became a human being and came to the earth: the unclean, messy, and broken world. Jesus Christ, the Holy one, came to us. Jesus Christ visited so-called unclean people such as women, foreigners, sick people, tax collectors, and sinners. In the Old Testament, to be holy means to separate, but what Jesus, the Holy one, did was to visit the marginalized with love, not to separate them, but to love them, to meet, heal, and call them. Even when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The curtain of the temple means there is a barrier between the clean and unclean, because only clean and holy people encounter God. Only high priests were allowed to enter the Holy of Holies.. But Jesus opened the way to encounter God. There is no more barrier between God and us. All can encounter God. God wants to meet you as who you are. God knows that we are not perfect. God knows we are weak and vulnerable. God knows that we can make mistakes and failures. That's why Jesus wants to come to us, and walk with us

together. It is okay to make mistakes. It is okay to have weaknesses. It is okay not to follow all the rules or to-do lists. It is okay not to be perfect. To accept Jesus, and to walk with Jesus will make us perfect! It is nothing but a grace, the gift of Christian perfection.

Please do not get me wrong. Does my message mean that we do not need any rules, to-do lists, or guidelines? Does my message mean that we do not need to follow them, and make mistakes and failures on purpose to receive the grace and the gift of Christian perfection?

What I mean is that we are on the way to perfection in God's grace and love.

#### **4. Holy Communion**

Today, we will have communion. Because God wants to be with us, God sent many prophets, God sent the Bible, God sent the churches, and God sent our friends. And God sent Godself to us. Jesus Christ himself is a gift. Jesus Christ wants to be a part of our lives and walk with us. When we take the bread and cup, may God's holy and loving presence, the Sanctifying grace, be with us. We may not be there yet, but we are holy and perfect in God's eyes!

#### **Closing Prayer**

Loving and living God, we come to you. We are weak. We are vulnerable. We are not clean. We are not doers. We are not hearers yet. But we come to you, Lord! Please walk with us in our lives. We are so thankful for your grace and love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.