

Sermon Title: **“Calling and New Heaven and Earth”**

Bible: **Acts 16:9-15 & Revelation 21:1-7**

When: on the 6th Sunday of Easter, May 25, 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. What kind of phone did you use at first?

A long time ago, there were neither smartphones nor cell phones. Let me show you some photos of old phones that I have used before. I used to use these old and “not that smart” phones, just home phones, wireless ground line home phones, phones with cords, mechanical ringer phones, and even rotary dial phones.

These days, it is not that difficult to meet up with each other. If someone is not arriving on time, we can text or give a call to their cell phones. Then, we do not need to worry about missing meetings, or whether they might have been in an accident. We can reschedule another meeting, too, if there are any emergencies. Do you remember when we did not have any cell phones, but only home phones? Do you remember how we met with each other at that time? For example, we might have to just wait one or two hours at a restaurant. When I was seeing Mihyun, I remember that one time I waited for three hours. We used to have a lot of patience, love, and care. Our lives have become so convenient with smart devices these days, but sometimes, I miss those days.

It is the season of Annual District Conferences, and Annual Conferences. Yesterday, we had

our El Camino Real District Conference via zoom, and we will have our California-Nevada Annual Conference at the end of June in Sacramento. The popular hymn that is sung at the beginning of the Annual Conference is “And Are We Yet Alive.” It was written by Charles Wesley, a brother of John Wesley, in 1749. Do you remember what it was like in 1749? Were there any phones? The first verse goes like this: “And are we yet alive, and see each other’s face? Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace!” In those days, there were no phones. There were no vehicles. Many pastors were circuit riders who rode a horse, and served more than one church. They could not meet each other often, and they could not communicate with each other well, either. But they could meet once a year. And the first hymn they sang was “And are we yet alive and see each other’s face?”

2. Calling and Appointment

How about the story in Acts? It was more than two thousand years ago. Paul had a vision to serve another church, and Paul just followed that vision without any knowledge of where he was going. He might have a horse, but he did not have any cell phones, and he could not research any information that we could google now. What the Apostle Paul relied on was not his knowledge, not his ability, not his experience, not his wisdom, but God’s vision and calling, and the need of God’s people.

As you might know, I will be appointed to another church, starting July 1st. And my answer is “Yes” to God’s calling. Even though I have had no vision like Paul’s, I accept our bishop’s intent as God’s calling. However, I have struggled with some concerns and worries. What if I

will not be able to attend your important moments, like memorial services? Yes, we have smartphones, emails, and social media to connect with each other. But it is not allowed for me to connect and to be contacted with former church members for at least one year. If we do not follow this guideline, it will not get you in trouble, but it might get me in trouble, because as your pastor, it might mean that I failed to educate my former congregation well. I will not be your pastor anymore, but I will be your friend. To have this identity transitional time, what our annual conference guides the pastors to do is to take at least one year from the former congregation. Even though we have some questions and some what ifs, I decided to follow this guideline. Just in case you have any plans to contact me within one year, please set it aside and do it one year later as a friend!

But please remember that we are already and still connected to each other in Christ. This connection is one of our significant keys in the United Methodist Church. Our new pastor Soungbum Joshua Baek, my friend and my companion, will be your pastor, and I have already built a good relationship with him. As soon as his new appointment to our church was announced, I have been praying for Pastor Joshua, his wife, his family, and our church. He will serve you and our awesome churches with his gifts and passion!

3. My Last Sunday and Hope for New Heaven and Earth

Please remember that we are the people of hope! We have a hope for the new heaven and earth! Until we meet in glory, we might not be able to see each other. I am sure that most of you will not be able to make it to my retirement celebration, probably about thirty years into

the future. I promise you that I will not be disappointed at your absence in my retirement, because I believe that many of you will celebrate my retirement from where you are, the heaven, and because each of you are already a part of my ministry and calling. Even a visitor for one Sunday or two Sundays is a part of my ministry. I will take your spirit, your help, your care, your eye contact, and your prayers. They are already parts of me. However, I will be very sad at your absence on my last Sunday worship service, which is on Sunday, June 1st. I have already visited our homebound church members, before my moving, to say good-bye. Please come to my last Sunday Worship Service! If you are not available to be there in-person, please try to be there via our live streaming.

I know that not all church members welcome and love me. But I am also a person of hope, too. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. Complaints will be no more. Misunderstanding and miscommunication will be no more. We all will meet at the heavenly kingdom in glory! We will understand each other and love each other. But please come to my last Sunday, to celebrate my calling and ministry to this church and to bless my new appointment together!

Closing Prayer

O Lord, sometimes, we cannot understand your calling and your plan. But we are the people of faith. We are all called by you, and we are here and now. We are the people of hope. Even if we misunderstand each other, even if we fail to love each other, even if we cannot plan all things, you love all of us, you guide all of us, and you are with all of us. Until we meet each other in glory, please be with us in your love and grace! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.