

Sermon Title: **“God’s Covenant and Jesus’ Way”**

Bible: **Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 & Luke 13:31-35**

When: on the 2nd Sunday in Lent, March 16, 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. God’s Covenant**

How do we make a promise? We can use our pinky fingers. And sometimes, we can sign on the dotted line. When we get married, the bride and bridegroom make a promise with wedding rings, but on the wedding certificate, signatures of two witnesses are also needed in California. Most times, promises require agreement from both parties. Can I make a pinky promise to myself? In the book of Genesis that we read today, God made a promise with Abram. But God’s promise, or God’s covenant, was somewhat different.

Similar to a pinky promise, a long time ago, there was a special way to make a promise in the area of the Western Mediterranean. As we read, it was splitting animals in half and passing between its parts. Probably, the meaning of this act seems to be that the party passing between the parts will die like the animals if he or she breaks its promise. It might be too scary or too intense, but it shows how important or how serious the promise is. Because it is a promise made by two sides, two people should pass through the parts of the animals. Let us

read verses 17 and 18 again. “When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant (or promise) with Abram.” Who made a covenant? The Lord made a covenant with Abram. Then, both the Lord and Abram should pass through the parts, right? But Abram did not pass. Only the symbol of the presence of the Lord, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, passed through. It is very interesting, isn’t it? What I mean is, would it be okay for Abram to break the covenant’s promise, because he did not sign on for that promise? Only the Lord signed on for this covenant, right? But isn’t that what God’s grace and love look like? We are weak and fragile. We are broken and we can fail. But it is totally fine and okay in our Lord’s eyes, because God’s promise is way bigger than our weaknesses, our failures, and our brokenness.

## **2. Jesus’ Way**

God’s love and grace is never changing. As we read the Gospel of Luke, God sent many prophets to God’s people, even though they rejected them. Many prophets knew that to proclaim God’s words could risk their lives. Nevertheless, they came and shared the message of God. And many of them were persecuted and lost their lives. Even some Pharisees came to Jesus, and warned him of the danger his life was in. He knew what could happen to him if he did not run away. Nevertheless, Jesus did not stop going his way. He followed God, and he obeyed God’s will! As we all know, Jesus passed away on the cross.

## **3. Jesus’ Cross**

God’s promise, God’s covenant, and God’s love and grace are way bigger than our thoughts

in our history. Even though many prophets were rejected, even though our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, is God's love and grace still coming to us now and here? There has been a lot of suffering and sacrifice, because God's people followed God and many of them were not welcomed, but were rejected and persecuted. But ironically, more and more people followed God and became Christians anyway, until the fourth century, when the Edict of Milan by Roman Emperor Constantine I went into effect. Because of this Edict, Christians could have religious freedom, and there was no more persecution of Christians within the Roman Empire. But there was another irony. When Christianity focused on political power and authority, rather than God's message and God's grace, the churches lost their saltiness, and they became corrupted. Nevertheless, God's love and justice did not end. I believe that it is because of God's promise, or covenant. Our God still wants to be our Lord, our shield, our light, and our salvation!

Beyond the persecution of our faith ancestors, and beyond the corruption of our churches, God's love and grace came to us. Can we still follow our Lord, just like many prophets and Jesus? Do we have that faith to follow Jesus' way, even if it means to risk our lives? I do not want to not be welcomed. I do not want to be rejected or persecuted. I wish that would not come my way.

However, during this Lenten season, I see Jesus' way toward the cross. How was Jesus on the way to the cross? One of my favorite Korean poets, Dong-Ju Yoon, described Jesus in his poem "The Cross" as the following: "Jesus had felt the cross painfully, but he was happy."

How could the cross make him happy? Which one matters to us, to follow God's way, even though it might risk our lives, or to run away from God's way to save our lives? During this season of Lent, and during these unsettled times, let us pray for God's love and grace, and God's justice and peace. And if Jesus' way is our call and our cross, let us follow Jesus' steps. May God's holy presence be with all of us today, tomorrow, and the next day!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, we are so thankful for your promise and your covenant to be our God. But Jesus' way and Jesus' cross is too heavy and big for us to follow. O Lord, please be with us and show us your way and your holy presence with us. We are your servants and we are here for you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.