

Sermon Title: **“Peace With Justice Sunday”**

Bible: **Isaiah 6:1-8 & Romans 8:12-17**

When: on Peace With Justice Sunday, May 26, 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. Peace With Justice Sunday

According to the lectionary, today is Trinity Sunday. Trinity means that God is three persons and God is one. God is one and God is three persons. How can one be three? How can three be one? We might know something about God, but not everything. There is always a mystery in Trinity. And according to our United Methodist Church, today is Peace with Justice Sunday, which is one of the six special Sundays: Human Relations Sunday, Native American Ministries Sunday, World Communion Sunday, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee On Relief) Sunday, Peace With Justice Sunday, and United Methodist Student Sunday. These Sundays are not only celebrated annually, but are also intended for sharing the opportunity to contribute offerings to special programs. As a small local church, we cannot observe all six Sundays, but I would like to observe and celebrate Peace With Justice Sunday every year. Last year, our denomination collected \$144 thousand for Peace With Justice Sunday to support programs and ministries to educate, equip, and mobilize actions in support of

identified economic, health, and gender justice priorities. Half of them remain in the Annual Conferences, and half of them are for national and international peacemaking ministries and grants. Then, how much is for each? Our local churches might be small, but all together we are doing a great job.

2. Social Principles

What makes us, the United Methodist Church, observe this Peace With Justice Sunday? I believe that's because of our calling. In our Lord's prayer, we pray that "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Would we say Amen to this prayer? We are Christians not only for our own salvation, but also for the kingdom making on the earth. Is this our calling? Then, what is your answer to this call? Just like the prophet Isaiah responded, would we say, "Here am I; send me!"? Our denomination founder, John Wesley, has said, "There is no religion that is not social, not holiness that is not social." We have both personal holiness and social holiness. Likewise, we proclaim both personal gospel and social gospel. To me, these are like our two wings to fly. There is no personal gospel that fails to express itself in relevant social concerns. There is no social gospel that does not include the personal transformation of sinners. We need both, not either. Even though we are living on the earth, we are people of heaven. Even though we are people of heaven, we are on the earth today here and now.

As one wing for the social holiness, social gospel, and social justice, in our Book of the Discipline of the United Methodist church, we have a part of the Social Principles. To

exercise our responsibility for this world and to work for social justice is our calling, our confession, and our DNA. We do not close our eyes and ears to social concerns. Please remember that the Social Principles are not the church law, but they are our prayerful and thoughtful effort on contemporary issues based on our biblical understanding, theologies, and traditions. If we read them, they cover almost every part of our lives. It is okay to have different opinions, because it is not the law, but it is good to know and study our Social Principles, because it can be a good guideline. You can build up your ideas and you can take some actions. That's how I approach our Social Principles. When I see the news and when I face controversial issues, I try to read those parts to learn and develop my perspectives. For example, I read these parts: divorce, abortion, suicide, death penalty, war and peace, right to health care, poverty, national power and responsibility, etc.

3. Examples

Last year, I shared the overview of the whole chapters of the Social Principles. Today, I would like to share a couple of examples, based on my understanding of our Social Principles. As you might know, our United Methodist Church used to be against LGBTQA+ clergy. Our Cal-Nev Annual Conference had declared Safe Harbor to set aside the complaints against our LGBTQA+ clergy. But this Safe Harbor was not in place for every Annual Conference. On May 21st, there was an incredible moment at the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference Session. When clergy are ordained at the Annual Conference by the bishop, clergy kneel and the bishop lays their hands upon clergy and blesses them. But the

Bishop John Schol knelt and a clergy laid her hands upon the bishop. And this clergy, the Rev. Beth Stroud, had been removed from the ministerial orders as an elder in 2004, after a church trial, where she admitted to being in a committed relationship with another woman. Now that LGBTQ bans have been lifted, this defrocked pastor was reinstated as a clergy. After twenty years, she was very welcomed back. The bishop knelt and the pastor laid her hands on the bishop. It is a moment of our episcopal humility and public forgiveness. It is the way to justice, reconciliation, and healing.

Another example is our sincere apology by our General Conference to all who experienced sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church. This apology was read during the last General Conference Session, and it is to be read at every Annual Conference Session. And I would like to read “*Apology from The United Methodist Church to the victims/survivors of sexual misconduct.*”

Introduction

Sexual misconduct is a current and real problem within The United Methodist Church. Today, we acknowledge there are people here who have been mistreated, abused, and assaulted by clergy and lay leaders in the Church.

We honor those who have shared their stories and those who have sat with their stories in silence. We commend the courage of all survivors of sexual misconduct to walk a path they did not choose.

Too often those who suffer from sexual misconduct are silenced, ignored, or not believed by the Church.

Sexual misconduct includes psychological, emotional, and spiritual abuse. This apology is a beginning point for confession and hope in prevention and response to sexual misconduct in The United Methodist Church.

Apology

The United Methodist Church apologizes for the times we allowed our desire to protect the Church to outweigh our desire to care for victims and survivors of sexual misconduct. We have allowed polity and protection of the institutional Church prevent us from holding persons accountable, thus perpetuating harm within our local churches and other ministry settings, and damaging the whole United Methodist connection.

We apologize for the times we have not listened to you, doubted your stories, ignored your wounds, and have not tended to your pain. We believe this has contributed to allowing an unsafe culture to exist.

An apology is worthless without a commitment to the challenging work which must follow. The United Methodist Church pledges to:

1. Apologize in every annual conference across the connection.
2. Educate Church leaders regarding sacred trust in ministerial relationships and power imbalance within those relationships.
3. Provide healing resources to all affected in accordance with ¶ 362. Complaint Procedures.
4. Develop a trauma-informed response to complaints of sexual misconduct.

This apology alone is insufficient for healing. The United Methodist Church accepts our responsibility and publicly states our commitment to carry out the steps named to do no more harm. May God's blessing and never-ending love guide our work and see it through. Amen.

4. Our Calling

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. We honor and remember those who have died in service to our country. Without them, we cannot be here, in the land of the free, and the home of the brave. Their sacrifice cannot be forgotten. Today is Peace With Justice Sunday. The way to justice and peace is not easy. It might require our sacrifice, pain, and suffering. But it is our calling. I would like to read the last verse of today's Scripture Reading of Romans. This is from NIV, New International Version. "Now if we are children [of God], then we are heirs - heirs of

God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” Suffering for justice and peace might be a prerequisite. And I would like to read one more verse, Romans 8:18. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” At the end of our road to peace and justice, even though it is tough and painful, there will be reconciliation, healing, joy, and glory.

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, thank you so much for calling us. Even though we are unclean, even though we are lost, you are calling us. Here we are, Lord. We humbly bow down and kneel down in front of your presence. Please cleanse us and use us for your peace and for your justice. In Jesus’ name. Amen.