

Sermon Title: **“Preparing Priceless Perfume?”**

Bible: **Isaiah 43:16-21 & John 12:1-8**

When: on the 5th Sunday in Lent, April 6, 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. From Walk to Emmaus

Thanks to all of your prayers and support, I had a meaningful and graceful time at the Men’s Walk to Emmaus. On the way to Walk to Emmaus, I saw a full rainbow, and I took a photo of it. I regarded it as a sign of God. De Colores! Even though it was not easy to be there without a shower for 72 hours, I had a great time to focus on God’s timing, not on our time. For 72 hours, I did not need to look at the clock or my cell phone to check the time. How I slept in the corner of the small chapel did not matter. To find God’s grace does matter to me during this time of Lent and during this time of pastoral transition.

2. A-ha Moment

I had a couple of a-ha moments during the Walk to Emmaus. And I would like to share one a-ha moment. On the second day of Walk to Emmaus, I received a bag that was full of cards and prayers. Thank you so much for all of your prayers and cards. So, I had time to read them in a quiet place, which was next to the small chapel. There was a bench, and there was a

church memorial wall of the saints. I sat down on this bench and read them one by one. I almost cried with your prayers and love. Actually, I stopped reading the cards and took a time to stop crying, and read them again.

During this pastoral transition, one thing that I try to keep in my mind is “Clergy Ethics and Courtesy with Churches to which Pastors Are Not Appointed.” This sounds something like the costly perfume that Mary used to anoint Jesus’ feet. Three hundred denarii would be nearly a year’s wages for a laborer. I believe that we are not like Judas Iscariot. We are not thieves, and we are not greedy. But to spend one year’s wages for such costly perfume is too much, isn’t it? Because we are reasonable, wise, and smart, if we had one year’s wages, we could distribute it very well, right? But what Jesus did was not to save the costly perfume in order to sell it and distribute the money wisely, but to accept what Mary wanted to do for his burial. Probably, anointing the body with perfumed oil is one of the Jewish burial customs, and Mary wanted to spend priceless perfume to be ready for Jesus’ impending death.

Let me read some parts of “Clergy Ethics and Courtesy” for the pastoral transition. This might be too much like costly perfume, but you and I need to face the pastoral transition. “The issue is addressed in the Standing Rules of the Annual Conference and the *Book of Discipline*. Conference Standing Rule IV.H “Ministerial Courtesy” states: ***All pastoral functions, for example preaching, baptisms, weddings, and funerals, are the responsibility and privilege of the pastor under appointment to the specific charge, circuit, or parish. Retired ministers, former ministers, located ministers, ministers special appointments, or***

neighboring ministers shall perform such functions only upon the invitation of the pastor in charge.” I will read another part, **“When a pastor retires or leaves an appointment, he or she shall not participate in the life of that congregation for at least one year.”** Does this sound okay for you to follow and accept it? Or is it too much?

I am your pastor, and I will be your pastor until June 30th, but as of July 1st, I am no longer your pastor, and I will be your friend. I will be a pastor of Sparks UMC. For this new identity change, we need some time, at least one year, because it is very difficult to distinguish between friendships and pastoral relationships.

One a-ha moment that I would like to share is that you might become my friends, my sisters and brothers, like my family. One day, my mom shared her idea for me to officiate her funeral after attending some funerals of her friends, because I am a pastor. I know that it is a great privilege for a pastor to officiate at the last moment of our lives. I heard that some pastors officiate their parents’ funeral and memorial services. But I do not want to be a pastor who officiates my mom’s funeral. I just want to cry as who I am as her son. July 1st is not coming yet. But I am slowly and steadily getting ready for our good ending and for the new relationship.

3. Preparing Priceless Perfume for Your Family and Friends

Have you heard of the DNR, the Do-Not-Resuscitate Order? I have not heard of it in Korea, but I learned about it here in the States. Is a DNR too much like a costly perfume? Or does it make sense to you? And I would like to share another priceless perfume, for your family, for

your friends, for your loved ones. It is a “Funeral/Memorial Planning Information” form. I learned about this form from another UMC. The following is from the 1st page: “At the end of your life, loved ones will gather to celebrate and to remember you. This document is an opportunity for you to share with them what your own wishes will be for that time. You can give a wonderful gift to your family and loved ones by expressing your preferences for some of the most important decisions they will have to make at the time of your passing.” You can share about your memorial service and obituary. You can write down your favorite hymn or secular songs, Bible passages, poems or readings. This could be too much like the costly perfume, but I am sure that it will be a priceless gift to your family, your friends, and those who love you. I made some copies of this form and have them available in the Fellowship Hall.

Saying good-bye is never easy. Facing endings or death is always difficult. But as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, our Lord will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. We are all God’s chosen people. Therefore, we can find spring after winter, a new beginning in every ending, comfort in pain, hope in sorrow, and resurrection in death.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we are all your chosen people. As we welcome spring after winter, we welcome a new beginning in every ending. With your holy presence, we can face our death with hope of resurrection. O Lord, please be with each of us, and give us your power, your wisdom, your liberation, your love and grace! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.