

Sermon Title: **“Thriving in Community”**

Bible: **Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 & Luke 4:14-21**

When: on the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany, January 26, 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. Thriving in Community

What is our mission of the United Methodist Church? Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We are here now not only for ourselves, being and making disciples of Jesus Christ, but also for the world. And our California-Nevada Conference’s CORE team set up three visions in 2023 for the following years: Following Jesus, Thriving in Community, and Healing the World. Last year’s vision was “Following Jesus.” Next year’s vision will be “Healing the World.” This year’s vision focus is “Thriving in Community.” To follow Jesus, to be a Christian, to be and to make disciples cannot happen by itself. It means to do life with each other in this world with God’s love and grace.

As we read and heard the reading from the book of Nehemiah, when people read, heard, learned, and understood the word of God, they were touched, and they ate and drank together, sharing what they had with those who did not have anything. That’s because God’s people

could not hide the joy of the Lord. In the Gospel of Luke, there is more powerful news. Jesus came to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That's because the power of the Spirit and the love, grace, and mercy of God is overflowing through Christ's followers and disciples. Our feelings of personal peace, joy, and salvation are important, and we cannot hide them. They are God's gifts of peace, joy, and salvation. So, when we love, we cannot hide our love, and God's love and grace will be overflowing through us.

2. As a Small Local Church

I believe that everyone and every church wants to help those in need. And I would like to share some realities serving as a small local church: a joy and a challenge.

One day, I received a phone call from some people in need. While traveling, they had lost their wallet, and they could not fill up their gas tank. Somehow, they knew that the United Methodist Church was kind and generous, and they gave the church a phone call. So, I asked where they were, and I met them at the gas station near Walmart. I filled up my car with the cheapest priced gas, but I filled up their car with the best gas. Thanks to our Angel Fund (or Pastoral Discretionary Fund), I was able to help a stranger in need. I am proud of our Angel Fund and our church.

One day, a person came to the church to pay their rent fee, which was a couple of thousand dollars. What should I do? My answer was "I am so sorry, but we cannot help pay your rent

fee, but what I can do is to give you a grocery gift card.” I gave a couple of grocery gift cards, and guided that person to contact St. Joseph’s Family Center, our local non-profit organization, who might be able to help with emergency rental or utility assistance. Our church cannot help everyone who needs help with their rent, deposit, or utility fees, but we are supporting our local organizations who work to make our community better. As many of you know, it is our tradition to donate 100% of our Christmas Eve offering to St. Joseph’s family center, and to feed those who are in the Safe Parking Program one month each year.

3. A More Loving and Caring Faith Community

We want to help everyone. Should we help everyone? Can we help everyone? No. We cannot help everyone, but we can help someone. So, my question is “What can we do?” “Whom can we help?” and “How can we become a more loving and caring faith community?”

As is always required at the beginning of the year, our church needs to submit the previous year’s statistics report. And one question that came to me to consider is the number of persons on our constituency roll, which means those who are not yet our church members, but who are in relationship with us, and who are under our church and pastoral care responsibility. And the following numbers are related to our church members and friends.

Our church membership is 59, and our average worship attendance is about 25 including YouTube viewers. About half of the members come to our worship service. Can you guess how many people are in our church directory? There are about 80 people in our church

directory, and they are under our church and pastoral care responsibility. I think and I hope that we can share our love and care with them. For example, since Valentine's Day is coming, we can send Valentine's Cards and say "We are thinking of you." We might not be able to reach out to everyone in our community, but we can reach out to our church members and friends, whom we have missed for a while, and your friends and neighbors, in order to build a loving and caring faith community. As Jesus called each disciple one by one, reaching out to one person can be a great start. God's love and grace is in you and me. God's spirit is in you and me. And who comes to your mind? With whom do you want to share God's love and grace? For this year, can we hold one person or one family in your prayers and thoughts?

Closing Prayer

O Lord, because your love and joy are great, we cannot hide them. Your love and grace is overflowing. It is overflowing through us. Today, we are thinking of our small church, and loving and caring faith community. As you have called us one by one, please help and guide us to hold one person or one family in our prayers and thoughts. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen!