

Sermon Title: **“Temptations After Achievement”**

Bible: **Deuteronomy 26:1-11 & Luke 4:1-13**

When: on the 1st Sunday in Lent, March 9, 2025

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live 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. Ash Wednesday**

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” In 2025, Lent began with Ash Wednesday. Lent is the season of forty days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday. We do not count Sundays, because Sundays are always little Easters. They are not Sundays that are part of Lent, but Sundays that happen to occur during the Lenten season, so we do not count them. Therefore, we can sing Alleluia with joy on Sundays in Lent. If we counted every day during Lent, including Sundays, it would add up to forty-six days, which is more than forty days. During these forty days that represent Christ’s time of fasting and temptation, we prepare to celebrate Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, while remembering his forty days spent in the wilderness.

“Remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.” Our lives had a beginning, and our lives will have an ending. We are preparing during this Lenten season to celebrate Easter. My appointment had a beginning, and there will be an ending to my appointment at this

church. We are also preparing for the pastoral transition during the next four months, in order to have good endings and new beginnings. Even though I have officiated at many celebrations and memorial services, to celebrate the lives of our beloved ones is always challenging, and I cannot get used to saying good-bye. Likewise, I cannot feel used to saying good-bye to the churches, and each of you, that I have served. But there is a season for everything, and there is a time to say good-bye and to welcome a new pastor. Even though this pastoral transition can be challenging, I trust the decisions made by our bishop and the cabinet, because I believe that God is still calling us, you and me, both churches and pastors, and God will call our new and next pastor for this church. During this season of Lent and pastoral transition, let us pray deeper and deeper for our churches and the new pastor.

## **2. Temptations**

“I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back.” I have decided to follow Jesus. And among many possible denominations, I have decided to be a United Methodist. And thankfully, I was able to become a United Methodist pastor. When I became a United Methodist pastor, I committed to obey the itinerancy, the appointment system where pastors are sent or appointed to all the local churches. That’s because it is one of my understandings about this calling: I will go and serve anywhere and anytime. And I think that this appointment system can help us to avoid or overcome some of the temptations that we can face.

What made you come to this church? There are and will be many reasons why people come

to this church. Is it because of the pastor? Am I the reason that you came and stayed at this church? Am I the best pastor? I do not think that I am the best pastor, but at least, I am one of the good pastors, right? And now there might be a temptation for me to stay in this church forever. I really appreciate your thoughts and support, but let us remember how Jesus responded to the first temptation. Bread is very important for us to live. But we cannot live by bread alone. We need our Lord, right? Likewise, the long or longer-term presence of the pastor can be very important. But we cannot attend a church because of the pastor alone. We need our Lord, the body of Jesus Christ, the faith community, the church, and each of you. To grow in faith, pastors are needed for you and for the church, but whom we rely on is not a pastor but our Lord.

I am so blessed to serve you for many years, and at significant moments of your faith journey, but how I have served you is to point you toward our Lord Jesus Christ. I am just a finger to point in the direction of our Lord. Our focus is not upon the action of my finger, but upon the Divine one. Of course, there is always temptation for me to point not to our Lord, but to myself. I do not want to fall into this temptation, because I have seen many great pastors whose beginnings start out great but whose endings are ugly. I am just a pastor. I am just a means of grace to you. I know your names one by one, and you know my name, which was hard to pronounce at first. I am so thankful to be a part of your faith journey and for us to worship the Lord and serve our God only.

I hope there is not anyone who is hurt or angry with this pastoral transition. We do not know

yet who is our next pastor. However you feel is totally fine and okay. I am dealing with many emotions, as I said, and I cannot yet get used to the idea of saying good-bye. And it is totally fine and okay to have any questions for me or our SPRC (Staff Parish Relations Committee) about itinerancy, the appointment-making process, and the pastoral transition process. I am here for you, and our SPRC members are here for you. But I hope for us not to doubt or test our appointment system. As many of you remember, I came to this church as a stranger and an unknown pastor. And I did not know anything about Gilroy and garlic ice cream. But I trusted that my appointment was God's calling, and I have served each of you and this church with joy, with sweat, and with tears. I hope that I am at least one of the good pastors to you, and I believe that one of the better or best pastors will be appointed to this church, and I hope that it will be announced soon for a smooth transition.

### **3. Transition and Lent**

The 2025 Lenten season has just begun, and we have many days before Easter. The pastoral transition has started, and we have four months ahead. I am so thankful to have forty-days of Lent, and four-months of pastoral transition time. In my experience, many times the pastoral transitions for small churches have been unexpected and occurred at the last minute. But we are under prayerful consideration and discernment by our Bishop Sandra K. Olewine, our District Superintendent Samuel Hong, and our cabinet. And our SPRC members, lay leaders, and I are praying during this time of Lent and pastoral transition.

Can you join us with your prayers for Lent and pastoral transition? We might have a lot of

emotions of confusion, anxiousness, fear, anger, and even guilty grief. But can we give our prayers to the Lord, just like God's people gave the first fruits in the book of Deuteronomy? Long ago, God rescued God's people from slavery. While giving their first fruits, God's people remembered God's protection and guidance. When we put our trust in the Lord, God will protect us from temptation, and God will guide us for another bright chapter of our church. Let us continue to follow God and trust in God's ways, and God's grace!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, thank you so much for this forty-day Lenten season and four-month pastoral transition. We have a lot of emotions, and we might need to face some temptations. But Lord, we trust your protection, your guidance, your ways, and your grace and love. Please be with our Bishop, our District Superintendent, the Cabinet, and our SPRC members and lay leaders. And please reveal yourself to our church members and friends, each of us, during this time of transition. All honors and glory are yours, our Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.