

Sermon Title: **“Written and Spoken Words”**

Bible: **Acts 11:1-18 & John 13:31-35**

When: on the 5th Sunday of Easter, May 18, 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. Written and Spoken Words

Today’s Scripture Reading from Acts is very interesting in a couple of ways. First of all, who is the main character? Peter! Generally speaking, the Apostle Paul, not Peter, was regarded as the apostle for the Gentiles, the foreigners. But here, Peter is the first one who spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, those who were not Jewish. Peter hung out and ate together not only with Jewish Christians, but also with non-Jewish or gentile Christians. When Jewish Christians criticized Peter why he ate with the Gentiles who were profane or unclean, which was against Jewish law at that time, Peter shared the vision that he experienced during prayer three times.

And here is the second interesting part: which one is more important, written words or spoken words? Let me explain a little bit more. According to the written words, Jewish law, Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, it was prohibited to eat unclean food, like four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. Everybody knew these written words, which were very clear and well-known. But there were spoken words, which could be new, but unfamiliar, uncomfortable, unknown, or not well-accepted. That was “What God has

made clean, you must not call profane.” The written words were not confirmed by the spoken words. The spoken words objected directly to the written words. That’s because the Spirit called on the Jewish Christians not to make a distinction between ‘them’ and us. That’s because the Holy Spirit fell upon ‘them’ as well as upon us. Then, Peter could not hinder God, because God gave the same gift, the same grace, and the same love to the Gentiles, as to all people! And these spoken words became the written words in Acts now. No one and nothing can separate us from God’s love.

2. Love One Another

Does this mean that we do not need any written words and can just throw them away? I do not think so. As you see, as a Methodist pastor, I am a method or rule follower. I still read the Bible, the Old and New Testament, and I can find the meanings in God’s presence, grace, and love, even in the Old Testament, but with special glasses. Those special glasses are Jesus Christ’s new commandment to love one another, which came from today’s Gospel reading. To love one another are the most important spoken words, even though they have become written words now in the New Testament. Jesus loves me, Jesus loves you, and Jesus loves others, and Jesus loves all of us. Who can hinder God’s love?

3. Holy Conference about Marriage

To love one another is not easy. Sometimes, social norms can work like the written words. For example, I learned that interracial marriage was illegal in the past. The practice of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds was restricted in the United States until 1967,

and the case of Loving versus Virginia Supreme Court decision, which made it legal. But the written law cannot win the love of the people.

To love one another even in church is not easy. I believe that Jesus knew that it was not easy. So Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit. But it requires time, energy, many meetings, and open-mindedness in order to listen to the Holy Spirit, the spoken words, together, like the reading in Acts. We can see a similar example in our denomination's history about marriage. Even though marriage is not a sacrament in the United Methodist Church, Christian marriage is the moment of a sacred covenant. However, because of the different understandings about marriage, our churches have struggled for many years, about 40 years. The United Methodist Church is a global denomination, which is present not only in the United States, but also in Europe, Asia, North and South America, and Africa. Is it possible to have a common understanding about marriage? The 2024 General Conference affirmed that "Marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community." It used to be that marriage was considered to be a union between a man and a woman. The parentheses, the amendment for a double-barrel definition of marriage, came from Molly Mwayera, an East Zimbabwe Conference delegate: both a man and a woman in line with law in much of the world including her home country, and two adults in line with law in other parts of the world, including the United States. As you can imagine, this amendment rejects child marriage and

polygamy and supports there being consent in sexual relationships. I learned that the vote came after about an hour and a half of debate and an amendment, or after 40 years of listening to the Holy Spirit, not only from the United States, but also from Africa. Is this amazing? I feel the work of the Holy Spirit!

To be a worldwide denomination is not easy, but what we can see is our prayers, efforts, meetings, debate, tears, and stress, in order to listen to the Holy Spirit here and now. How about us? To be a local and small church is not easy, either. But can we see our prayers, efforts, meetings, debate, and God's love and grace in our church? Yes, we can feel the work and presence of the Holy Spirit even through our conversations, meetings, and debate. That's one of the ways to discern God's will, to love one another, and to be a church together. Methodists call it "Holy Conference." To discern God's will between written words and spoken words happened in Acts. In the same way, to discern God's will happens through our conversations, meetings, gatherings, and conferences, too. Let us love one another through our conversations, meetings, and debate, too! Then, everyone will know that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, many times, it is not easy to discern your will between the written words and spoken words. It is not easy to love one another when we have different opinions. But we are all your people and your disciples. Please be with us through the Holy Spirit and speak to us. We are here to listen to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.