

Sermon to homeless people (at a church of homeless people)

The followings are brief sermons I delivered at the homeless church. They are rather simple and not in depth because we need to preach a short sermon due to time constraint before our dinner for the homeless. However, in the process of preparing my sermon, at times it ended up using difficult terms that some may not understand exact meaning. In that case, I used to break it down in easier language and made them simpler. But here I present my original scripts as they have been prepared in the first place. Those who want to use them for the same population may do the same as I did. I just tried to communicate some core ideas on each Scripture text and theme. Although they are relating to the homeless situation, they can also be preached for the public with some modification. I dare hope that these brief sermons might become some reference to those who serve homeless people, need to preach to them as well as to the public.

1. **Advent Sermon**

Scripture text comes from Luke 3:4-8. Anyone would like to read it?

*The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."
⁷ You brood of vipers! ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance.*

Sermon theme: "Let us repair the road."

We are in Advent season which started last Sunday and will last until Christmas. Advent means "waiting." It is the period of preparing to welcome Jesus.

Today's Bible verses tell us about an announcement of Jesus' coming. During the 400 years before Jesus' birth, Israel didn't have prophets. The people longed to have them because they were the conscience of old days for Israel's religious and social ills.

Here John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness and announced Jesus' coming saying, Jesus was much greater than John himself. John is presenting ideas how to welcome Jesus.

First, John is asking people to prepare Jesus' way by making *every valley filled, and every mountain and hill made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.*

This is exactly what people did – repaired the road condition when King came so that King didn't have to travel up and down the hill and mountain on a rough road.

How can we relate the road condition – valley, hill, mountain, crook, and rough in the text to our life today? Can we say that many of you have been in deep valley of despair in losing jobs, homes and health. The stress and struggle to survive in your homeless life has been as high as hills and mountains. Your thinking and mind became bent and crooked from the rage and hostility in your painful homeless life. And the whole homeless life journey has been rough and tough for you.

John is urging us to repair the road to welcome the King. John's idea of fixing the rough crooked road condition is our repentance. Repentance means complete turnaround from where we are. That also means change our old wicked ways and experience forgiveness. It is just like when I expected very important guests from Korea last August, I cleaned the whole house, changed sheets, got new towels and got ready with all necessary things including food.

How we can relate this message to our heart by saying, we must smooth out our deep valley of our life, rough road we have been walking physically, emotionally and spiritually. What will be your valley, rough ways and crooked side of life that call for "repentance." I wish there is a simple way of washing all of the negative things out of body and mind using detergent and disinfectant.

John calls this cleansing activity "repentance." In order to prepare to receive Jesus, we have to experience some change in our life. To change we have to know what to change and how to change. Anybody would like to share your way of doing it? Yes, some of you might change some of your old bad habits of drinking by getting some help because it will be hard to do it alone. That way we can clean the room in our hearts. Let us repair our road condition by changing our old way of thinking negatively so that Jesus can come into our lives. Let us pray.

2. **Christmas sermon:**

Scripture Text: Luke 2:1-11

Sermon theme: Christmas: Meeting homeless baby Jesus

As we know Christmas is so commercialized and a family event that it is a very difficult time for many of you, because few people will give you Christmas gifts and very few of you have your family ties that you can join them at this family season. As our theme this year (2011) is "Let us meet Jesus," today's particular theme is meeting homeless baby Jesus. It might be a depressing theme in this joyful season. But I think you will like this Jesus I am introducing to you today. This baby Jesus is different from other babies:

Firstly, he was born homeless: Let us read the Bible story together from Luke 2:1-7:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

To summarize the story, Mary was in full pregnancy. The Roman Emperor ordered people to go to their ancestor's town to register. Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem with Mary which was Joseph's ancestor's town. While they were there, the time came for Mary to deliver her child. But there was no place she could deliver the baby. Finally baby was born in an animal barn and was laid in a manger, an animal feeding box, because there was no room for them in the inn. Perhaps there were too many people who came to register and the town was crowded. But Joseph and Mary were poor and couldn't afford any better housing either. Joseph was carpenter and a day-laborer just as some of you are. He didn't make much. When rich people brought offerings of lambs and goats for the church, Mary could bring only a little dove. This means she was poor. So baby Jesus was born in a manger, born homeless. This means that he started his life poor and homeless from the day one.

What does this mean to all of us? Very few of us are born outdoor in this day and age. But some of you might have been born in poor and broken homes. Some of you might have been born with no father's presence. Some of you might have been taken away as soon as you were born to be adopted out. Some of you might have lost mother as soon as you came to this world because she left you. Many of you also can relate to that situation: You lost your own room. When you call many shelters there was no room and you call churches and there was no answer, how devastating it is! That's exactly what happened to Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. Those of you who experienced all these can identify with homeless baby Jesus. Do you like this Jesus now because he was in your shoes, and knows your situation?

Let me share my experience: I was born in a broken home. In those days, my father ran off with another woman. My mother was sad. The baby, me, must have been sad too. Before I was born, I might have pounded her womb crying out "why are you bearing another woman when you yourself are abused?" From day one, my life has been very tough. Therefore, personally, I feel that Jesus knows my troubles and pains. This truth has comforted me. For this reason, Jesus loves me and I love Jesus. This is the reason I love you, the poor and homeless because I have been there too. This motivates me to introduce this special Jesus to you who knows your situation from day one.

This Bible story helps us to identify with Jesus' troubled infancy. This story helps people who experienced early trauma to find hope in him. Early trauma affected all of us and many of us are damaged by it. Our early trauma has driven some of us to substance abuse and others to mental illness. I am not saying that our early trauma must dwell on us but to understand where we came from so that

we can understand the little child in us. Without knowing who we are and where we come from, we can't be healed. It's like no Doctor can treat their patients without knowing the cause of troubles.

Secondly, baby Jesus was born among poor friends and for the poor: Let us read the Bible stories in Luke 2: 8-11 and Luke 1: 52-53 together;

2: 8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

1: ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

But Angels who brought big news didn't announce it to the emperor or governor through King 5 TV station or in the New York Times. They told this news to shepherds in the field. In those days, shepherds were poor, marginalized, and despised lower-class outsiders. So Jesus' best friends from his first day on were the poor and marginalized.

In Luke 1:52 and 53, Jesus' mother, Mary is talking. She knew what kind of man this baby would grow up to be. She perceived him to be a person for the poor, who would bring down the rich and powerful from their thrones and send them away empty, but lift up the poor lowly and fill the hungry with good physical, emotional, social and spiritual food. She was envisioning a fair world where the rich wouldn't exploit the poor and throw them into poverty and homelessness.

Not only has Jesus been in our shoes, he understands us. He suffers with us and in us because he resides with us and in us. When we cry he cries. When our hearts ache his heart aches.

Thirdly, this baby was born as a savior: Let us read the bible verses together: Luke 2: 11: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

He came to save us; to bring us salvation. What is the meaning of salvation?

Many people will relate salvation only to spiritual sphere of life or something we will experience after death.

But according to theologian, Marcus Borg, the word "salvation" comes from the same root as "salve," a healing ointment. Salvation thus has to do with healing the wounds of existence. Wounds of existence are many and deep. Some of these wounds are inflicted on us, some are the result of our own doing, and some we inflict on others. Liberation from bondage is thus one of the central meanings of salvation. Liberation from physical, political, economic, emotional, social and spiritual poverty, homelessness, illness, afflictions, bondage and sins can be called salvation. I call this holistic salvation. Bible says, the purpose of Jesus birth was to bring us such salvation. So his birth is very different and unique. This homeless baby was born with a big purpose.

How is Jesus going to do this? I will do this by coming into our midst to live with us. His birth meant that God came down, took residence in our midst, to live with us and to save all people including you and me.

Fourthly, this baby Jesus was born as good news to us: Let us read the bible verses together; Luke 2: 10: ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people:

Liberation from all forms of bondage to sin, poverty and homelessness is surely good news. I wrote in my Christmas card about the Christmas as follows: *This is the time we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ who came to reside in our midst as the light in a dark world, as compassion in an apathetic world, as justice in an unfair world, to empty his entire self for the greedy world, to love the world that is full of hatred, to be a hope to the hopeless, to heal the sick, and to save sin-sick souls in exchange of his own life.* These are good news to us all. This is the meaning of Christmas and the very reason why we celebrate the birth of Jesus today.

3. Meeting refugee baby Jesus

Scripture Text: Matt. 2: 13-15

Last week we met homeless baby Jesus who was born in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Today we are going to meet a refugee Jesus, who fled to a foreign country because his own king was seeking to kill him. Let us read the Bible verses together: Matt. 2:13-15:

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod.

Anybody remember why the King Herod was going to kill Jesus? Yes, because the King Herod heard that this little Jesus was born to be the King of the Jews.

In those days, Herod was a vassal king under the Roman occupation. He was known to be a tyrant, a madman and a murderer who had killed several of his wives, his own children, other relatives including many teachers and religious leaders when he felt suspicious of their threatening his power. When he couldn't find the baby Jesus in the little manger, he decided to kill *all of the children in and around Bethlehem under age 2*. These children didn't even have a chance to flee. They were all killed before they could escape.. So the land was filled with mother's laments.

God's angle let Joseph and Mary know what was going on and urged them to flee with baby Jesus. So they fled to Egypt, which means they became refugees in a foreign country.

Any of you came to this country as a refugee? Refugees are those who fled their country escaping wars or some kind of life-threatening persecution. There are many people in this country who do not have legal refugee status. Refugees get some help but illegal immigrants get no help. When you are illegal immigrants, homeless and sick, you might feel like you are at the end of the rope. Here, we don't ask about your legal status. We welcome and love everyone as Jesus would.

Today, there are many Herods in our world. Any leader, any political party, any system, and any policy that causes a displacement of people can be the Herod. Many people in the world experience displacement in man-made wars, natural disasters and poverty. Many of you were born in the U.S., and not as refugees. But when you are evicted from your parental home or rented apartment into the cold streets, you become refugees in your own city. When you are evicted from jobs and have no money for rent or food it could have been like a refugee life. People pitch tents, police come and destroy them, you are displaced again and suddenly you become like a refugee. When people are locked up in mental hospitals or prisons for a long time, you are displaced. I want to call these displaced life circumstances "a refugee life." It is very sad that many people become refugees in their own cities and don't get the same housing privilege as legal refugees receive.

In 1946, at age 11, before many of you weren't even born, I became a refugee with my family from North to South Korea fleeing from the threat of the Communist regime. In 1950, we were again refugees in an unfamiliar city and town during the Korean War fleeing from the bombing and killing war zone. We lost everything we owned except the clothes on our back and a few bags just like some of you are carrying. We experienced hunger and homelessness. This is the reason why I understand people in a refugee situation so well. That is the reason why many other Koreans have joined me in helping the poor in this country. **We had been in your shoes.**

It was bad enough for Jesus to be born homeless, and this time in his infancy he was forced to be displaced in a refugee life in a foreign land. For Mary, Joseph and Baby, seeking asylum in Egypt was a nightmare as well as a hope. It was bad news to be a refugee for Jesus but God provided him a refuge in Egypt. This was a hope from the displacement. God was involved in every aspect of their life. God was with them and in them. Therefore, Jesus has compassion toward all those who lost their

homes and were displaced into a refugee life. Do you like this Jesus who had been in your shoes? Does this story help you to find hope in Jesus?

I have been talking with some of you individually over our meal listening to your past sad stories. I get to know you whole lot better and am building amazing relationship with you. I learned that some of you come from early trauma and later messed up your life with substance abuse. The best news I have been hearing is that some of you are trying to get up and walk by enrolling in colleges to start anew or finish up unfinished courses. Yes, that's wonderful! Let us try to overcome our early traumas. Your parents might have messed you up. But when you grow up to be adults, you have to do recovery job for yourself. This year, you cannot stay where you were last year. You have to move forward. The refugee Jesus will walk with you, and we will walk with you. When refugee Jesus understands you and accepts you as a wonderful person, can you feel better about yourself? Can you help Jesus lift you out of the dumps you have been in? Several volunteers of the Nest Mission also came from past traumas, came to this country with empty hands and we have made it.

My conclusion is that we have a hope. As Jesus was provided for an asylum even in the midst of violent nightmare, God will do the same for you. We hope the Nest Mission and Maplewood Church can be your refuge. Although we can't offer physical refuge, we want to offer you spiritual and emotional refuge by being your friends and supporters. Jesus is in us and with us. He is walking with us in every step we are moving because he loves us. I hope you meet this refugee Jesus today and welcome him into your life that you may experience much different and better life this year. We will work together for that hope. Amen.

4. Meeting Galilean Jesus

Scripture Text: Matthew 2: 19-23;

My scriptural text comes from Matthew 2:19-23 and my sermon theme is meeting Galilean Jesus. Let us read the Bible verses together from Matthew:

*19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’
²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth.*

Let us make a few points:

Firstly, we remember that the infant Jesus and his family became refugees in Egypt. Angel appeared again to bring a good news that Jesus' family can go back home now. But Joseph was afraid to go back to the land of Judea because Archelaus, the son of tyrant Herod was ruling. Archelaus apparently inherited his father’s violent tendencies. He began his rule with the slaughter of three thousand people. So Mary and Joseph went to Galilee instead and settled in a small town called Nazareth in Galilee region. Although Galilee was also ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod, the circumstance there was relatively less threatening. So Joseph and Mary settled with Jesus in Nazareth. So, Jesus grew up in Nazareth. This is why Jesus was called "Nazarene." Can you imagine that they had to come back to the region that was ruled by the same tyrant Herod family from whom they ran to Egypt? What an unsafe and frightening circumstance!

Secondly, why was Galilee so important in Jesus' life? What Galilee could have meant for him? Nazareth was a little town in Galilee District just as Edmonds is a little city of Snohomish County. Galilee region had a diverse population who were racially mixed people, called "Gentiles." Galileans felt contempt from the Jews as Jewish people despised any non-Jew as unclean and ungodly people. Most Galileans were peasants and poor. Farming in Galilee was rapidly becoming commercialized just like our Marysville is rapidly turned from farms into a city. So, in Galilee, small farms were being replaced by large estates. Many people were dislocated just like gentrification in our time. Galileans were underprivileged and lacked the opportunity for education and many other things. Jesus too was a peasant in Galilee. He was also a day laborer. He was a *tekton* (carpenter) and perhaps he was employed in the construction work just as some of you have been. He owned no land of his own. Peasant and day laborer describe his social class. This means that he was at the bottom of society. Therefore, when God came to the world in Jesus Christ, God came to the poor, most despised and lowest place. Does this help you feel better by identifying with this Jesus?

Thirdly, God had a purpose in placing Jesus in Galilee. Jesus came to Galilee as a Galilean to identify with the poor and marginalized and to live in their midst and share their suffering to save them. Thus other Galileans can identify with Jesus and find hope in him. In a way, where you are is in Galilee. Your displaced, poor, unemployed and homeless life can be called Galilee. Therefore, you have been Galileans. I had been in Galilee too.

Here is a story of a homeless man whom I met in Seattle downtown: He used to make a 5 digit salary. He injured his back on the job. He was taking prescription drugs for his pain. He got addicted to that drug. His addiction made him lose all of his savings, possessions including his house and his job. He ended up eating out of trash bin and sleeping on the streets. He went down all the way to the bottom pit of his life. He was a Galilean in Galilee. He confessed that one day God told him that he can't stay down there any longer. He too wanted to get out of this Galilee. He came to transitional housing of the First Presbyterian Church. While he was a resident there, he stopped taking drugs and became a shelter leader. When I met him, he was going to college. Nest Mission helped him with

tuition one time. In the evening he works for another shelter as staff member. Not only did he get out of Galilee, he is now using his Galilean experience to serve the most needy.

My last concluding question for you is: Do you want to meet this Galilean Jesus today? Does he identify with your Galilean experience? Do you identify with HIS Galilean experience? Do you find HOPE in him? Are you ready to get out of your Galilee? How are you going to USE your Galilean experience? Like Jesus and the homeless man you might want to go back to Galilee later to serve the most needy friends there. May God bless you and walk with you. Amen.

5. **Meeting Jesus, the street minister**

Scripture text: Matthew 4:12, 15-17, 23-24

Theme: The street minister

Does anyone remember what kind of Jesus we met the last few weeks? Yes, we talked about Homeless Baby Jesus, Refugee Jesus and Galilean Jesus. Today we will talk about a different Jesus. I want you to figure out what kind of Jesus this is while we read the bible verses. Please look at the screen and read out loud together: Matthew 4:12, 15-17, 23-24

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee.... Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.' ...²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

Firstly, where were Galilee people sitting? They sat in darkness and in a shadow of death. What could that mean? Anyone has any idea? Yes, it could mean poverty, unemployment, eviction, homeless life, sickness, etc. It could also mean addiction to substances or mental illness, prostitution and many other things. Has anyone been sitting in darkness and a shadow of death but being cured? Is there anyone who would like to share such an experience?

Secondly, when Jesus came to the world as the God's son, he didn't come to a Governor's or presidential mansion. He came to sick, poor, despised, and underprivileged outsiders. He came to homeless people first. What was happening to them on the street while Jesus was with them? Anyone remembers? Yes, that's right. People were cured from all kinds of sickness, pains, diseases, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics.

What do you call this man who did that? Street evangelist. Street healer. Street preacher. Yes, I call him *the street minister and street Doctor*. He didn't have any office to practice his profession. He did all that on the streets where the homeless people were.

Thirdly, what was happening to people when they were cured? Anyone can guess? Would you think that the cured people were finding joy, hope and high self-esteem? Because finally someone cared about them, respected and treated them like human beings. Yes, some change must have taken place too. What kind of change would you expect? When we are cured *physically*, what do you experience *emotionally*? We feel better and feel good. *Spiritually*, what could happen to you? We will come closer to God. What does that mean for you? When you come close to God what happens to you? Yes, you get to tell God who you are, about your past life, etc. We can call it "repentance". Jesus said, "I am here and you repent!" Repentance means complete turn-around from our old life style. It could mean change in our thinking, feeling and behavior. Could it also mean sobriety from alcohol and clean from drugs? Yes.

Lastly, my question for you today is "What must happen here in our gathering"? What is your hope and wish? What must the Nest Mission do? What you can do? How can we work together to bring your hope and wish to reality? My suggestion is that we meet this Jesus TODAY, who is already in our midst. Do you want to meet this Jesus, the street minister who deeply cares about us? We can work with him to get us out of all of our afflictions and bondages. So I want you to be part of this mission and not mere dinner guests. Jesus needs you to help yourself. Nest Mission needs your help to help you. None of us can do it alone. We are a team that must work together to bring healing and restoration to our lives. We can call it "Salvation." Now turn to the person sitting next to you. Ask what is his/her prayer concern. Pray for that friend's concern or problem. Do it for each other. And I will end with my prayer. Thank you.

6. Meeting Jesus who is the Good News

Scripture Text: Luke 4: 18-19

Theme: Jesus, the good News

We have been talking about Jesus the past few weeks. This evening, we are going to meet Jesus again. When you read the Bible verses try to name this Jesus. OK? Now, Let us read out loud Luke 4:18-19 on the screen: Luke 48-19:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

How would you name this Jesus? I named him "Jesus, the Good News. This passage is known to be Jesus' inauguration speech or his first sermon. When a President gives his inauguration speech, everyone's eyes are glued to the TV and they listen carefully. Why? Because it is his first and the foremost important speech that will give us some idea who he is, what he is up to, what his political agenda is and how he is going to lead the country, etc. In the same way, in this passage, Jesus tells us what he is up to and who he is. He introduces himself as the anointed one, which means he is God's Messiah. He doesn't say literally in this text but implies that "He himself is the Good News." Most of us believe that he came to save the world, which is good news for the world.

He visited Nazareth in Galilee region where he grew up. He spoke in a worship service at the temple just like I am preaching here right now. There His major message was that he was sent to bring good news to the poor, to the captives, to the blind and to the oppressed.

Why was what he said good news to the poor? Because 90% Galilean citizens were poor because they were exploited under the Romans. Many were enslaved by poverty. Their debts were mounting because they kept borrowing money to pay taxes to Roman government and to their own government. Many lost their farm land when they couldn't keep up with tax and debts. Many fell into day labor just as many of you lost jobs these days and fell into day labor. Many ended up begging on the streets just as some homeless persons today stand on the street with a sign saying, "I need help, I need a job." Many were sold into slavery for their debts. Most of them couldn't see any hope or future and lived like the blind. When they protested against such oppression, they were crucified or imprisoned. I bet many of you can relate to such life circumstances, right? Release of the oppressed, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the captives were certainly good news to poor Galileans who were sitting in the shadow of death.

Why is it good news to the poor? Jesus was referring to the year of the Lord, which is *Jubilee year*. All Galileans knew exactly what that meant. Jubilee meant that every 50th year, the overused and exploited land took a rest for a year; peasants forced to sell their land for debts would get it back; those sold into slavery because of debts could now come home. All of their past debts were cancelled.

The spirit of jubilee comes from their slavery experience in Egyptian bondage. Exodus 23:9 says, *"You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*

What if the U.S. government ever announced jubilee law so that the housing and the job you lost came back to you? You wouldn't need to sleep in your car, on the streets or in the park. Your credit card debts would be cancelled. All your traffic tickets and many other kinds of citations would all be cancelled, and police officers would not be on your back any longer. You wouldn't need to go to free dinner any more. When you hear such announcement wouldn't that be **good news** to you. You might shout for joy on top of your lungs, and dance and have a party. So can you understand Jesus' announcement as **good news** to the poor?

What will be good news for you today? When I say to you, "I am taking you out to dinner," isn't that a small good news for you? When I announce that we will offer Christmas gift of motel rooms

for 3 nights. Isn't that good news for you? If someone calls and asks me to send a few people to work that is good news for me because I know it is good news for you. When I said, "*Government is offering free cell phones. Come and apply for it.*" Wasn't that good news? When you get a phone call for a job offer on your new phone, isn't that good news? When Linda heard that her senior apartment is ready for her to move in, that was the best news we have been waiting for. When a cancer patient hears that he/she is cancer-free, isn't that good news? When I took off 30lb it was good news for me because it lowered my cholesterol. When you tell us that you are clean and sober that's good news for us and for Jesus as well.

What will it take to bring Jesus' good news to our reality? Remember that we are his partners? He needs us to bring his good news to our reality. He is giving us all the hopes, encouragement, strength and love that we may get out of our captivity in poverty, captivity of addictions, captivity of illness and captivity of hopelessness, captivity of despair, captivity of blindness and captivity of homelessness. But he needs our partnership. If you are lying under the cherry tree hoping cherries fall into your mouth that will never happen. God raised cherries and you must go to cherry tree and pick them yourself.

My concluding remark is that Jesus is the **good news** for us. Accepting this good news is an invitation to eternal life. All you need to do is meet him and walk into his presence. If it takes prayer to experience his good news, let us do it. If it takes sobriety, let us do it. If it takes giving up dope, let us do it. If it takes getting up early, let us do it. If it takes our patience, let us nurture it.

Elder Young Hee Kim sent me the following e-mail. It might be appropriate for what I am saying here:

I asked God to take away my habit. God said, No. It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up. I asked God to grant me patience. God said, No. Patience is a byproduct of tribulations; it isn't granted, it is learned.

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, "No," I give you blessings; Happiness is up to you. I asked God to spare me pain. God said, "No." Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me. I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, "No." I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.

Jesus, the good news, invites us to be his partners to bring us good news. Are you ready to accept that invitation? All God's people say loudly, "YES."

7. **New Year Sermon**

Bible text: Isaiah 43 : 18 -19

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

A. Introduction

Today is the first Sunday of the New Year of 2011. Isn't that wonderful that we are not in that difficult last year any longer? Did you all have good dreams on New Years' Eve? Korean people believe good dreams on the New Year's Eve will bring fortune throughout the New Year. Usually people are determined to make the New Year different from and better than the past year.

B. Let us reflect on the Scripture Text:

Today's scripture text comes from Isaiah 43: 18-19. God says, "*Do not remember old things but remember God is going to do a new thing.*"

From this Bible text our theme is "Old thing; new thing."

In Isaiah's days, Israel had been in Babylonian captivity for 70 years. Babylon defeated Israel and took almost the whole nation including people, wealth and resources to Babylon. Life in captivity was very difficult. They lost their country, their temple, family members, friends and all their belongings. In Babylon they knew no one, didn't speak their language and might have experienced cultural shock just as refugees anytime experience in a foreign country. They felt they had lost God too. They thought God failed and lost the war. They felt that it was God's punishment for their past sins. In the Babylonian captivity they also committed all kinds of sins, worshipping foreign gods, idols and doing many wrong things. But one day, God used the rising Persian Empire to defeat the brutal domination of Babylon. God won. Babylon lost.

God said to Israel, "I didn't forget you. I am going to do a new thing." God's new thing was God's plan to bring Israel back home. The old things God wouldn't remember and Israel mustn't remember were God's punishment of Israel into captivity and also forgiveness of all of their past bad things. God said, *I am not going to remember them and will bring you back home to your own country.* Therefore, don't think of old thing, and live a new life. Isn't that wonderful news?

C. Today, isn't God saying the same thing to us? Yes, God does. Now, what does that mean to us? Let us talk. What are your old things or your Babylonian captivity? What captivity have you been in? If you feel comfortable talking about this, let us talk. Yes, that's right. When you cannot stop drinking, or taking street drugs, you are in captivity. When you cannot stop stealing, you are in captivity. When you keep on living in your past hurt, pain and anger, you are in captivity. When you cannot find a job and keep your street life too long, you are in captivity. What other captivity have you been in? Anyone would like to share?

What then should be your new things in the New Year? Can you call out something that should be your new plan in the New Year? Yes, stop substance abuse will be a new thing for many people. Yes, ending homelessness by finding jobs and apartment will be a new thing for many of you. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Yes, for some of you, going to college will be a new thing. Yes, reconnecting to your family will be a new thing for some of you. All in all not repeating your past life style will be really a new thing in the New Year

How can you start these new things? Just sitting and looking up to the sky won't automatically bring you new things. You must decide to be partner with God using all of your God-given will power. In other words, you must have God in your new plan. Respect God more than last year. Have more faith in God. Relying on God will give you courage and strength to keep on working toward your new plan in the New Year. In your New Year plan also include prayer and reading bible on daily basis. Trust God. Work with God. God needs you to help you. You will also work with us, the Nest Mission. We will work with you to achieve your new things and new plans.

D. **What the New Things for the Nest Mission would be this year, as you wish?**

Korean Nest Mission has something new for the New Year.

1. We are changing dinner program from Sunday to Friday evening, beginning with the first Friday in February, which is February 4th at the same location.
2. We will focus services on homeless persons.
3. We will add singing, message and prayer.
4. We will add Bible study, God's words in your life.
5. We will also help you to pray for yourself and for others.
6. We will meet the homeless person, one by one, during the week by appointment.
8. We will be working as a team.
9. You are not just guests to this dinner. You are our partners. You are our families.

We won't force you to do these things. But we strongly encourage you to walk with us as we walk with you side by side.

E. My conclusion is that our new thing is Jesus Christ. This year, we are going to love him and work with him more to help bring many new things to you. Without Jesus Christ, we can't do much of a new thing. Without a change in us, there won't be a new thing for us. So, let us all experience something new this year. Let us all shout, "New Things, New Things." May God bless you with your plan to change.

8. **Lent sermon - Ash Wednesday sermon**

Scripture texts: PS. 51: 1-17

I. INTRODUCTION

We are walking into the "Lent" season. It is the period of 40 days beginning with Ash Wednesday to Easter. Lent is the time to remember Jesus' suffering and pain, to reflect upon our own lives and to repent seriously the way we live and commit to love and serve him more.

You see some volunteers and I are wearing purple shirts with the words - End Homelessness. When I developed these shirts, I chose the purple color which is the Lent Color. As we remember Jesus' suffering, we lament, repent, and commit to love him and serve him more. I chose the purple color to lament and repent for having so many homeless in this country and to commit to the mission of ending homelessness. I have been wearing a purple shirt since 1997, day and night. Many friends call me "a purple woman." It is my color of grief, repentance and commitment. It is also my mission color.

This year Ash Wednesday falls on March 9th and Easter falls on April 24.

I am starting early to talk about Ash Wednesday because I am not going to be here for the last two weeks of April.

The most visible and widespread ritual of Ash Wednesday is marking the forehead with ash, in the sign of cross saying "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," or saying, "Turn away from your sins and be faithful to the gospel. The ashes suggest a posture of penitence, and they remind us of our mortality and our humble place before God.

The second most familiar practice of a typical Ash Wednesday service is the communal recitation of Psalm 51. Expressing clear humility, David acknowledges his transgression and pleads for God's mercy. Let us read Ps. 51; 1-17 together and feel the heart of David:

A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

1. We have just read Ps, 51 which is known to be written by King David. In order to understand the heart of the author, David, we need to know some background of the writer. In the Bible, from his boyhood, David was known to be a very generous, faithful, compassionate man of faith who loved

and served God. However, after he became the king, he committed an unforgivable crime. He took Uriah's wife and committed adultery and murder. Uriah was one of 30 chosen men who commanded David's army. While Uriah was fighting in a war, David took advantage of Uriah's wife, Bathsheba and got her pregnant. In order to cover up his crime, David made a murder plot by sending Uriah to the forefront of the hardest fighting to have him killed. When the prophet, Nathan, confronted David and forced the king to acknowledge his transgressions, David cries out to God from a heart shredded by the guilt. That is Ps. 51.

2. Psalm 51 is David's plea to God, a prayer for forgiveness. David displays a painful awareness of his sins saying, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." He uses words, "transgression," "iniquity," "evil," to express his sins. He uses "have mercy," "be gracious," "steadfast love" to ask for forgiveness. The penitent employs five images for the remission of sin; "Blot out my transgressions," "Wash me," "Cleanse me," "Purge me with hyssop, and "Hide your face from my sins."

As a man of God, he knew he fell into temptation and caused harm to others. So, he poured out his soul before God deeply regretting what he had done. He trusted that God's mercy would forgive him. There was no way he could forgive himself. David truly repents and begs for a new start, a second chance. He begs God to "Create a clean heart in him." He knows that he cannot begin anew without God's mercy and grace. He trusts that God will accept his broken spirit and forgive him.

3. Sin is harmful to self and others. According to Albert Schweitzer, "The essence of Goodness is "Preserving life, promoting life, helping life to achieve its highest destiny. The essence of Evil is "Destroying life, harming life, hampering the development of life." David's sin surely harmed Bathsheba and Uriah and God. Our grave mistakes often destroy our relationships with self, others and God. For David, who had all the power as a king, took advantage of the powerless. He destroyed the life of Uriah and destroyed his family. The baby who was born between David and Bathsheba died and became another victim. God said David's sin was to despise and scorn God.

4. How do we relate to David's confession of sins? Ps. 51 is not just David's anguished prayer. It is also our prayer because before God's eyes "all are naked and laid bare." All of us are sinners. The author of the book, *Born to be Good*, says "We are born to be good and also born to be bad." We can be both ways and therefore constantly try to be good.

Augustine confessed, "*But if I was born in sin and guilt was with me already when my mother conceived me. Lord, where or when was I ever innocent?*" We are never innocent because in reality we are often alienated from God and from one another.

In this Lent season, many of you might identify with Jesus' suffering because many of you have been suffering. You know his pain and he knows your pain. We can also identify with David although we didn't commit the same crime (adultery and killing). We may regret some things that we have done. I sure do regret and repent some things that I have done. Therefore, it is very important that we pour out our sinful soul honestly before God and ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. I am sure God will hear us and forgive us.

5. As my concluding remarks I will quote the Christian writer, Frederick Buechner, who writes, "After being baptized by John in the river of Jordan, Jesus went off alone into the wilderness where he spent forty days asking himself the question what it means to be Jesus. During Lent, we must ask what it means to be Jean Kim, Ken, Doug, Scott, Steve, Marvin? Let us make this Lent season time for reflection, time to repent and time to hope. Amen.

9. **Lent sermon – Sunday – Palm Sunday Sermon**

Scripture text: Mark 11: 7-10.

Theme today is “Which procession are you in?”

INTRODUCTION

What would you do if you have just one week left to live on earth? Some homeless people might want to check in to a fancy hotel, take many showers, sleep on a comfortable warm bed for one week and die in that warm bed. Others might take a trip to a foreign country. Still others might spend one week with their children and family. This question sounds easy to answer but in fact, difficult because there might be too many things one might want to do.

Starting today, I am going to review Jesus’ last week on earth which is called “Holy Week, or Passion Week.” We are not at the Holy Week yet but, I start early because I will be gone for two weeks before and after the Easter. Today’s bible verse comes from Mark 11: 7-10. Let us all read it together:

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! 10. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

On the first day of his last week on earth, Sunday, he goes to Jerusalem from Galilee, which was a week prior to his execution. The distance from Galilee to Jerusalem was about hundred miles. It could have taken several days on foot. Don’t we all wonder why in the last week of his life he went to Jerusalem, the city that led him to passion? To answer this question we need to understand the Jerusalem of Jesus’ day and his relationship with her:

1. First-century Palestine was occupied by the Romans. The Empire was so exploitative that much of the peasant families’ income was extracted through the instruments of tithes, taxes, tolls, rents, tribute, and confiscation. Rome sold the privilege of collecting taxes to “tax farmers,” who were Jews. They were permitted to keep any excess above what the government required. Many Jewish farmers could not pay the Roman taxes and thus lost their land. Their mounting debts made them fall into day laborers, slavery, and robbers and beggars. It was a two-layered domination system: the local domination system and the Roman imperial domination system. Suppression, uproars, persecution, mass crucifixion on the cross, were common practice. Corpses were left on the cross to be food for birds and animals or thrown into tiger’s bin so that the whole body including bones was completely consumed. The whole purpose of such gruesome massive killing was to gain absolute control over the entire Jewish nation. This is the Jerusalem Jesus marched into.

2. What was happening in Jerusalem on that day Jesus entered? When he arrived just outside Jerusalem, he told his disciples to get a brand new young donkey for him. The crowd which came with him from Galilee or joined him on the way took off their top garments, put them on the donkey and Jesus sat on it. Others spread their clothes and palm branches on the road cheering and shouting, “Hosanna (meaning Lord saves), blessed is the one who comes.” Ever since, Christians call this day “Palm Sunday” because Jesus’ followers spread palm branches on the road. It is also called “Jesus’ Triumphant Entry.”

Historians report that there were two processions on that Palm Sunday. One was Jesus' humble procession on a donkey from the east, being cheered by his peasant followers from Galilee. The other was an imperial procession of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Jesus' procession portrayed the kingdom of God. Pilate's procession portrayed the power of the Roman Empire. The imperial procession was well known in the Jewish homeland of the first century. It was the standard practice of the Roman governors of Judea to be in Jerusalem for the major Jewish festivals in case there was a trouble. There often was, especially at Passover, a festival that celebrates the Jewish people's liberation from Egyptian bondage. Egypt was another earlier empire. For example, on our independence day, July 4, riots could break out by the oppressed racial minorities although it rarely happens here. I often wonder what will happen if several million current and formerly homeless people demonstrate on the streets in every city demanding jobs and housing!

Jesus' procession was very humble with Jesus riding on a donkey. In sharp contrast, Pilate's procession was a show-off of the empire's power with cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold, and also with sounds of the marching feet, the creaking of leather, the clinking of bridles, and the beating of drums. Pilate's procession displayed not only imperial power, but also Roman imperial theology. According to this theology, the emperor was the ruler of Rome and the Son of God. Do you think Jesus would appreciate this? No. Hearing what he taught in his 3 year ministry, we don't think so.

3. Jesus' procession deliberately challenged what was happening on the other side of the city. While Pilate's procession displayed the power, glory, and violence of the empire, Jesus' procession displayed an alternative vision, the kingdom of God. It appeared to be an anti-imperial entrance affirming nonviolence that countered the violence-based triumphal entrance of Pilate's imperial power. The confrontation between the two kingdoms continues through the last week of Jesus' life. While the Holy Week is the story of our Lord Jesus who suffered for our sins, it was also socio-politically a confrontation with the Roman Empire. In this confrontation Jerusalem plays the central role.

If Jesus preached just, "Believe in Emperor God you will be saved," nothing bad could happen to him. He might have even been welcomed by Roman governor. But his silent, non-violent procession into this Jerusalem was his strong non-verbal challenge against this domination system, because Jewish religious authorities collaborated with Roman occupying forces and legitimated it in the name of God.

Now do you see what his march to Jerusalem meant and what the price was? Down the line, we will talk more about that the whole month. Mark recorded in 14:1-2 that two days before the Passover festival, the chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus.

4. Do you see another empire in our time? There is a book titled "American Empire" written by Boston University professor. I know many of you sit in the library. Read it when you can and find out the similarities and differences between the American Empire and Roman Empire. In the United States, nearly 5 million people experience homelessness every year. 49 million people suffer from poverty and 47 million Americans don't have health insurance. In Washington State, as of July 1, 2011, 66,000 persons will lose their Basic Health Plan. 21,000 will lose Disability Lifeline benefits. 26,000 clients of Community Mental Health will experience funding cuts.
5. My concluding question for us today is between the two processions, which procession are we marching in? Which procession do we want to be in? I know homeless brothers and sisters might want to be in procession with Jesus. Do you? Do some of you wish to be in Pilate's procession? For some of us, one foot might be in Pilate's procession and the other foot is in Jesus' procession. Right?

Do you see this Jesus who is marching into Jerusalem to represent people like you in his day and today? He paid the price with his own life for his marching for you and for me. Is there anyone in this whole world who would march and die for you and me? He alone did it for you and me. Can we say, "thank you, Jesus, for marching in to Jerusalem on our behalf?" He keeps marching in all contemporary exploitive empires. Are you in Jesus' procession or in Pilate's? Lent is demanding our answer to this question. Let us pray.

10. **Lent sermon – Monday**

Scripture Text: Mark 11: 15 -18

Theme: House of Prayer

We are in Jesus' Passion Week. Last week, Sunday was his first day in Jerusalem. We talked about why Jesus marched into Jerusalem on a donkey, what Jerusalem looked like in those days, and what his silent marching into Jerusalem meant, etc. We ended with a question "Who are you marching with?"

Today we look at his second day, Monday, in Jerusalem. I chose the Bible verse from Mark 11: 15 -18. Let us all read together:

15 Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.'¹⁸ And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him;

For those who weren't here last week, let me repeat briefly what the Jerusalem and the Temple looked like: The First-century Palestine was occupied by the Romans. The Roman Empire exploited Jewish people through the tithes, taxes, tolls, rents, tribute. Rome sold the privilege of collecting taxes to "tax farmers," who were Jews. They extracted as much as they could from their own people and kept the rest after paying required amount to Rome. Many Jewish farmers who could not pay the Roman taxes ended up losing their land, falling into day labor, slavery, robbers and beggars. Suppression, uproars, persecution, mass crucifixion on the cross, were common practice.

First, today we will talk about his second day, Monday, in Jerusalem. Jesus went into the Jerusalem Temple. What was the Temple like in his day and why did he go to temple first?

The Rome assigned the role of local administration to the temple and its authorities. Jerusalem Temple was also the center of imperial tax system that collected taxes. The Jerusalem temple now became the central economic and political institution. In this system, temple authorities were the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes who became wealthy land owners. Thus, the Jerusalem temple was the center of local collaboration with Rome. The Jerusalem Temple was quite different from our churches today. While we can worship at any church anywhere, the Jews in those days treated Jerusalem Temple as THE only residence of God on earth just as there is only one White House in the whole world for the U.S. citizens. So the Jews worship there only. At special occasions, Jews came to worship there from all over the world. Can you imagine this Temple, God's only residence on earth being a business center selling and buying things for the offering and a tax office?

Our second point is what did he do in the Temple? Anyone remember? Yes, he drove out all the sellers and buyers in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. Anyone remember why did he do that? Yes, he had two reasons for doing that: First reason was, "My house shall be called a "House of prayer for all the nations." Second reason was, "But you have made it a den of robbers."

I want to reflect upon these two points - "Den of Robbers" and "House of Prayer." For your reference, first, let me add this: Today we bring money to the church as our offering. But in those days, people brought animals, crops and coins to the temple as sacrifices for their sins.

Firstly, den meant in those days a cave in the mountains where robbers set up their stronghold, plot further crimes, and guard their loot. From the quotation's context in Jeremiah 7 and 26, a "den" was a hideaway, a safe house, a refuge. Therefore, den was the place where robbers escape justice.

"Robbery" refers to what is going on in the outer Court of the Gentiles. The outer court was the only part where Gentiles were allowed in the temple. It was a hubbub of activity. People were exchanging coins so that pilgrims from other lands could pay the temple tax. Dealers were supplying pilgrims with certified clean sacrificial animals. Officials sold doves to the poor which were less expensive alternatives to sacrificial lambs. Therefore, there was profit-taking going on. The religious establishment had to certify animals "clean." Thus, they could reject animals that pilgrims presented and sell their own at much higher prices. They could set exchange rates on currency unfairly. They could even overcharge for the doves, which were made available to the poor. The temple court was also being used as a shortcut; the shortest route from the Kidron valley into Jerusalem right through the temple court. It served as a short-cut street.

Can you picture a very noisy, busy and chaotic atmosphere in the temple instead of calm and quiet place for meditation? We can tell Jesus was upset about the commercialism, excessive profit taking by temple officials and robbing of the pilgrims, the poor (11: 15-17) and widows (12:40). By filling the outer court with merchandise, they robbed Gentiles of their place of prayer. Ultimately, they were robbing God. They stole the honor that belongs to God (12:38-40), and they withheld their love (12:28-34; cf. Jer. 7:30). They were not giving God what belongs to God (12:17).

Jeremiah said: *"This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord," (Jer. 7:4). The people commit abominations, and sinners stand before God in the temple saying, "We are safe!" (Jer. 7:10). But they are not.*

According to Mark, Jesus considered the religious leaders a bunch of robbers.

Secondly, he called the Temple, "the House of Prayer." In Jesus' days, neither Jesus nor anyone else could stand where the money changers sat and the pure animals were sold, saying that the temple was not open to all people. In the outer court, where Gentiles are welcome to worship alongside Jews, there was no place for all the nations, all people.

In his days and today, God observes much religious activity in the temple or church. God is asking, where is worship, Where is prayer in all this commotion and noise? They have perverted the temple. It has become a den of robbers. It is no longer a house of prayer.

Where does God see anyone loving God and neighbor with heart, mind, soul and strength (12:30-33)? In the Old Testament, God repeatedly said, "I reject your worship because of your lack of justice" (Amos 5:21-24).

Lord require of us to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. (Mic. 6:6-8) God said: "When you stretch your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow". (Is. 1:15-17).

Since God is justice, worship cannot be separated from justice because worship or union with a God of justice empowers the worshipper for a life of justice. Jesus wasn't seeing any of this and ended up carrying out a dramatic demonstration. He stopped the trading, turned over the tables and chairs, and blocked off the shortcuts and the merchandise traffic.

Scholars claim that Jesus' actions loudly proclaimed the *already present* Kingdom of God against Jewish high-priestly collaboration. In that criticism, he stands *with* the prophet Zechariah for the anti-imperial entry against violence and with Jeremiah for the anti-temple action against injustice He also

stands *against* those forms of Christianity that were used throughout the centuries to support imperial violence and injustice.

He stands *against* many contemporary churches which have many activities but no true worship - No justice but apathy toward the poor and homeless.

Our third point is "What are Jesus' words and action telling us today?" Is God asking us the same question? I see all the activities going on here, setting up dinner table, getting food ready, eating and, distributing daily necessities, etc. Where is true worship and prayer in all this commotion and noise? God is asking!

Therefore, having time for singing, prayer and worship is our answer to God. When we do that, our attitude must be right for worship. If you are invited to the White House by the President, how would you present yourself? Anybody has any idea? When you come here, do you believe that you are invited by Jesus Christ? I wouldn't expect the homeless brothers and sisters to show up with clean clothes on. But I would expect you to present yourself at least "sober." because we respect and honor God and Jesus. When you appear before the President of the United States, wouldn't you present yourself at least sober because you respect the president?

We do everything in this one room. But let us not make it a den of chaos. When we worship God, let us put all of our hearts, souls, and minds together. When a minister preaches, let us be quite, pay your full attention, concentrate and focused. When we pray to God, let us be honest with God. God knows all about our thoughts and actions, we might as well be honest with God. When we pray for others, let us be sincere so that God will hear you prayer.

I want all of us to get into a habit of singing the communion song before our dinner because I consider our meal is the heavenly banquet and dining with God.

I did this with homeless women downtown when I served the Church of Mary Magdalene. I also want us to say the Lord's Prayer after the pastoral prayer. Let us make this place "A house of prayer for all people" as Jesus claimed. Let us all repeat loudly, "House of Prayer." "House of Prayer." Amen.

11. Lent sermon – Tuesday

Scripture Text: Mark 12:28-34 (Matt. 22:34-40; Luke 10: 25-28; Rom. 13: 8-10)

Theme: The Great Commandment

INTRODUCTION

Today we are going to talk about Jesus' important saying on his third day in Jerusalem. Anyone remember what he did on the first day, Sunday? Yes, he marched into Jerusalem with people who came with him from Galilee. Anyone remember what he did on the second day? He entered the temple and turned over tables and chairs, because the temple had become a den of robbers claiming the temple must be a House of Prayer.

Today we look at his third day in Jerusalem. There were arguments and debates with Jesus on many issues but I chose an important question raised by a scribe. What would you say if I ask you to summarize the whole Bible in two sentences? Anyone has any idea?

Let us now read our bible text and see what it says. All look at the screen and read it together. Mark 12:28-31:

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' 29 Jesus answered... 'The first is, 30 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." 31 The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

1. One of the scribes asked Jesus, "*Which commandment is the first of all?*"

This question comes from a "Scribe," who was an expert in interpreting the Old Testament Law for people in those days. This question was known to be an ongoing popular discussion in those days because there were too many laws to keep. In the first century, they had only first 5 books in the Old Testament. They were called Torah. But the Torah contained 613 laws (365 prohibitions and 248 commands). It was very difficult for people to keep all these laws. Punishment for violation was severe too. So in Jesus' days, Jewish teachers were wrestling with the question of how all these commandments relate to each other, and how can they be summarized in one or more basic commandment on which all other laws hang together. Therefore, scribes were challenged to develop a single, simple, working principle that would encompass all of the other statutes.

So a Scribe came to Jesus and asked "*Which commandment is the first of all?*" This question has too frequently been misinterpreted by many people as a priority question. The question is NOT about chronology, "Which was given first." NOT about priority, "Which is more important than the other?" It has more to do with centrality. The question is, "Which commandment is at the heart of the law?" Which commandment is the most important of all? Which is the chief commandment of all? Which commandment determines the proper application of all the others? Therefore, he is asking, "What is most central?" "What matters most?" His question is a very good and legitimate one that everyone in those days was asking. Even today, we want to ask the same question, right?

2. Jesus answered, "*The first is, 'You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Deut. 6:5-6). The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Lev. 19:18). There is no other commandment greater than these.*" Then the scribe agreed with Jesus. No one else raised any more questions. The Bible says because no one could beat Jesus in such a debate.

Because Jesus said, the first and the second, people tend to interpret it as a priority answer, thinking the first one has higher priority and the second one is less important. That is not what Jesus was saying. What he meant is that the commandments to love God and neighbor stand together at the heart of

the Torah (Law). It states that everything *in the law and the prophets* hangs on these two commandments. The multitude of laws in Scripture are valid *in as much as* and *insofar as* to love God and neighbor. Some scholars call it “Twin Commandments” or “Double Commandments.” “Love your God” is called vertical love between God and us. “Love your neighbor” is called horizontal love between human beings. The two cannot be separated. They are one. The vertical love must accompany the horizontal love. The two must stay together. One without the other wouldn’t work.

3. Love your God refers to an active, caring love that invests heart, soul, mind, and strength in the service of God and others. To love others adequately requires a redirection of these energies. Instead of active investment of our energies to serve ourselves, we are called to active investment of them in the service of God and others (cf. 10: 43-45). To love God above all else means giving to God what belongs to God; our heart, soul, mind, and strength. These belong to God.

A decade before Jesus, the great Jewish teacher Hillel replied to a Gentile who asked for a concise summary of Jewish law, *"What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor; this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it."*

Because the commandments to love God and to love your neighbor are separated in Old Testament Scriptures, the Pharisees had an excuse to lower the priority of the second commandment. Even today, many Christians do that. Jesus takes away their excuse by fusing into one simple and inseparable commandment what they believe about God, how they relate to Him, and how they treat their neighbor. To love one's neighbor as one's self means to refuse to accept the divisions between the righteous and sinners, the rich and poor, friends and enemies, and Jews and Gentiles.

You and I know how hard to love God and our neighbor because loving God is not just a spiritual term because it is not possible to love God without accompanying love our neighbor. Love our neighbor means our action. Therefore, without this action loving God is not possible. (-- RE-write

Many of us find it also hard to love our neighbors because too often we put our neighbors in the category of “others” and discriminate against them instead of loving them. Everyone has many “others; those of other races, other nations, other cultures, other parts of town, other religious beliefs, other political ideologies, and those who are so other that we call them enemies. In America, the poor and homeless are others to many people who discriminate against them. I noticed these others abuse and take advantage of each other instead of feeling sorry and empathetic with each other. I heard homeless people use and abuse each other by stealing from and exploiting each other. Anyone among you feels like being treated as one of these "others?" I am sure many have experienced that.

4. Jesus’ point is to include all these others and love them as our neighbors. Jesus' critique of the temple system (11:15-17) was that they have kept their system running, but have failed to love God and neighbor. Jesus’ conclusion is that there is something more important than all the sacrifices and ceremonies. What really matters is the condition of the heart. What matters is the quality of one's relationship to God. What matters is the quality of relationship within the community and with those in need. Love, not legalism or ceremonialism, is the way of God's kingdom.

It is the commandment for us too. How are we doing with this commandment – Love God and Love our neighbor?

Theologian Schlabach says "If we are freed from slavery to sin and self, we are also freed to live for others." The way we can love all others is recognition of who we are, what are our behaviors and

action, repent, change and be free from sins. That will make it possible for us to love God and others. Therefore, it takes lots of work to love God and our neighbors. My concluding remark is that when we put our act together then we can love our God and neighbor. All God's people say, Amen.

12. **Lent sermon: Tuesday**

Mark 12: 13-17

Theme: Pay tax

INTRODUCTION

We are in the Lenten season. It is a season when we think of Jesus' passion. We grieve and repent for his suffering on our behalf to forgive our sins. This month we are reflecting upon Jesus last week Jesus on earth. Today we will talk about the third day. In Jerusalem, Temple authorities try to find fault with Jesus to kill him. He teaches, argues, debates and deals with all the traps adversaries put on him. To learn about a particular challenge let us read the bible text, Mark 12: 14-17 and see what the argument is on Jesus' third day.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?' But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' ¹⁶ And they brought one. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were utterly amazed at him.

As our text explains, the argument is about paying tax. Tax issue is gravely important then and as it is now. These days, we too are serious about paying taxes. No one enjoys paying taxes. In the U.S. many people decide who to vote depending on the candidate's position on tax. Especially in this time of recession, local and federal governments try to raise tax to pay off the debts and to do domestic programs. They challenge the rich to pay more taxes to overcome the recession. The rich don't like that idea at all.

1. **First, Let us reflect upon our text:**

Who are trapping Jesus? In the story, "Pharisees and Herodians" are sent to trap Jesus. The Jewish authorities are the chief priest, scribes and elders. Pharisees and Herodians allied with each other and collaborated with the Roman Empire. Therefore, they were the adversaries of Jesus.

What was the question? "Should we pay tax to the emperor or should we not?" In those days, it was a very serious matter for all, including common Jewish people, Roman Empire and Jewish collaborators of the Rome. The Roman Empire profited from per capita head tax, land tax and agriculture tax from the Jewish people. For Jewish collaborators, it was also matter of their livelihood because they were the ones who collected tax on behalf of Roman Empire and they too benefited from the tax. Their political position would also be seriously threatened if a multitude of Jews refused to pay the tax. For common Jewish people, the taxation was economically burdensome. It also symbolized the Jewish homeland's lack of sovereignty. It was the oppression of the Jews by an alien Empire. The extreme nationalists or Zealots had refused to pay tax saying, "NO." The Herodians said, "Yes." The Pharisees went along with paying it, although they did not like it. The resistance to pay tax had become a headache to the Roman and the Jewish authorities. Therefore, the Jewish authorities sent the Pharisees and Herodians to trap Jesus with this burning question about the tax.

Why was the question a trap? Because either answer would get Jesus in trouble. If Jesus says, "Pay," he will offend the crowds and risked discrediting himself with the crowd that praised Jesus and followed him; If he said, "Do not pay," he could be charged with denial of Roman authority with sedition. That was treated as a serious crime in those days.

How did Jesus respond? Jesus told them to show him a denarius. So they brought one. A denarius was a silver coin equal to a day's wage. His interrogators easily got one out of their pocket. Jesus looked at it and then asked, "Whose head and whose title is this?" In other words, "Whose image and inscription is this?" Their answer was, "The emperor's." Jesus then said, Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.

Our second point is what are some of the implications?

Those Jewish who pulled out a coin out of their pocket must have forgotten that Jewish law and oral law considered the image on the coin idolatry. Thus, in the first century, the Jews used a coin that had no image on it. Many Jews would not carry a coin that has a human image on it. But Jesus' interrogators did have it. It was a serious matter. Instead of trapping Jesus, they themselves were tested and they ended up proving that they violated Jewish law and were hypocrites. Jesus' strategy was brilliant. It was a counter trap on his opponents.

What belongs to God? For Jesus and many of his Jewish contemporaries, everything belongs to God. The land of Israel belongs to God. Leviticus 25:23 says, "*The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.*" The vineyard belongs to God, not to the local collaborators, not to Rome. The whole earth belongs to God (Ps. 14:1).

What belongs to Caesar? The implication is "nothing." Because they had seized the land of the Jews. Nothing in the land of Israel belonged to Caesar. He didn't say it out loud but implicitly meant "we give everything to God" but "nothing to Caesar." But those who assumed the occupied land of Israel and Israelites belonged to Caesar heard as if Jesus was saying "give to Caesar what belongs to him" and "to God what belongs to God."

Some interpret that "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" also establishes a priority of loyalty. Since God created us in the image of God, God owns us. We belong to God. Whatever bears the image of God - humankind that is made in God's likeness belongs exclusively to God. God is therefore due the highest loyalty and ultimate obedience of persons, who are God's own, not to Caesar.

Some others interpret Jesus' answer to mean that the state is due the loyalty and support of its citizens. While we owe some duty to the state, our primary loyalty belongs to God. For Jesus, the land of Israel was taken and robbed by the Romans. What Jesus makes clear is that our primary obligation to God includes and transcends every other duty including our duty to the state.

Our final point is reflecting the story to our own social context: Many people in the U.S. pay tax reluctantly. Most of us don't think that we are blessed and therefore, pay some of our income for the country. We think we give out of our own wealth. But it is God-given wealth. As people of God, and citizens of this country, we have a privilege and a responsibility to God and to the state.

Is there anyone who gives God a monetary offering? Is there anyone who pays tax to the state? As people of God, you don't bring any offering to God because you don't have money. As citizens, most of you don't pay tax to the state either because most of you are low income people.

We are still alive because some people pay tax and God cares for us. Food stamps, SSI, Medicaid, GAU - all come from the tax money. Therefore, we owe God and state, or tax payers for our sustenance.

What can we do for God and for the state? Although we have no income or have low income, we must do something. We can't keep on wasting ourselves because we don't have jobs. Then what can we do for God and for the state or tax payers? Yes, we can give them what we have. What do you have? Yes, time, talents, and yourself. Yes, you can serve God and state with yourself, your talents and time.

This is the Lenten season. It is time to reflect upon our lives. Jesus suffered for us. We can't waste our lives in drinking or doing nothing. To serve God and our country we give ourselves, our time and talents for good causes. This is our home work in this Lenten Season. If you agree with me, all God's people say, AMEN.

13. **Lent sermon: Wednesday**

Scripture: Mark 14: 1-10

Theme: Best gifts

Do you all still remember we are in Lenten Season? It is the time to reflect upon our lives seriously, repent and repair.

I have a few questions for you. One is: Do you remember getting the best gift from someone? Let's name some. My second question is: Can you name someone you want to give the best gift that you own? My third question is; if you know your loved one will die in a few days, what would you like to do for that person?

Today we are going to talk about Jesus' 4th day, Wednesday, in Jerusalem.

It was a very stressful and anxious time for Jesus. He was standing between the plot by chief priest, elders and scribes to kill him (14: 1-2) and Judas' plan to betray and hand him (14: 10-11) over to killers. He knew he had only a couple of days left to walk on his two feet in this world, and he would face the most horrible, the most painful, the most unbearable and the most cruel death. In that desperate moment something beautiful was happening to him by a woman. What was it? Let us read today's Bible texts together from Mark 14: 1-10:

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ² for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,* and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news* is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

During the day Jesus was in Jerusalem teaching and debating but at night Jesus retreated to Bethany for the night rest. Bethany must have been a nearby town to Jerusalem. He had friends in Bethany; Mary, Martha, Lazarus and others. In Bethany, while he was having dinner at the house of Simon, the leper, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of nard oil. It was a very costly ointment, worth of one years wage of a day laborer. Many of you are day laborers. You know how hard it is to save money especially worth of your one year wage because it is big money.

Who was that woman? Some versions say she was Mary, Lazarus' sister. Other version would say she was a sinner. Others say she was Mary Magdalene. Since it happened in Bethany, it could have been Lazarus' sister because they lived in Bethany. Or it could have been Mary Magdalene because she travelled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem and she was with Jesus till his last breath on the cross. Mary Magdalene even followed when Jesus' body was laid down.

Anyway, it was best and precious thing she had saved which was an alabaster jar full of expensive ointment. She broke open the jar and poured ointment on Jesus' head and anointed him. Anointing the head of a king or a priest meant a special calling from God. Prophets in Ancient Israel established a king after anointing him. People also anointed a body to prepare for burial.

Her story written in all four Gospels suggests that this story was very important to early Christian communities.

There were two immediate contrasting responses; one from Jesus' disciples and the other was from Jesus himself.

Disciples blamed her for wasting the expensive ointment; "*Some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her."* They didn't understand why she did it. Nor did she explain why she did it.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus told disciples three times that he would suffer and die on the cross and would rise three days later. But they didn't believe him. They didn't understand that Jesus trip to Jerusalem was a final one.

But if it was Mary Magdalene, she too heard it, did understand and believed what Jesus said. Some historians say that she was very insightful to Jesus' messages and understood him better than other disciples. She wanted to do something for him. She wanted to give him the best gift that she owned. She must have known who Jesus was. She must have been very appreciative of and loved him so much.

In response to disciple's criticism of her action, Jesus said, *Leave her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.*

What is the essence of the story?

Jesus was on the way to the cross. Jerusalem for the disciples was a place of victory while it was a place of suffering and death for Jesus. Of all those who heard Jesus' three prophecies of his death and resurrection, she alone heard and believed what he said. She decided to give him her best. This woman's anointing of Jesus is a symbolic act of declaration that Jesus is Messiah. This woman's act also foreshadows Jesus' crucifixion (Mk 14:8-9). This woman's act is contrasted with disciples, who never understood Jesus. It is also contrasted with Judas, who betrayed his teacher. Her gracious act is also contrasted with the religious leaders' plot to kill him. She truly loved Jesus and understood him.

Therefore, for Jesus, this woman's act was the best gift for him. So, he gave her his best gifts in return with his highest praise that anyone had ever heard from Jesus before. *Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.* Two thousand years later, even you and I hear about her inspiring story. Christians remember her and her story forever.

Theologians, Spong and Borg wrote that, *In the Gospel of Mark, she is the first believer. She was the first Christian. She believed in the word of Jesus even before his resurrection. She represents the perfect disciple-leader. This passage shows contrast between believer and traitor, and the best and the worst.* *Betraying Jesus represents the worst action possible.*

Jesus is about to give his best gift. In two days, he was going to give his own life for all of us. That is the best gift he could give us to forgive our sins.

Our concluding question for ourselves can be: Do you appreciate Jesus for giving his life for you? Do you want to give him your best gift? What would that be? With what can you make him happy? Any idea? Is your sobriety the best gift for Jesus? If it is, let's do it. What else? My best gift for Jesus might be loving and serving YOU even in limited way. Let us now close our eyes and pray to Jesus and promise our best gifts for him in this Lent season. Now you can open your eyes. All God's people say "Amen."

14. Lent sermon: Thursday – Jesus' Last Supper

Mark 14: 17-25

17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' ¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' ²⁰ He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' ²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.' ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

INTRODUCTION

We have been talking about Jesus' last week on earth. Today we are going to talk about Jesus' fifth day, Thursday, in Jerusalem. On his fifth day, many things were happening in Jerusalem. Of many significant events, I am going to focus on Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. The Last Supper is very important to all Christian Churches.

Is there anyone who has lost loved one(s)? Do you remember your last supper with him or her before their passing? Where did you eat your last supper with him or her? What kind of food was their last supper? The reason I asked you to think of the last meal that your loved ones had with you is to help us to think of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples and the meaning of that Supper for us today.

Knowing he was going to be arrested and killed, Jesus had his Last Supper with his disciples. Jesus' Last Supper was not just an ordinary supper. It was a special Supper. Christian churches have been celebrating his Last Supper for the past 2,000+ years because his Last Supper has significant meaning for the church.

1. The Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples was a Jewish Passover meal. Jesus wanted to have the Passover meal as his last Supper with his disciples. What is Passover? Passover is the great annual Jewish celebration of God's greatest act of liberating Israel from Egyptian bondage. When God killed all the first born in Egypt to liberate Israelites, God passed over the Jewish homes that had blood of lamb on their door post. Therefore, Jewish Passover is their story of deliverance and liberation. Passover was their birth as a nation. It was their Independence Day. As we celebrate July 4, every year, they celebrated their Passover every year with a special meal of lamb meat and unleavened bread as their ancestors had on the day they left Egypt.

2. Jesus' Last Supper has explicit connection to Jesus' impending death. Jesus took bread and wine, and blessed them and thanked God for them and said, *This is my body that is given for you*. He took a cup and said *this is the new covenant in my blood*.

The Christian Church interprets that breaking bread to mean Jesus' body that was broken for the sake of others. Pouring wine means blood that Jesus shed to forgive sins of many people. Therefore, this Last Supper Jesus shared with disciples was not only his farewell meal but also has to do with confessing our sins and being forgiven because he had given his body and blood to forgive all the sins of humanity. This is what the Christians confess ever since.

All twelve disciples participated in the bread-as-body and wine-as-blood. By *eating* the bread and *drinking* the cup, Jesus wanted his disciples to commit to live out what Jesus did - giving his body and blood to save the world.

In the biblical setting, this meal is usually labeled "the Last Supper." In the setting of the church, when the ritual of bread and cup is reenacted, the event is called the Lord's Supper, Communion, or Eucharist. The Eucharist derives from the Greek verb *Eucharisteo*, means "giving thanks".

3. Jesus often shared meals with people. He often taught at meals. The event of a woman anointing Jesus also took place at a meal. Banquets were topics of his parables. His meal practice was often criticized by his opponents, because Jesus often ate with tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:16) who were the undesirables, the marginalized and outcasts. With whom one shared a meal was very significant in that society. It might be somewhat true today too. If I had a lunch with our governor what would you think of that? I have had a lunch with 21 homeless friends so far up to this week. When you are invited to have a lunch with me, how that makes you feel? You are invited to our Friday dinner. How does that make you feel? Jesus' meal practice was about inclusion in a society with sharp social boundaries and discrimination.

For Jesus, they were real meals. For Jesus, real food - bread - mattered. In his teaching, "bread" symbolized the material basis of existence, as in the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." For Jesus' peasant audience, bread - enough food for the day - was a central survival issue of their lives, just as the supper we offer here is for your survival - not a symbolic one.

4. My concluding remark is that the congregation eats bread and drinks wine in remembrance of Jesus' death. We too are invited to share his life and share what we have with others.

One scholar said,

"Neither denials nor even betrayals are the worst sin against Jesus or God.

The worst sin is despair. That is the loss of faith that repentance will always obtain forgiveness. All of us can make mistakes and commit sins. But if we repent, Jesus would always forgive us. That is the meaning of his Last Supper. Do you all get that? Now, let us close our eyes and confess our mistakes to Jesus and ask forgiveness. For meals, we sing "Let us break bread together on our knees." Let us take this dinner we offer as the reminder of Jesus' Last Supper.

15. **Lent sermon: Thursday – Disowning Jesus**

Bible Text: Mark 14: 17:50;

Theme: Disowning Jesus

INTRODUCTION

We four pastors have been talking about Jesus' last week on earth. Today is my turn to talk about Jesus' fifth day in Jerusalem. The fifth day is called "Maundy Thursday" in Christian tradition. This Maundy Thursday moves Jesus' last week toward its climax. Maundy derives from the Latin word for the "mandate" - the new commandment that Jesus left as his last gift for his followers in John 13:34:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I loved you"

Maundy Thursday begins the most serious part of the most sacred week of the Christian year. It is also called "Holy Thursday." This fifth day was emotionally most difficult day for Jesus because he was anticipating the crucifixion the next day. My Bible text comes from Mark 14: 17-50. Let us read together:

17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'one of you will betray me ... woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' 26 When they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters;' 29 Peter said to him, 'Even though all become deserters, I will not.' 30 Jesus said to him, 'this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' 31 But he said vehemently, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And all of them said the same. 32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' 33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34 And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ... The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.' 43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' 45 So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. 50 All of them deserted him and fled.

What is the theme of this passage? We can choose a few themes from this text but I chose "Disowning Jesus" as our theme because this paragraph uses words betray, denial, and desert ten times. It seems to be the central theme of the paragraph. I am going to make a few points.

My first point is that Thursday was the most difficult day for Jesus; knowing he would be killed by the most cruel and painful crucifixion on the cross, his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow. He threw himself upon the ground, being filled with anguish. Mark describes Jesus as "distressed," "agitated," "deeply grieved, even to death," Mark presents him as a vulnerable human being. As the Son of God, he became one of us. Many of us can relate to such an anguish, desperation and helplessness. Anyone would like to share your experience?

My second point is that through the whole paragraph Jesus uses the words betray, deny Jesus, and desert ten times; at his last supper, he announces that one of the twelve disciples will betray him. Jesus said of his betrayer, Judas, "woe to him who betrayed me. It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Jesus took betrayal very seriously and sounds angry, who wouldn't? After supper, on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, he predicted that all of his disciples would desert

him. Yes, they did by falling asleep while Jesus was agonizing. Jesus also predicted Peter, the chief disciple of Jesus, would deny him 3 times. When the temple police force arrived with Judas to arrest Jesus on the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus call them "betrayers." While Jesus was being arrested, all of his disciples deserted him and fled. That evening, Peter denied Jesus three times. But Peter repented, broke down and wept. Judas sold Jesus for money and betrayed him. He felt so bad about this, he threw money at the betrayers and killed himself. One scholar said, neither denials nor even betrayals are the worst sin against Jesus or God. The worst sin is despair - loss of faith that repentance will *always obtain forgiveness*. Had Judas broken down, wept, and repented, he too would have been forgiven.

People also betrayed Jesus by giving false testimony against Jesus. The high priest, elders, the scribes, and whole council betrayed and disowned one of their own Jewish brothers, their own rabbi colleague, and their own spiritual leader by crucifying him when no crime had been committed. (??????)

The whole chapter is talking about disowning Jesus. Judas disowned Jesus by selling him for money. Disciples disowned Jesus by falling asleep and later by deserting him. Peter disowned Jesus three times by denying his teacher. Jesus' own people disowned him by standing with killers. Jesus was denied, betrayed, abandoned, deserted and disowned by his colleagues, friends, and by his disciples at his most critical moment in his life. No one stood with him except a few women who came with Jesus from Galilee. He walked all alone on that lonesome death valley with only a few women nearby him.

Anyone would like to share your experience of being disowned in your life and in time of your despair no one was there for you. You might have disowned by your spouses, children, friends, or even by society. Or did you disown anyone?

My third point is about how Jesus handled his despair, anguish fear of death and betrayals. I am going to read Mark 14: 36: "*Take this cup away from me, yet, not what I want, but what you want.*" At first, Jesus tried to avoid the cup of death but decided to drink it if it is God's will. In other words, if it accomplishes the purpose he came to the world he was willing to pay the price. He had accepted and overcome such an anguish and betrayal by committing his life into the hands of God. When he entrusted all of these into the hands of God in absolute trust, he wasn't afraid to take the crucifixion. It is an amazing trust in God. Do we have such a trust in God?

One day, a little boy was caught in a burning house. He was looking out through upstairs window crying and screaming. His father screamed back at him from the ground to jump into his arm. First the child, looking down the window and was scared to jump, crying and didn't know what to do. But his father kept calling on him to jump, saying, "Son, trust me, I will catch you into my arm and you will be safe. I promise. Jump." The child put his total trust into his father, and jumped from the window. The father caught him into his arm safely. The child was saved from the fire. Do we have such a trust in God?

Jesus story on this Holy Thursday reminds us of many of our own experience of being betrayed and disowned, and our own betrayal of someone. Jesus' experience also reminds us of our lack of trust in God in time of our despair.

My conclusion is this: When the disciples and when we disowned Jesus, we disowned God. When the disciples and we disowned Jesus and God, we disowned ourselves. We are created by God and owned by God. When parents disown their children they disown themselves because they gave birth to their children. When we hate our parents and never see or love them, we disown them. When we disown our parents, we disown ourselves because we come from them. When we disown anyone, we disown ourselves. We all belong to God's family. God is our creator and our parent. Therefore, we never can disown anyone. The only option we have is to love one another.

God never disowns us. God is always with us, loves us and is on our side. Therefore, we offer you an opportunity to worship God every Friday. For many of you, this is weekly worship since you

don't go to church on Sundays. Going to churches for meals is not same as going to church to worship God. Therefore, we urge you to come early to sing to God and worship God.

Lenten season is the time to think of Jesus suffering and also review our own life seriously, if we disowned Jesus and ourselves by our behaviors and life styles.

This is the time we need to repent those behaviors.

Jesus had overcome his death by trusting God. We must learn from Jesus to put all of our troubles and despair in God's hands. May God bless you and guide you in this Lenten season to walk with Jesus. Amen.

16. Lent sermon: Friday

Scripture Text: Matt. 27: 20-23, 26,28-31, 35-37, 45-46, 50, 55-56.

Theme: Cross/Crucifixion

Introduction

The last few weeks we have been talking about what Jesus did in Jerusalem during his last week of his life. Today is his 6th day in Jerusalem, which is called Good Friday, a very painful and sad Friday in Christian tradition.

Why do people call it "Good Friday?" Someone died the most horrible death. What is so good about it? Does it make any sense to you? Let us hear how scholars interpret it: In Greek Christianity it is called "the Holy and Great Friday." In Roman language,

"Holy Friday," and in German, "Sorrowful Friday." In the English speaking world, it is, of course, "Good Friday." The origin of the English designation is uncertain. It may have driven from "God's" Friday or may have begun as Good Friday. In either case, it may come from German, where the day was also known as *Gottes Freitag* ("God's Friday") and as *Gute Freitag* ("Good Friday"). It was a very sad day for many people in his day and also today for Christians.

I chose Scripture texts from Matthew. It is a long statement. Let us read together:

²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' ²²Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' ²³Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!' ²⁴So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. ²⁵They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁶and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ²⁷They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ²⁸After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. ²⁹And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁰then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³¹Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' ³²From noon on, darkness came over the whole land* until three in the afternoon. ³³And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ³⁴Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ³⁵Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. ³⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

From this long paragraph, my theme is Cross/Crucifixion.

First point: What was the Crucifixion like?

Those of you who watched Mel Gibson's movie, would you say something about how Jesus died? Yes, he was tortured, humiliated, flogged, undressed, dressed, mocked, stricken, spitted, and condemned to death by crucifixion on the cross.

A cross for a capital punishment was used only by Romans. Not by Jews. That might be the reason why the Jewish authorities took Jesus to Pilate. Romans used a crucifixion for a very definite type of capital punishment such as for runaway slaves or rebel insurgents who subverted Roman law and order and thereby disturbed the Roman peace (*Pax Romana*). Furthermore, as imperial terrorism, it was always as public as possible. It was a calculated social deterrent. Victims were hung up as a public warning not to protest against Rome. Along with other supreme penalties, such as being burned alive or eaten alive by beasts, what made it *supreme* was not just the amount of suffering or even humiliation

involved, but that there might be nothing left or allowed for burial. The victim usually carried the cross along with notice of the crime attached. Although Jesus was given an honorable burial in a family tomb, other victims were often crucified low enough to the ground that not only carrion birds but scavenging dogs could reach them. And they were often left on the cross after death until little was left of their bodies even for a possible burial. After hearing such horrific violence to human beings we cannot use the word "Cross" lightly.

Second Point: Why was Jesus killed?

There are several ways to look at Jesus' death. Scholars interpret what is written in the Bible in reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. One interpretation can be made from the standpoint of the Christian faith and another from the socio-political context of his days and his relationship with power holders. I am going to present you interpretations of many scholars:

1) **Theological reason:** He died for the sins of the world. All of us are sinners. In order for God to forgive sins, a sacrifice must be offered. But it would not have been adequate for an ordinary human being to be the sacrifice, for such a person would be a sinner and would only be dying for his or her own sins. It was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53: 5-6, "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Only Jesus, who was not only human but also the Son of God, was perfect, spotless, and without blemish. Thus Jesus is the sacrifice. Therefore, Good Friday is the day that makes our forgiveness possible.

2) **From a legal framework** for understanding our relationship with God. Our sin, our disobedience, is a crime against God. Disobedience requires punishment, or else it is not being taken seriously. Hence God must require a punishment, the payment of a price, before God can forgive our sins or crimes. Jesus is the price. The payment has been made, the debt has been satisfied. And we are freed from the sins and saved. For St. Paul, it is the demonstration of God's love for us, the sacrifice that makes our redemption possible. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

3) From the Socio-Political perspective, jealousy was one reason: Jesus was so popular among the poor peasants who were very resentful toward Roman Empire's exploitation and oppression. The Jerusalem Temple leaders were jealous. Matt. 27: 18 reports: "Pilate realized that it was out of jealousy that they handed Jesus over [for crucifixion]. Jealousy contains poison that kills.

4) False accusations: Matt. 26: 59 reports, "Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death." In Matt. 27: 13, Pilate asks Jesus, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" People were giving false testimony saying, "This fellow (Jesus) said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days"(Matt. 26:61). They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king (Luke 23:2). He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place" (Luke 23: 5). High priests accused Jesus of blasphemy and asked [the council] what is your verdict? They answered, "He deserves death" (Matt. 26:65-66).

5) Fear: There was fear of Jewish leaders who were collaborators of Roman Empire said, "*If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation*".....Caiaphas, high priest that year said, "*it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed*" (John 11:48-50). Even apart from Jesus' subversive message of Roman

law and order, and however nonviolent it might have been, *the very presence of enthusiastic crowds listening to whatever Jesus said threatened Jewish leaders and Roman authorities as well, especially at the Passover festival when big crowd gathered* in Jerusalem in the week of Passover.

6) His passion caused his passion: Jesus' passion was about the kingdom of God. He spoke to peasants as a voice of peasant's religious protest against Roman kingdom of god. Roman emperor was considered god's son. In Jerusalem, Jesus challenged the authorities with public acts and public debates. All of the things he was passionate (love) about, God and the Kingdom of God, God and God's passion for justice led him to his passion/suffering. Therefore, one passion (love) got him to another passion (suffering).

7) Scripture tells us that Jesus was crucified between two "bandits" (Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27). The Greek word translated "bandits" is commonly used for guerilla fighters against Rome who were "freedom fighters." Some scholars think that Jesus was executed as a rebel in the eyes of Romans and thus it was a political execution.

The **Crowd** demanded Jesus' crucifixion and Pilate gave in. When Pilate asked, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews [that is Jesus]?" Crowd shouted, "Crucify him." So Pilate released Barabbas instead and handed Jesus over to his soldiers to be crucified. Pilate COULD spare Jesus' life because Pilate found no basis for an accusation against Jesus, but he was afraid of the crowd (Luke 23: 4, 13-25). He was such an unpopular Roman governor among Jewish people as well as to Rome, he was afraid to lose his position. He went along with the crowd's wish and ordered an execution of Jesus.

What Crowd was it that shouted to kill Jesus? Scholars think that this was not the same crowd that came with Jesus from Galilee. This was not the same crowd that was amazed at hearing Jesus during the week. Scholars think that this different crowd was brought in by chief priests. The rationale of thinking this way is that the trial was taking place in Pilate's palace. Ordinary people could not come into Pilate's palace unless an authorized personnel let them in. That must have been temple authorities. The temple authorities "stirred up the crowd to have Pilate released Barabbas for them instead" (Mark 15:11) and kill Jesus. The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barnabas and to have Jesus killed (Matt. 27: 20).

Third point: What is your understanding of Jesus death? In your homeless life have you ever felt like dying? When I served homeless women's church in Seattle downtown, I wrote a litany of death having my homeless friends in mind. I will read it for you and see if you can relate to this in any way:

Litany of Death

When we are abused, our identity dies.

When we are dominated, our self-determination dies.

When we are oppressed, our freedom dies.

When we are forced, our free-will dies.

When we are threatened, our peace dies.

When we are raped, our dignity dies.

When we are sick, our health dies.

When we are mentally disturbed, our dream dies.

When we are depressed, our joy dies.

When we are angry and hateful, our love dies.
When we fall into temptations our will-power dies.
When we hurt ourselves and others, our value dies.

When we are evicted, our home dies.
When we are hungry and thirsty, our hope dies.
When we have no resources, our future dies.
When our children are taken away, our heart dies.

When we give our body for money, our worth dies.
When we are lying and stealing, our honesty dies.
When we are messed up by drugs or alcohol, our mind dies.

When we alienate each other, our bond dies.
When our minds are narrowed, our vision dies.
When we reject ourselves, others and even God, our soul dies.

When we are homeless, our motivation dies.
we do not love our neighbors, our salvation dies.

When

You might not have experienced all of these, but some of them, right?

Lastly, my Concluding question is how the death of Jesus affects your life?

Let me quote a scholar who expressed Jesus' death so profoundly. I want you to think how you are relating to this Jesus:

According to Spong,

Jesus as the person who gave all of himself for others:

When this self-giving Jesus was crucified, he refused to defend himself. When his disciples forsook him, he loved his forsakers.

When one of them denied him and he loved the denier.

When another betrayed him, he loved the betrayer.

When his enemies abused him, he loved his abusers.

When they killed him, he loved his killers.

He gave his life away even as they took it from him.

Self-giving, sacrifice, suffering, powerlessness were the marks of Jesus' life. This Jesus was in fact "a person for others.

This Jesus was the meaning of God, who is the source of life and love.

Therefore, this self-giving love was the meaning, the essence and definition of God disclosed in the person of Jesus."

This Jesus came into the world to show what the God's love and justice look like.

Anyone would like to share how do you feel about this Jesus?
died to forgive our sins. He died our death. We owe him our life.

Yes, Jesus

So how would you live your life? Share your decisions about the change
you are going to make or how your life will be different because
you.

Jesus died for

17. **Jesus' Seven Words on the Cross**

1. Luke 23:34: - Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”
2. Luke 23:43: - Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”
3. John 19:26-27: - Woman, here is your son..... Here is your mother.”
4. Matt 27:46: - My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
5. John 19:28: - I am thirsty.”
6. John 19:30: - It is finished.”
7. Luke 23:46: - Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Introduction

Have you ever been in such a pain that you couldn't talk except groaning, mourning or screaming? Can you think of anything in such a situation? Once I was in an auto accident. My pain was so great that I couldn't think of anything but one thing that was, "I am dying." What do you think he was thinking on the cross in such an unbearable pain? Could he have been thinking of those three years of his ministry in Galilee? Could he have been thinking of people who were cured by him? Could he have been thinking of disciples who deserted him and ran away? Could he have been thinking of Judas, one of his disciples, who sold him for money? I don't think so. I am amazed that he was able to speak even spoke 7 words in such an unbearable pain on the cross.

If you were in such a devastating pain, what do you think you will think about? Do you think that you will condemn your killers for the eternal punishment? I don't think so according to my experience. Pain numbs your thinking.

The mighty Jesus who fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, the mighty Jesus who raised Lazarus from dead, the mighty Jesus who cast out all the demons, the mighty Jesus who healed all the sick including lepers, the mighty Jesus who could call angelic army and destroy Romans, carried his cross silently and accepted such cruel death on the cross. He carried our sins on his own shoulder and died on the cross for us. The process of dying by torture and hanging on the cross might have been too painful and devastating to utter anything but 7 words. Each of his 7 last words on the cross are so precious that each of them can be sermon or Bible study theme. Therefore, I am going to reflect upon his seven words briefly.

1. Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing:

Luke 23: 34.

The first word Jesus said was asking God to forgive his killers. At that moment when he was praying for forgiveness for those who deserve eternal punishment, the door of forgiveness for all humanity was open.

Peter who denied Jesus three times wept for his mistake, repented and was forgiven. Judas who sold his teacher for money felt so bad but didn't ask for forgiveness. He judged and destroyed himself by hanging.

You know we all make mistakes or commit sins. We need to ask ourselves, how do we handle our guilt feeling? Judging is not our responsibility. We are not qualified to judge anyone including ourselves. But we all do judge self and others. At times it is too painful to judge self for own mistake and blame others for it. We call it "projection." Some people feel so bad for their mistakes that they judge themselves by destroying self and others. They don't God's forgiveness. I know it is hard to forgive self. For me, it was rather easy to forgive others but not myself.

Unresolved and unforgiven guilt eats at our souls. It makes us sick, destroys our mind, and makes us dysfunctional. Research has shown that bottling up anger can lead to many health consequences, among them heart disease, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, hives, acne,

psoriasis, peptic ulcer, epilepsy, migraine, Raynaud's disease, and high blood pressure and mental illness.

Yes, there is way of cleaning up our guilt. Confess to God, and ask for forgiveness. God will willingly grant us forgiveness because God is a merciful God, not a condemning God. It is important that we do not ever repeat the once-forgiven- behavior again.

Jesus' cross is a symbol of and price for forgiveness. Do you believe that? He gave his life to forgive us. Today, let us meet this Jesus who is ready to forgive us. Amen.

2. Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise: Luke 23: 43

When Jesus was hung on the cross, there were two other people hanging each of Jesus' side. There was a conversation going among the three dying people on the cross. One of the criminals on the cross derided him saying, "Aren't you Messiah? Save yourself and us." But the other confessed his own sin saying "We are getting what we deserve for our deeds." He seemed to accept the consequence of his action. And he confessed Jesus' innocence saying, "He has done nothing wrong." Then he asked Jesus to **remember** him in the kingdom. He didn't ask Jesus to take him to the Kingdom, but just asked to **remember** him. Jesus responded by saying, "Today you will be **with me** in Paradise." He got an invitation into the Kingdom instead of just being remembered by Jesus. It was the reward for his confession of his sins, and acceptance of Jesus. Even when he was dying on the cross, he was forgiving and saving sinners. It was the moment that transformed the most despising, ridiculing, cruel, painful condemning Roman imperial cross into Jesus' soul-saving cross for all humanity.

Whenever I officiated memorial service for homeless friends, I comforted their souls with these words, "In the Kingdom of God, in the Paradise, there is no more hunger, no more homelessness, no more illness, no more abandonment, no more substances, no more violence, and no more death because Jesus promised to prepare a place for us. "I'm there and you will be also" (John 14: 2-3). Therefore, in Paradise, God's eternal home, there will be no more shortage of rooms. Jesus' invitation to the paradise - Kingdom of God - is the best promise for all of us. Going into the paradise must be the reward for the way we live. The whole purpose of having faith in God and Jesus is to live justly by loving our God and our neighbor. Then we don't have to worry about where we go when we die. Rooms are already reserved for us. Let us meet this Jesus who opened the Paradise for us and invites us there when we finish our life on earth. Amen.

3. Woman, here is your son..... Here is your mother: John 19:26-27.

Calling his mother, "Woman," was an affectionate expression. Can you imagine the mother watching her beloved son's most painful death on the cross? Can you imagine her, grabbing the cross, wrestling with herself wishing to die for her son. What the son could do watching his pain-stricken mother, beating her chest and wailing beneath the cross? What could you have done if you were in his shoes? Jesus' love for his mother was so deep that he had to care for her even at his death bed. He tells mother, "John is your son from now on. Love him and depend on him." He tells John, "She is your mother from now on. Care for her and love her as I did." It was the moment John and Mary became the mother and son, a family. John cared for her from then on.

In Jesus Christ, we all are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. In him, a new family and new community are born. In Matt. 12:48-50, when Jesus heard his family came to see him where he was teaching, he said, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." This is the reason I call our gathering "A new family and a community."

Dear friends, look around people on your right, left, front and behind. They are your new family in the Christ's community. One theologian said, "There is no other organization like a church that welcomes you as a member, prays for you and cares for you for the rest of your life."

Beginning today, we all need to treat each other as our mother, father, brother, sister, daughter, and grandchildren. Look at the one sitting next to you and call out these names - brother, sister, mother, etc.

Let us meet this Jesus who binds us in to one family relationship and his beloved community. Amen.

4. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matt. 27:46.

Did you feel God was forsaking you when you lost your job?; when you were evicted in to the streets?; when you are sick on the streets?; when your spouses, family and friends deserted you? Yes, it might be natural for most of us to feel that way in our devastating and profoundly discouraging situation. It might be very painful experience to be forsaken by your own loved ones. Being forsaken by God would be the most devastating, most lonely, most sad, and most painful thing to experience.

However, very few Christians might cry out "My God, why have you forsaken me" when they die because we believe that we are returning to God's home. And then, how come Jesus, the son of God, did that, someone asked. I interpret his outcry of being forsaken by God at his death, as a condition that "Jesus died homeless" because there is no worse homelessness than you feel deserted by God. Someone else said because he was dying as a human being. Jesus who had no address of his own just like many of you, and facing his final moment of his life as a homeless person, he cried out the cry of all deserted homeless humanity. We confess that Jesus is 100% human and 100% God. Therefore, his cry represented all human cry that is being shouted out when we are deserted by God for our unconfessed and un-forgiven sins. It was the savior's cry for all sinners in the world. This was the outcry of Jesus Christ, the savior, who embraces all human cries. This was the cry of Mary, who was watching her son's death and all mothers' cry who lose their sons at the hand of tyrants. This is the cry of all those who are hungry, sick and homeless, being deserted by their families, friends, churches and society.

Do you believe that God would never leave us in homelessness forever? Do you believe that the God who brought deserted, exiled Israel back home will also bring you home? Yes, God will bring you home too. Let us meet this Jesus who experienced being forsaken on our behalf and cry out our cry for us. Amen.

5. I am thirsty: John 19: 28.

He lost lots of blood and liquid from his body. This condition is called dehydration. Therefore he was thirsty. This also means the state of his acute pain. I read that dehydration causes severe pain which can result in death. This also means that Jesus has a human body and he was human. Jesus was physically thirsty to death.

But we must be thirsty for his words, his spirit, his ethics, his justice, his love and his salvation and thirsty for his cross of forgiveness.

We must not be thirsty for wealth for ourselves, but we must be thirsty to help the poor. We must not be thirsty for the blessings for ourselves but we must be thirsty to share our blessings with others.

We must be thirsty to love others more, thirsty to pray, thirsty for mission, thirsty to serve, thirsty to give and thirsty to share what we have.

Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me"(John 7: 37). "Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6: 35). We must be thirsty for his life-giving water and be thirsty to share it with others who are thirsty.

What are you thirsty for? You might be thirsty for job and home. You might be thirsty for your family. Some might be thirsty for more education. Some might be thirsty for alcohol.

Let us meet this Jesus who makes us thirsty for love and justice.

6. It is finished: John 19: 30.

He finished with all the slanders; He finished with betrayal from his loved and trusted ones; He finished with the injustice in the Pilate court; He finished with the execution on the cross; He finished with the mission of carrying the world's sin, and He finished with giving his own life to save the world. It was his cry of victory that he had finished his mission on earth. Our Lord Jesus finished all of the above for us.

Have you ever finished anything and experienced shouting "I am finished"? I did that when I finished my last term paper for my Masters in Social Work. I shouted "I am finished" flying down all the way from upstairs to downstairs of my home. What would you like to finish? We must start something in order to finish. If you don't start anything anywhere there is nothing to finish. Therefore, now it is our turn to follow him. His finishing point is our beginning. So what is your beginning? If you didn't start something already, what would you like to begin with? Some people determined to begin to serve the Lord. Some people are determined to begin to serve the poor and needy. Some of you want to begin college. Some of you want to begin going to AA to achieve sobriety.

Jesus' end was his disciples' beginning of a new life. They began witnessing to their Lord Jesus. Disciples' end was the beginning of the first century churches. Their end was our beginning of inheriting Jesus from them and witnessing to what we learned through scripture. Therefore, one Christian's end will become someone else's beginning. End and beginning is therefore, a circle which is never disconnected. The Lord Jesus was the beginning and end. He invited us into his circle of ending and beginning.

Let us meet this Jesus who is an end and a beginning for all of us and motivate us to begin anew. Amen.

7. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit: Luke 23: 46.

Have you ever thought about to whom you will commit your soul when you die? Jesus had God to commit his soul at his last breath. How discouraging it will be if we don't have anyone who welcomes our souls at our last breath, if there is no home for our souls to return to when we finish our life on earth! How fortunate we are for having God to whom we can commit our souls.

When I officiate at a funeral or memorial service for homeless brothers and sisters, including my own husband, I committed their souls into the hands of God, the warm and loving bosom of God who would protect them. I pray that they no longer experience hunger, cold, sickness, substances, crime, or homelessness. How hopeless it could have been if I had no one whom I commit their souls to.

The risen Lord Jesus told Mary Magdalene that "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20: 17). This is affirmation that our souls have eternal home to return to just like Jesus did.

Jesus will welcome all of us into God's home. Jesus is the one who opens the way to God's home. Let us meet this Jesus who is our home for our souls to return to.

Conclusion: We reflected upon the seven words of Jesus on the cross and tried to relate them to our own life. As my conclusion, I am going to suggest that we all determine to live and die with Jesus. In Romans 6:6-7, Paul said, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is free from sin." Can we die to our old habits, mistakes, our old thinking patterns, and life style that we may become free from all of negative, destructive life styles? Can you identify things you want to die to for your new life? Dying means living a new life and living eternally.

18. **Easter Sunday Sermon:**

Scripture Text: John 20: 18

Theme: I have seen the Lord

INTRODUCTION

We have talked about Jesus' last week on earth – Sunday through Friday. In other words we walked through Jesus Passion week up to his death on the cross. Today, it is Easter, when he was raised from his tomb. What does Easter mean to you?

I chose John 20:18 as my sermon text today. Let us read it together:

¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

My sermon theme is "I have seen the Lord." When I founded and served the Church of Mary Magdalene, a homeless women's congregation downtown, Seattle, I chose this verse as the founding theme. When Mary Magdalene visited Jesus' grave early Sunday morning, she met the risen Jesus. Jesus told her to tell all the disciples that he was raised from the dead. So she went out and announced, "I have seen the Lord."

Mary Magdalene was a woman who was possessed by 7 demons. I call it "multiple troubles." She was suffering from many different troubles including perhaps emotional illness. But Jesus raised her from her deadly life circumstances whatever they may have been. To help homeless women rise from their multiple troubles I named the church after her.

The Resurrection message became the founding principle of Christianity. So Easter is utterly central for Christianity. Christians believe that the cross wasn't the end for Jesus, not like thousands of Jews who were killed on the cross and have been forgotten, but not Jesus. What is the meaning of the Easter stories? Many Christians believe literally his body was raised from the dead. Many others consider the meaning of the Easter more than literal rising from the dead. I have no power to make you believe one way or the other but the power of God can do it.

Let me share with you what the Easter story means for many Christians: I hope some of you may be able to relate to that. According to some scholars,

Easter means, *God raised Jesus* from his grave and therefore *Jesus lives*.

Jesus is not among the dead, but among the "living." He is a figure of *the present*, not simply of the past. This is the central affirmation of Easter.

The Easter story affirms that *God has vindicated Jesus*. Easter is God's "YES" to Jesus and God's "NO" to the powers which killed him. Easter is the reversal of Good Friday. It means God's vindication of Jesus' passion for the kingdom of God; for God's justice.

Easter is about *God* even as it is about Jesus. *Jesus has been raised* (NRSV) by God. God (not Jesus himself) caused the resurrection. God did it! Resurrection is God's answer, "I did not forsake you" to Jesus' cry, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15: 34).

Post-Easter affirmation is *Jesus is the Lord*. Remember that Roman emperor claimed to be the lord and son of God? Anybody who protested against this power was put to death. Therefore, the Easter message is that the Roman emperor or any other domination system is not the lord but *Jesus alone is the Lord*.

It was *Jesus of Nazareth* who was put to death. It was *Jesus of Nazareth* who was raised. There is no other Christ of faith who is not *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Jesus is *the crucified one*. There is no risen one who is not the *crucified one*. Without *crucifixion* there is no resurrection. *The crucified one* by the Roman Empire is raised.

Easter means personal born-again for us all as well as political justice. Remember that the disciples were devastated, discouraged, disappointed, filled with fear, abandoned and disowned Jesus? But after seeing Jesus' resurrection they all found courage, hope and new life. The cowardly disciples all came back together and began to witness to Jesus' resurrection. This time they risked their lives, not running away, denying or forsaking Jesus. Anyone who said Jesus was the Lord, Son of God not the Roman Emperor was at the risk of losing his life. But disciples did. Three days ago they had all ran away. Three days later they all came back being ready to risk their own lives. Aren't you amazed at this change? How could that be possible? We can call it "salvation." Jesus gave his life to save personal souls or humanity from sins. So there is powerful personal meaning to Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, and Easter.

Easter also sees the human problem as injustice and the solution as God's justice. The just world is God's dream, a world being grounded deeply in God's heart of justice. Passion for such a Kingdom of God got Jesus killed by an unjust imperial power. But God has vindicated Jesus.

Therefore, Easter disclosed Jesus' passion for compassion, justice, and nonviolence. Compassion is utterly central to the message and life of Jesus. Justice is the social form of compassion. Compassion is based in love.

Love is the soul of justice, and justice is the body of love. All of this is what Easter, the ultimate climax of Holy Week, is about.

Holy Week and the journey of Lent are about an alternative procession.

Remember that there were two processions on the Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem? One was Pilate's procession which was a show of power of the Roman Empire. The alternative procession was Jesus' procession on a donkey accompanied by peasants from Galilee, which was an anti-imperial procession. The alternative journey is the path that leads to journeying with the risen Jesus.

We are not just celebrating Easter that took place several thousand years ago. We want to experience Easter as Mary Magdalene experienced. Jesus raised her from her multiple deadly life situations. She was with him through all his mission trips, teaching, trial, suffer, death and resurrection. She was honored to be the first to see the risen Lord, the first to be commissioned to carry the good news and the first to announce "I have seen the Lord." I developed the homeless women church in Seattle naming it " Church of Mary Magdalene" to help women rise to a new life as Mary Magdalene did.

We want to relate the Easter to our own lives. Easter means that Jesus always lives with us, and in us whether you like it or not. We can't take his presence out of our hearts and souls.

Easter is God's "No" to all the unjust powers even in our world. Easter is God's "NO" to your poverty, unemployment and homelessness. Easter is God's "YES" for your new life. Easter is God's answer to your cry. Easter is the proof that God is with us always.

Easter is an invitation to Galilee to meet Jesus again just as he met his disciples in Galilee. Countless believers throughout the centuries have accepted the call to "meet Jesus in Galilee": Dr. Schweitzer too went to Galilee in Africa to meet Jesus. Mother Teresa went to Galilee in India to meet Jesus. You are the contemporary Galileans who are victims of economic crises and injustice. All of us, volunteers, are here in contemporary Galilee to meet Jesus with you.

The political meaning of Easter in our world is seeing the homeless problem as injustice and the solution must come based on God's justice. The world God wants is the world where everyone has enough to eat and home to live in. Our political system must see this. Easter always asks us which

procession are we in. Do you want to stand with Jesus? We are all invited to this journey of death and resurrection with Jesus. Easter means your rising from your own devastation and death to a new changed life - salvation. God will help us. Do you all want to rise?

I wrote a litany of rising in thinking of my homeless brothers and sisters, which is an alternative procession we can march in with Jesus. I hope this Easter may bring you rebirth and rising as Mary Magdalene experienced. I hope you can announce shouting "I have seen the Lord." Let us now read the litany together.

Litany of Rising

Leader: Jesus Christ rises from the dead:

People: We rise from our own death.

Leader: We rise to our pride.

People: We rise to our identity.

Leader: We rise to our dignity.

People: We rise to our worth.

Leader: We rise to our freedom

People: We rise to our courage.

Leader: Jesus Christ rises from the dead:

People: We rise to our peace.

Leader: We rise to our health.

People: We rise to our sobriety.

Leader: We rise to our equality.

People: We rise to our hopes.

Leader: Jesus Christ rises from the dead:

People: We rise to our joy.

Leader: We rise to our dreams.

People: We rise to our vision.

Leader: We rise to our love.

People: We rise to our opportunity.

Leader: Jesus Christ rises from the dead:

People: We rise to our potential.

Leader: We rise with our children.

People: We rise to our homes.

Leader: We rise to our life.

People: We rise to our salvation

ALL: With Jesus Christ, we all rise.

We rise like a bird.

We rise like a bread.

We rise like a balloon.

We rise like a kite.

We rise like a tide.

We rise like a sun.

We rise like a fire.

ALL: AMEN, AMEN, AMEN

19. **Emmaus Road**

Scripture: Luke 24: 13-35

Sermon theme: Emmaus Road

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, we talked about the appearance of the post-resurrection Jesus to Mary Magdalene. Today, we are going to talk about the appearance of post-resurrection Jesus on the Emmaus Road. Four people including a narrator are going to represent four characters who share conversation on the road to Emmaus. They will read the story from Luke 24:13-33. Four readers, please come forward to the microphone. Congregation, listen very carefully. We are going to discuss this story after hearing the reading of the text.

Narrator: Now on that same day, [the first day of the week], two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them,

Jesus "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

Narrator: They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him,

Cleopas: "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

Jesus: ¹⁹ "What things?"

Cleopas, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.

Cleopa's wife: ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.

Cleopas: ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

Cleopa's wife: ²² "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it was just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Jesus: ²⁵ "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Narrator ²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying,

Cleopas: *"Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over."*

Cleopa's wife: [Yes, stay with us please! It's going to be dark pretty soon]

Cleopas and Cleopa's wife [together: Please!!! Please go with us !!!]

Narrator: So he went in to stay with them.³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other,

Cleopas : *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"*

Narrator: ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.

Thank you, readers. You have done a good job. Now let us reflect on the story. It was late Sunday afternoon, the day Jesus was raised from the dead. Cleopas and his wife seem to be members of Jesus' inner group. This weary couple was returning home to Emmaus from Jerusalem. It was about 7 miles distance. In those days, people walked. Even today, some of us can walk that distance. They heard about Jesus' rising from his dead. But they weren't sure what to make of it since they hadn't seen the risen Christ, and it could have been a rumor or gossip. The resurrection story they heard in Jerusalem didn't seem real. In fact, they could have been extremely upset, stressed out and exhausted being in Jerusalem on that week-end while Jesus was crucified. So this trip back home could have been a fatigued and confused one for them. A couple of points we can make here:

Our first point is that for the couple, "the Emmaus Road" was a journey of profound disappointment, hopelessness, despair, confusion, and exhaustion. They had just lost the most important leader in their life. Has anyone been on such an Emmaus Road in your life? Would anyone like to share?

Our second point is that this couple encountered a stranger on their Emmaus Road. Jesus approached them but they did not recognize him.

42 years ago, my Emmaus journey in the U.S. started in St. Louis, MO. I met a nice clergy family who were total strangers to me. But the couple helped me a lot to resettle. They were my Jesus. For the past 42 years we kept our friendship. Have you ever encountered a stranger on your Emmaus Road and later recognized him as Jesus?

Our third point is that this couple offered the stranger a warm hospitality. The stranger wanted to go on with his trip. But the couple persuaded him to go home with them because evening was near. The couple made time for Jesus by inviting him in. The implication is that had they not made time for him with an extra effort, he would have gone on. Jesus did not intrude. They had to press him by saying, "Please come in. It's late. Don't go on. We want you to eat with us and stay with us tonight."

Our fourth point is that the couple prepared a dinner for the guest. It was their warm hospitality. The guest turned into a host by giving thanks, blessing and breaking and sharing the bread with the couple. Whose practice was it? Yes, it was Jesus' practice while he was with disciples for three years. The couple remembered that, and recognized Jesus!

Have you ever shared what you have with others, or invited anyone in, and then the guests became a host who brought you a blessing? What happens when you eat with a stranger? When I eat with a stranger, my eyes and hearts are open to that person and vice versa. And we become friends right away.

Our fifth point is what they did in the end? Yes, they ran back to Jerusalem to share this news of meeting risen Christ. What good news did you share with others lately? Do you share your good news about Jesus or God?

Our concluding remarks can be:

Firstly, we all experience Emmaus Road: Our Emmaus Road can be sad and hopeless. Or Emmaus Road can be just a life journey. Often Jesus is walking with us but we don't recognize him. He knocks on our hearts but we don't open the door for him, because we are not ready. When we are not ready, Christ cannot come in. Our life together here every Friday can be our Emmaus journey. Perhaps Christ tries to enter into your life through our worship service and dinner. But many of you may not open the door for him. I hope it won't take too long to open your door for him.

Secondly, we must persuade, press and keep calling Jesus to come in. One scholar suggested that we must constrain him to come in. He suggests us to take time every day, five minutes or fifteen minutes, just to say, "Lord, I'm setting this time aside. I constrain You to come in and spend time with me." If we don't, he goes on without bothering us, for he does not intrude.

Thirdly, when he comes in to our heart as our guest, he will change into our host. He will break bread and share it with us and bless us.

Fourthly, we become a witness to what he has done for us. We will share this good news with others.

Lastly, the couple's trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus was slow and hopeless. But their trip back to Jerusalem was in haste and hopeful. Likewise, once you welcome Jesus in your heart and life, your life will become joyful and hopeful no matter what kind of life circumstance you may be in. If you agree, all God's people shout Amen three times. "Amen, Amen, Amen."

20. **Father's Day Sermon**

Scripture: Ps. 103: 13

Theme: Father's compassion

This time of year, in the third week end of June, we celebrate Father's Day. I chose Bible verse from Ps. 103:13. Let us all read it together: *As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.*

I am sure those of you who are somebody's children might be angry and grieving for something your father had done to you. If some of you are fathers you might be grieving for how badly your children treat you or what you have done to your children. I too have something I regret about for not doing enough for my parents and my children. You might also be grieving, as fathers or as children, for not being with your loved ones this time of the year. For some people father's day is not a good day at all with mixed emotion of love and hate.

But I know that all of you, who are fathers, love your children no matter what. I also know that your children love you no matter what and how you are. I also know that your fathers love you regardless of what you did to them. I know that you love your fathers regardless of what they did to you.

Ps. 103: 3 says, "As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for us." Bible recognizes father's God-given love and compassion. There is no bad father. All fathers are loving fathers. Some fathers just do not know how to love. You, who are fathers, know this.

Let me share with a story I read in Korean newspaper many years ago. This story is stuck in my soul ever since. It was a real story that made the national news. One hot summer day, a young father and 6 years old son went to beach. Neither one was able to swim. So they decided to ride on a rubber boat. While they were enjoying the ride on the water, a sudden surf engulfed their boat and both of them were thrown into the sea. As they couldn't reach their boat, the father quickly picked the child up and put him on his shoulder. Water was deep, up to his neck. Father tried to stand on the sand firmly. He tried to call for help but no one seemed to hear them. His feet were sinking deeper and deeper into the sands. Salty sea water began to creep in to his mouth and nose. As deeper his feet were sinking into the sand, more water was reaching his whole face. He gathered up all of his might in his feet, legs and his arm to hold the child up. He was standing at a devastating life and death moment. He couldn't breathe any longer in the water, and his feet were no longer holding him up. Can you imagine how could he breathe and drink the salt water at the same time? His love for his child gave him the strength and power to hold on. At that critical moment, help arrived and got them out to the shore. Father passed out on the sand. Helpers tried to revive him with no success. But the child was saved by the father's frantic fight for his life. What do you say about this story? Yes, that father loved his son so much that he gave his own life. Ps. 103: 3 says, "As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for us."

There is no father who doesn't love his children. All of your fathers love you as you love your own children. If your father didn't seem to love you, can you forgive him? If your children don't seem to love you, can you forgive them? Wouldn't you want them to forgive you too? On father's day, can you call your fathers or your children or see them in person, if possible? Can you tell them "You love them very much?" Or can you tell them, "You forgive them" or ask their forgiveness for you?

As fathers love their children, God loves us. Can we confess that Jesus loved us so much that Jesus gave his own life for us, as this father in my story sacrificed his life for his child? Can we live our lives by constantly confessing that we live by Jesus' giving his life for us as this child will live the rest of his life by confessing "I live because of my dad's sacrifice for me." May God bless you on this Father's Day. All God's people say, AMEN.

21. Are you healthy?

Scripture Texts: Gen. 1:27-28; John 3:16; I Cor. 3:16-17.

INTRODUCTION

One day, I had a lunch with a nurse friend, who is operating a small family home for Alzheimer's patients. She said that most of them lost their memories and couldn't recognize their own children. They replayed their early trauma, which had been buried deep in their hearts. One woman wouldn't eat because she remembered her early days when her children were hungry. She insisted that she had to feed them first.

She and I wondered what we will replay if we ever arrived at that stage. We said to each other, "It is very scary to NOT know what we will replay. And we don't want to replay our past painful memories." We also shared our experience seeing many people live in their old memory of trauma even while they are still younger than us. We concluded that in order not to replay our traumatic experience, not to live in our old memory of trauma, we must overcome our past pain and experience and arrive at a complete healing NOW. We must be free from all of hang-ups. This conversation motivated me to prepare my sermon today on our spirituality and health issues with my sermon theme, "Are you healthy?" I chose Scripture text from several books; Gen. 1:27-28; John 3:16; I Cor. 3:16-17. Let us read them together:

Gen 1: 27-28: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

I Cor. 3:16-17: Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

I want to make a few points.

My first point is about spirituality. According to Dr. O'Brien, "Spirituality" has to do with the spirit, sacred values, and religious matters. Some call that Spirit, Transcendent Being or Higher Being." Human beings are known to be spiritually yearning to be connected to the Higher being in order to be protected. In Christianity, we call this Transcendent Being "God". Therefore, Christian spirituality has to do with our relationship with God. According to Dr. O'Brien, the 2005 Newsweek Poll found that 79% of Americans described themselves as "spiritual." Almost two thirds of Americans say they pray every day, nearly a third meditate every day and 44% said they attend church every week. I am sure that all of you would consider yourselves "spiritual," right?

Dr. O'Brien's article also reported that Cardiac and AIDS patients benefited from intercessory prayer. Stroke victims were able to handle their disabilities better through prayer. The elderly who independently prayed, meditated, or studied Bible were more likely to live longer than those who didn't. People were less likely to be depressed if they believed in a power greater than themselves and perceived that their lives had meaning. The person has a negative relationship with spirituality can potentially make health outcomes worse. He reported that relaxation response in repetitive prayer, or other "mindful practices" show physiological changes including slowing metabolism, breathing, and heart rate, reduction of muscle tension, and lowered blood pressure.

My second point is that we need to define "health" to understand the relationship between spirituality and health. Many of us would say we are healthy if we are not under any medical treatment. Would you all consider yourself healthy? The World Health Organization (WHO) defines "health" as *a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being*. Dr. Stuart J. Kingman, the former Director of Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches presented the church's definition

of "health" as *a state of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social well-being: a state of being harmony with each other, with natural environment and with God.*

On the basis of the church's inclusive definition of health, how many of us can say we are physically, emotionally, economically, politically, and socially healthy, and are in harmony with each other, with natural environment and with God? Quite often we are not in harmony with our own selves!! Right?

My third point is how we understand illness. Herbert Benson, MD, indicated that 60-90 percent of all visits to medical offices are for stress-related symptoms or illness. According to the biomedical model, most disease is viewed as physical invasion from outside the human organism. Patients are viewed as helpless victim of external and unpredictable disease process and the individual's emotional, spiritual, social, economic and political aspect are completely ignored.

But according to the church's definition of health, when we experience brokenness from any of the physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, political, social well-being, and broken harmony with each other, with nature, and with God, we experience loss of health. Where are you with this notion? Are you ill?

How about homelessness and health issue? Poverty and hunger cause the loss of health. Fear, hopelessness and helplessness cause the loss of health. Loss of jobs, families and homes causes the loss of health. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse causes the loss of health. Absence of security, love, peace and justice causes the loss of health. Guilt, grief, anger, hatred and low-self-esteem cause the loss of health. Alcohol and drug abuse definitely damage health. All forms of mental illness means loss of health. Alienation, racism, sexism, classism, militarism, nationalism, and war cause the loss of personal and social health.

Homelessness can cause people to lose their health. According to the above definitions, do any of you feel that you are NOT healthy? Yes, it is very difficult to be healthy in this day and age, especially in a homeless situation.

My fourth point is a questions as to how can Christian spirituality help us to be healthy? According to the creation account in Genesis 1: 27, God created man and woman in God's own image, and not in an animal's image. God blessed them equally. Therefore, we are precious sons and daughters of God. We start our lives in a parent-child relationship with God and in the image of God. Without God, our existence is meaningless. It has no purpose. Without human beings in it, God's creation of the world is incomplete. Only in relation to God, are we "somebody" and we are given identity, dignity and pride. Therefore, we must be happy and healthy in relationship with God (spirituality). This is number one principle for our health.

In John 3:16, God so loved the world, you and me, that God came in to the world in Jesus Christ. President of the United States didn't come down to see you on the street. Your Governor didn't come down to see you on the streets. But God in Jesus came down to meet us in the streets, where you are, because you are God's children. There God in Jesus has taken residence in our midst. Therefore, in our relationship with God (spirituality) we must be proud of ourselves be happy and healthy.

God came in to the world but where is God's dwelling place? Is God residing in the White House as our President's guest? Is God residing at the Marriot Hotel? According to I Corinthians 3:16 God resides in us; it says we are the temple of God's spirit. This means that God dwells in our hearts and souls. Whether you recognize or not, God lives in our hearts as our host and guest. We must be proud of being the home and host for God. Therefore, we must be happy and healthy in relation to this God (spirituality). This is also) number one principle for our health.

The above three passages give us the following prescriptions to recover our health:

1) We are in intimate relationship with Jesus in God. We are in God. God is in us. Therefore, we are required to clean up our house to welcome Jesus as our guest. We are required to take care of ourselves because our heart is God's dwelling place. It has to be clean with no odor. Is your heart clean for God to dwell in?

2) We have a hope and pride as God's guests and host. We have God on our side. We have a profound source of health and healing in God. Therefore, we must be happy and healthy because God wants us to be healthy and happy. That is the blessing.

3) We must restore the relationship with ourselves, with God, with our families, with our friends and with our society if we want to be healthy. In order to do that, we must accept the truth that God created us in God's image, God came to us, and God resides in us. This is the profound ground of healing. Don't let that go.

4) Therefore, we cannot abuse our body and soul by filling it up with junk food, anger, hatred, resentment, wounds, hurt, and doubts. We must clean them all out of our hearts.

Then in the relationship with God (spirituality) we will experience total healing in the holistic sense as God's blessing. This is the Christian spirituality we believe in. This Christian spirituality can bring us good health if we do our homework as prescribed above. Do you believe in all these? If you do, all God's people say, AMEN.

22. **Are you possessed by demons?**

Scripture text: Mark 1:32-34a

Introduction

We have been talking about spirituality and health with a question, “are we all healthy?” How did we define spirituality? Does anybody remember it?

1. Some scholars describe “spirituality” in a different way.

William Stringfellow, Episcopal lay leader presents many faces spirituality; *the practice of mind control, yoga discipline, multifarious pious exercises, intensive journals, meditation, jogging, cults, wilderness sojourns, political resistance, contemplation, abstinence, hospitality, a vocation of poverty, non-violence, silence, the efforts of prayer.*

Bernard McGinn gives three definitions: 1) Anthropological Definitions that focuses exclusively on *human* spirit. Spirituality is seen as an element in human nature, a depth-dimension of human existence. 2) Theological definition perceives that true spirituality happens only when human spirit and divine spirit are connected. There is no spirituality without [the big] “Spirit.” 3) Here the spirituality is understood by one’s relationship to a community of faith. Thus, we can understand our spirituality by our relationship to this worshipping community you belong.

Sandra Schneiders defines Christian spirituality as “the conscious striving for self-integration toward the God who is revealed in Jesus and is presented as Spirit in and through the community of faith, the church.”

Historical-Contextual Definitions are rooted in a particular community’s history and experience. Historical-contextual definitions recognize that we are socially located and that this social location gives meaning and purpose to human life. For example, the black church tradition in the U.S. sees spirituality as having a distinctive connection to the struggle for social justice.

Women are seeking an understanding of spirituality that is distinctive to the context of women and that takes seriously women’s historical struggle for liberation. So you can see spirituality has many dimensions. But we will focus on Christian spirituality.

Today I chose our text from Mark 1:32-34a. Let us read it together;

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons;

From this text, our theme is “Are you possessed by demons?”

2. As we read from Mark, the whole city gathered around Jesus to heal their sick people. They must have had a strong faith that they could be healed if they came to Jesus. Why didn't they go to doctors or hospitals? In those days, majority of people were poor and couldn't afford Doctors. They heard Jesus healed at no cost. So, they all came to Jesus.

In the ancient times, there were no medical terms that we have today such as mental illness, cancer, alcoholism, diabetes, depression, schizophrenia, etc. They understood diseases as “demon possessed;” some bad spirit attacked our body. Demon-possession was also understood as judgment from God. They were treated as sinful, unclean and ugly; they were despised and alienated from the whole community and condemned to social death. Therefore, they were already dead before their final death.

Jesus’ healing of the demon-possessed was *de-demonization*. Jesus’ healing meant that they were not demon-possessed anymore, and thus deserved to be free from diseases. Some scholars view that Jesus’ exorcism was the dawn of the lordship of the divine life. The lordship of God drives out of creation

the powers of destruction, which are demons and idols, and heals the created beings who have been damaged by them.

Some scholars would say that if the kingdom of God is coming as Jesus proclaimed, then salvation is coming as well. If salvation comes to the whole creation, then the health of all created beings is the result – health of the body and soul, individual and community, human beings and nature.

Therefore, healing and exorcism must be viewed in relation to Jesus' messianic mission. When the doctor comes, the sick appear, when the messiah comes, the demons and idols have to disappear from the earth, because God desires to dwell in it.

Unclean spirits recognized Jesus as the Son of God as stated in Luke 4:40-41 and the Gospel reports the demons saying 'you have come to destroy us' in Mark. 1:24.

German theologian Moltmann views the demons as forces which are destructive of life. They enslave men and women, and make them dependent. They destroy the personality and derange the organism. They are characterized by their pleasure in 'tormenting.' They rouse the death-wish in human beings.

Can anyone relate to this notion? Are any of you enslaved by something? I am enslaved by work. I can't stop working. I never learned how to play. Too much work has been destructive to my health.

Some people are enslaved by greed. Greedy people use all possible ways to accumulate wealth from hard work to exploiting others. Harvard professor Kawachi would say that modern people are enslaved by shopping disorder- compulsive shopping, competitive shopping, and revenge shopping.

Has anyone experienced these three kinds of shopping? Especially, revenge shopping? Often, when women are angry at their husbands, they go revenge shopping. I experienced revenge shopping while I was traveling between Seattle and Baltimore. Delay by a tornado in Baltimore made us miss the connection of the flight in Minneapolis. We had to stay at hotel for one night at our expense and came home the next day. While waiting at the airport I did revenge shopping. I bought a travel bag in purple color that ordinarily I wouldn't buy due to the high cost. But I did buy it. It was certainly a revenge shopping.

Some people are enslaved by various diseases - physical and mental and emotional. Some people are enslaved by poverty and homelessness. Some people are enslaved by anger and hatred. There are too many things that keep us in bondage. We can't seem to get out of them. They all affect our health. They make us sick. So are we demonized?

Whenever Jesus drives out demons from possessed people, he was de-demonizing and these people were restored to health. How can we be de-demonized from all of that enslaves us? How can we become free from our sickness? Does anyone have an answer?

How were people healed in Jesus' time in the story of Mark that we read? What did they do? They didn't do a thing except they came to Jesus believing he will cure them. That's all they did. You all may come to Jesus. Not just physically come here and sit. But come with faith that you will be free from your own sickness or troubles. That faith and trust in Jesus is the power of healer. Come and believe that you will be healed. When you find hope and joy in Jesus for being here that is the power of healer. This is the meaning of Christian spirituality which brings us health.

May God bless you all to be healed. All God's people say, Amen.

23. **Anger and health**

Scripture Texts: Gen. 4: 8, Prov. 29:11, Eph. 4:26-27, James 1:19-21:

Last week we talked about demons that enslave us. There are many demons that destroy our health. Today we will talk about one of them, a popular one that destroys our health. Let us read our Bible texts from Gen. 4: 8, Prov. 29:11, Eph. 4:26-27, and James 1:19-21:

Gen. 4:8: Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.'⁸ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Prov. 29:11: A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.

Eph. 4:26-27: ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice

James 1:19-21: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

From these texts, what could be our theme today? Anybody has any idea?

Yes, Anger is another demon.

Recently we read newspaper articles about an angry husband who shot his wife to death and he shot himself too and died. Often times Anger, if handled right, can be very useful emotion but it can be demon if we don't handle it right.

I am going to make a few points from our texts:

First point what you do with your anger? Anger appears to have been with us from the beginning of the human family. Cain and Abel were the first sons of Adam and Eve, the first family on earth according to Christian Bible. Cain and Abel both offered their fruits to the Lord. Cain offered God crops from his land. Abel who liked hunting offered God some of his animals. God favored Abel's offering over Cain's. Cain was angry toward God who didn't approve his offerings. But he directed his anger to a wrong party, Abel didn't do anything wrong. Cain didn't control his burning anger boiling inside him. He suggested his brother to go out to the field. Cain meditated the idea to take his brother to an isolated place so that no one will see his action. He thought no one was around. He didn't realize God was everywhere. He killed his innocent brother, Abel. It was premeditated murder. He paid his price. He was thrown out of his land into homelessness.

There are several interpretations about God's favor and disliking about the two offerings: Some say God liked animal far better than crops. Some say God didn't like Cain's attitude of bringing offering. But that is not the point here. The point we like to make is how Cain should handle his anger? Was killing his brother only way to resolve it? If that is true we will kill half of our human race because we are angry every day.

What could Cain have done instead of killing his brother? Would you like to put your idea in here?

Yes, there could have been several ways; first he could ask God why God wasn't happy with his offering and he could correct whatever God pointed out or suggested. Or he could talk to his brother how his pride was hurt or talk to his parents, Adam and Eve about it. Or he could hit his punching bag a few times and get over with it.

Well, even if he resolved his anger this way, he would repeat the same offering the same way next time around, then God would favor his brother's offering again, if he didn't learn why God was not

happy with his offering. Therefore, the solution could be finding out why God wasn't satisfied with his offering and correct it. If that was matter of offering itself, he should change his offering. If it was his attitude he should have changed it by learning about his own behavior. One thing clear is that he didn't do anything about the matter and didn't control his emotion of rage and committed a crime of murder.

Our second point is learning about the effect of anger: From the story of Cain and Abel we learned already that anger is a demon that destroys our health. It also kills others just as Cain did.

According to medical doctors, a physiological reaction goes with anger; the common reactions associated with chronic anger include muscle tension, flushing (redness of the face), chills, and shudders, prickly sensations, numbness, choking, twitching, losing self-control, or feeling hot or cold, fatigue, teeth clenching, pain in the neck or jaw, ringing in the ears, lowered skin temperature, excessive sweating, hives, acne, itching, severe headache, migraine headache, belching, hiccupping, peptic ulcers, chronic indigestion, diarrhea, constipation, intestinal cramping, loss of appetite (without accompanying weight loss), and frequent colds.

What kind of symptoms do you experience when you are angry? In my case, I get a pain in my neck. Have you ever known anger results in this many reactions in our body? Amazing! Aren't they?

One of the major physiological effects of anger is the release of chemicals and hormones, principally adrenaline and nor-adrenaline. According to Tavis, 'Adrenaline and nor-adrenaline are what provide the *feeling* of a feeling; that tingle, arousal, excitement, energy. The adrenal hormones act on all organs of the body reached by the sympathetic nervous system, stimulating the heart, dilating coronary vessels, constricting blood vessels in the intestines, and shutting off digestion. That is why when you are excited, scared, furious, or wildly in love, you don't want to eat. When the release of adrenaline and nor-adrenaline is chronic or prolonged, resulting in chronic or prolonged anger, some of the most serious effects are high blood pressure, headache, heart attack, stroke, and kidney problems. Therefore, the result of repressed, chronic, or prolonged anger can be devastating. And say researchers, if there's enough anger, almost any part of the body can be harmed. The effects can be as serious as cancer and heart disease or as minor (but annoying) as the common cold or skin disorders. Therefore, can you say, anger is a demon that destroys our health?

3. **Our third point** is what is the prescription to kill the germ of this demon, called anger? Again, ancient people also realized that this uncontrolled emotion caused lots of problems. **Proverbs 29:11** suggests that a fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back. I know someone whose full blown anger caused someone brain damage and served long term prison sentence. In **Eph. 4:26-27 Paul** acknowledges the need to be angry at times but urges not to dwell on it beyond sun-down. If you get angry, do not take it to your dinner table. It will spoil the whole dinner of the whole family. The verse says, "Be angry but do not sin." Uncontrolled anger, like Cain's will make a person sin. Paul suggests that we not make room for the devil.³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice/hatred. James gives us another prescription in **James 1:19-21**, to shut up and listen first, take time to speak and respond, with a couple of deep breaths, which will slow down your anger;²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

We don't say you should never get angry. Yes, we can be angry. But control it. When I was really angry with my employer many years ago who discriminated me with regard to my pay or wages, instead of getting angry, I enrolled in St. Louis University and earned my Masters in Social Work. Ever since then I was able to find a good paying job. I always say my Master's degree was by product of my anger.

As our conclusion, let us read the prescription given by our scriptures:
Prov. 29:11: A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back.

Eph. 4:26-27: ²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil. ³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice

James 1:19-21: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

If you all determine to take this medicine as prescribed all God's people say, AMEN.

24. **Drunk with alcohol or the Holy Spirit**

Prov. 23:31-35 Eph. 5:18-20

INTRODUCTION:

When I worked at Harborview Mental Health Hospital I happened to treat a patient who was diagnosed “alcohol-induced Psychosis.” His brain was so damaged by alcohol that he couldn’t even walk straight, talk straight or think straight. He was hearing voices and was delusional. His case was worse than pure mental illness such as schizophrenia because it included brain damage. He used to be a high ranking Boeing staff who owned a luxurious home, an airplane, a yacht, expensive cars, and also had a wife and children. But his alcoholism made him lose all of the above he owned including his mind. His wife divorced him.

I also feel heartache to see so many of our members suffer from alcoholism. My deep love and care about them motivated me to reach the scripture text and to prepare my sermon from Prov. 23:31-35 and Eph. 5:18-20. Let us read them together:

Prov. 23:31-35 warns that ³¹ Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. ³² At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. ³³ Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things. ³⁴ You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. ³⁵ ‘They struck me’, you will say, ‘but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.

Eph. 5:18-20: ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those scripture texts gave me a theme, “drunk with alcohol or the Holy Spirit”: **Let us make a few points:**

First let us talk about drinking alcohol: Perhaps some of you who enjoy drinking might be able to preach this sermon better than I who never drinks. The story of ex-BOEING staff is an extreme case. Inpatient treatment stopped him drinking but we couldn’t restore his brain damage. So you and I know many people who won’t stop drinking but we also see many friends who stop drinking and maintain sobriety. Some of you might have experienced both ways. Some were able to stop drinking after meeting Jesus. These experiences motivated me to study about alcoholism. I learned that alcohol has done serious harm to human body and mind. Some people say a drink in the evening will help with good sleep, etc.

Koreans would say about alcoholism as follows: At first, a person drinks alcohol. Then, alcohol drinks alcohol. And finally, alcohol drinks a person.

Experts claim that alcoholism is drinking alcoholic beverages at a level that interferes with physical health, mental health, and social, family, or job responsibilities. Alcoholism is a type of drug addiction. There is both physical and mental dependence on alcohol. Many of you know about this better than I.

Experts point out alcohol-related illnesses; memory lapses (blackouts) after drinking episodes; withdrawal symptoms when alcohol use is stopped; the incidence of alcohol intake and related problems is rising. Data indicate that about 15% of people in the United States are problem drinkers. Some other symptoms of alcoholism includes abdominal pain, drinking alone, episodes of violence with drinking, hostility when confronted about drinking, lack of control over drinking, being unable to stop or reduce alcohol intake, making excuses to drink, nausea and vomiting, need for daily or regular alcohol use to function, neglecting to eat, not caring for physical appearance, numbness and tingling, secretive behavior to hide alcohol use, shaking in the morning, etc.

Our modern day health professionals describes the effect of alcoholism on our health: Alcohol affects the central nervous system as a depressant. This leads to a decrease in activity, anxiety, inhibitions and tension. So drunken person spit out hidden stuff deep in unconscious level. Even a few drinks can change behavior, slow motor skills, and decrease the ability to think clearly. Alcohol can impair concentration and judgment. Alcohol addicted persons can experience jaundice, enlarged liver, a fatty liver that is the accumulation of fat in the liver. Alcoholism could also result in inflammation of the liver (alcoholic hepatitis) and/or scarring (alcoholic cirrhosis). If drinking continues, these conditions will cause **cirrhosis of the liver** - hardening of the liver. When the scar tissue develops to a certain point, the liver can no longer do its work. The liver performs more than 1,500 functions for the body, including more than 300 life-saving procedures. If the liver stops doing its job, all kinds of health problems develop quickly and death can come rapidly. There are many more damaging effects of alcohol on physical, emotional, social and family health.

Secondly, The Bible tells us about the danger of alcoholism.

The author of Proverb wrote the truth by saying that alcohol goes down your throat smoothly. But at last it bites you like a serpent, and stings like an adder.³³Your eyes will see strange things [which means hallucination], and your mind utter perverse things [which means delusion].³⁴ *You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.*³⁵ *'They struck me', you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it.* It talks about intoxicated, psychotic, delusional and numb state caused by alcohol; *When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.* The author also points out that hangover and withdrawal symptoms when you wake up make you feel the need to have another drink. Here the bite of a serpent represents serious and even fatal impact of alcoholism on human physical and mental health, such as liver damage and alcohol induced psychosis.

Thirdly the scripture text from Eph. 5:18-20 urges us not to drink and offers us prescription for healing. That is filled with the Spirit. What happens when you are drunk with Spirit? The text says, we end up singing hymns and spiritual songs among ourselves. We sing and make melody to the Lord giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the treatment plan our Bible offers us. The biblical people didn't know our modern alcohol treatment but they knew better way to prevent or treat the addiction. Positive Psychology proves what the Bible is saying is true by reporting a number of research findings about the psychological and medical benefits of music:

Increased happiness, lessen stress, reduced depressive symptoms, greater autonomy, and increased competence, hope, and optimism. Music offers an easy, natural way to relieve anxiety, increase alertness, feel happier, sharpen memory, improve mood, and fight off insomnia, depression and even addictions, without any side effects. Research shows that children who are involved with music programs grow up to have lower rates of addictive behaviors, better academic performance, and greater preparedness for college and the work force. Music making (playing an instrument or singing) is a multimodal activity that involves the integration of auditory and sensorimotor processes. Music listening can enhance the emotional and cognitive functioning of patients affected by various neurological conditions. Intensive singing practice can lead to long-lasting effect in both the cardiovascular and pulmonary problems. Because the act of singing requires long, repeated contractions of various respiratory muscles, this type of training may help to preserve the maximal expiratory pressure of patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Several studies show the result that singing reduced the frequency of stuttering by over 90%. Research has shown that singing has been shown to produce improvements in chronic stroke patients. Studies have described the positive effects of singing on the development of speech in children with autism. Singing reduces the risk of heart disease. They also found that combination of physical activity while listening to

your favorite music improved the lining of your blood vessels and showed impressive benefits on cardiovascular health.

I hope you are going to be drunk with the Holy Spirit. That is the reason why we worship, sing and give thanks to God every Friday evening before our dinner.

25. Jesus, company of the expendables

Scripture texts: Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 7:34

INTRODUCTION

We, the pastors of the Nest Mission, have been talking about Jesus using the book, 'Profiles of Jesus' written by 14 scholars. From the book, today, I am using the chapter 13, titled, *Dirt, Shame, and Sin in the Expendable Company of Jesus* by Stephen Patterson, professor of the New Testament at Eden Seminary in St. Louis, MO. I chose the Scripture texts from Mark and Luke with my sermon title "*Jesus, company of expendables*."

Let us read Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 7:34 together.

Mark 2:15-17

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' ¹⁷When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

Luke 7:34

³⁴the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!"

In the first page of his article, Prof. Patterson is asking 'What was the goodness the followers of Jesus saw in Jesus' words & deeds? What was the good news - the "gospel" - they heard in his words? What words and deeds of Jesus made them confess they had seen God?

I am going to ask you, the members, the same question he was asking. For you, what made you believe in Jesus? In other words, what words or deeds he said or did made you believers? Can you share in a few words? Next, I am going to ask pastors what words or deeds called you to be pastors? In other words, why did you want to be a pastor? Thank you for sharing.

I can summarize his main points in long chapter 13 as follows:

First, He summarizes the world of Roman Empire and the world of Jesus. Although this came up in the past in our sermons, he introduces a little different source: Jesus was born, lived and died about a century after Rome had taken Palestine by force. When many towns were slow in paying their share of the Judean tribute, all the inhabitants were sold into slavery. Later, shortly before the birth of Jesus, Rome quelled protests by sacking the great cities of Galilee and Samaria just over the hill from Jesus' hometown. The protest ended with a public crucifixion of 2000 of the ring leaders. Rome sold the Palestinian people into slavery. Rome used the slaves for the mines, and building the great Roman ships. Rome built its empire on the backs of slaves. Jesus would have known about Rome, and its great *Pax*, peace. Rome claimed that it was giving Roman Peace to the world, called the *Pax Romana*. They invade other countries and call it "Roman Peace Making."

The emperor controlled the means to life. 20% enjoyed wealth, power and all other privileges. 80% of the population, peasants lived on the very margins of existence. Rome's purpose was to suck up as many of a province's resources as it could. It slowly drained the life out of places like Palestine, Jesus' world. In such a system, peasants are fortunate enough to get a full day's work. They receive enough to pay to eat for a day - the life of subsistence. When it rains, they had to beg or starve.

Secondly, those who were poor, lived on the margin and were called "expendables." Tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, beggars, the blind, lames, mute, mentally ill shepherds, dung collectors, tanners, peddlers, weavers, bath attendants, gamblers, bandits, Gentiles, and women all expendables in the Roman Empire. They had no role, no function, and no place in their society, and they couldn't offer anything to and for their society.

The landless were expendables in society where the basic economic engine is land. Peasants without the land were nothing. They were all landless expendables. In our modern day term, the landless is unemployed, jobless and homeless people. Tax collectors are seen as traitors, unworthy of the company of respectable people. Tax collectors who extracted tax from poor peasants were hated. Zacchaeus would have engaged subordinates to do the actual work of collecting. Levi, who was called by Jesus (Mark 2;14) was a tax collector. Frequently slaves were purchased as 'tax collectors' The male tax collector was equivalent to the female role of 'prostitute'. Tax collectors and prostitutes were both expendable in the Empire.

Jesus lived outside the system of power and economy of Roman Empire. He was an itinerant teacher who had no home, no job, no earning. Jesus was a tekton, a "carpenter," (Mark 6:3). In that culture, artisans generally ranked below the peasant class. So, Jesus may have been an expendable too. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus said, fox have holes and birds in the air have nest but the son of man has no place to lay his head. Thus, Jesus not only knew expendables, but he himself could have been one of those expendables.

Thirdly, in that Roman-Jewish world the expendables were treated as the shamed sinners, and unclean. In that culture, common people automatically connected those who suffered from poverty, low class jobs, illness, misfortune, disability and any deficiency to sin, dirt, uncleanness.

Fourthly, Jesus was constantly in the company of the expendables. Our text from Matthew presents Jesus among all the sick and afflicted expendables. The other Lukan texts presents Jesus eating with sinners, the expendables. They called him "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Jesus eats with lepers, known to be unclean in (Mark 14:3). He has conversation with Gentiles, who were regarded as unclean (Mark 7:24-30). He welcomes prostitutes who were treated unclean sinners into his company (Luke 7:36-50).

In that culture they had very special rules regarding who you eat with. Gentiles ate with Gentiles; Jews with Jews. Men with men; women with women. Washing preceded eating. But there were women at table with Jesus, and he did not chase them away (Mark 14: 3-9; Luke 7:36-50). Jesus seems to have initiated a very peculiar, open practice of table fellowship. Eating together is a social activity that establishes group identity and boundaries. In the ancient world, eating together was perhaps the most common form of social formation.

Jesus said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick do. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Mark 2;14-17). He is saying that he came to cure all expendables of his day.

Fifthly, how did Jesus treat these expendables? Jesus invited them to come, sit, eat, and talk with him. Jesus included all the expendables in his company. He invited them to become part of the Empire of God. With Jesus, the expendables share the experience of being unclean, shame and the experience of being regarded as sinful .

Jesus said that he came for them. He regarded the unclean as clean. He treated the shamed with honor. He declared sinners righteous and able to stand in the glorious presence of God. Together they created an Empire of God. Jesus brought these expendables back into the human community.

The Gospel typically depicts him speaking of his activity as the *basileia* of God. Jesus announces the presence of this *basileia*; Kingdom of God. He calls prostitutes, tax collectors, children, and beggars into this *basileia*. In the synoptic gospels this term is used over a hundred times. Jesus is reported to speak all the time about the *basileia* of God. Jesus brought them the Kingdom of God in the midst of Roman Empire, which was highly risky. People could have lost their lives for it. Of course, Jesus did lose his life.

The author's final point is a question on how did these expendables feel about Jesus' words and deeds? How would you feel if you experienced the same? They had experienced the meaning of God disclosed in the person

of Jesus. Yes, they were able to confess that they had seen God in Jesus.

I would end with quotes from Professor Spong who said so well and brilliantly.

“Jesus found his cause in the poor, sick outcasts. He identified with the hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, and homeless. He claimed no power. His teaching found him using Lazarus, a poor beggar as the sign of his kingdom. He identified his cause with the half-breed Samaritan. When this self-giving Jesus was crucified, he refused to defend himself. He accepted the whips and nails of his tormentors, and he died praying for them (Luke 23:34). His life was too vivid to be forgotten, too real to be ignored, and how could they deny the power of the experience men and women had with this Jesus? His love was real. His sense of presence was vivid. His magnetic appeal to others was immense. Self-giving, suffering, powerlessness, and self-sacrifice were the marks of his human life. There was an undeniable beauty about this Jesus, who was in fact ***a man for others***. That was the meaning of God disclosed in the person of Jesus. They had experienced the definition of God. They ended up confessing Jesus was God.”

Jesus represented these expendables. Jesus was an expendable in the eyes of the Jews. All other expendables found God in Jesus. They found each other. They became one loving community that would die for each other.

Do you want to be in Jesus' community? We are one of those. If you recognize it and see Jesus in our midst, all God's people say, Amen.

26. **Product made in God**

Scripture text: Gen. 1:26-27

Theme: Product made in God

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the amazing grace of God who allowed us to have this retreat. Welcome everyone to this retreat. 12 of us are here this week-end to spend time together. Let us welcome Rev. Luther Stohs for joining us. He is going to sing with us.

When I was in the U.S. for the first time in 1960, most items in the market were made in Japan. When I came back in 1970, many items in the market carried labels, made in Taiwan. After that we saw items made in Korea. But in those days we could also see items made in USA. But these days, we can hardly find any item made in USA any more. Most items we see are made in China.

Are we the products made in USA because we are U.S. citizens? Or, are some of us made in Korea because that is our country of origin? My 15 years old Toyota with 150,000 miles on is still running good. My Chevy van died on me at 90,000 miles. But how about us? Do we last about 80 -90 years?

The theme of our retreat is "*How to be God's servants.*" Not just ordained pastors can be God's servant but anyone can be one. This week-end you will hear a lot about "leadership." To prepare ourselves, I want to help us to identify first who we are. Therefore, my theme to begin with this retreat is "We are made in God."

Then we will talk about why God made us. For what purpose did God give us life? To find the purpose of our life, we must find our origin. Where do we find our origin? Do we find our origin in our native country or our parents? Anyone has any idea? We must find our origin from God and in God.

Our Genesis text says, ²⁷ *So God created humankind in his image, male and female he created them.* ²⁸ *God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;*

This passage is saying that we are the product made in God. This product made in God will last forever. Now, we have found our origin. Where do we find the purpose of our lives? Do we go to supermarket or shopping mall to find it? Does anyone have an idea where can we find the purpose of our lives?

Purpose of our Life: According to Rick Warren, the author of "Purpose Driven Life," and he is also the pastor of Saddlebag Church in California, "Searching for the purpose of our life is not about us. The purpose of our life is far greater than our own personal fulfillment, or even our happiness. It's far greater than our family, our career, or even our dreams and ambitions".

He says, "If we want to know why we were placed on this planet, we must begin with God. We were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose. The search for the purpose of life has puzzled humankind for thousands of years. That's because we begin at the wrong starting point - ourselves. We ask self-centered questions like what do *I* want to be? What should *I* do with my life? What are *my* goals, *my* ambition, and *my* dreams for my future? By focusing on *ourselves* we will never get to the purpose of our lives," according to Warren.

Job 12:10 says, "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being." Therefore, we are in God's hands. We exist only because God wills that we exist. *We were made by God and for God - and until we understand that, life will never make sense.* It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny. Every other path leads us to a dead end. Because we are the product made in God, and not made in USA nor made in

China, God is the original country we have come from. God is the owner of our lives, the USA does not own us, nor does Korea own us. We are the creatures made in God, by God and for God.

- The Bible says, ⁶ *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace* (Rom. 8: 6).

Warren claims, God was thinking of us long before we ever thought about God. God's purpose for our life predates our conception. God planned it before we existed, *without our input*. We may choose our career, our spouse, our hobbies, and many other things, but we don't get to choose our purposes. The purpose of our life fits into much larger purpose that God has designed. We can discover our identity and purpose only through our relationship with God.

Therefore, our life is about letting God use us for *God's* purpose. ...Just like our song, "I am gonna live so God can use me."

Jesus Christ, who once lived on earth helps us to relate to this God. Jesus said, those who saw him also saw God, because Jesus is representing God. If we know clearly who Jesus is, we know exactly who the God is. Because Jesus is the mirror of God. We also get to know who we are. Many Christians believe that Jesus is the incarnate of God or he is God.

He came to stand in solidarity with you, who suffer in homelessness with no jobs, no homes but yet can be his friends and servants. That new identity will help us to draw a picture of what our life is going to look like, and how we can be servants of God.

You will hear from Rev. La Point about "troubled life to leadership." You will hear from Rev. Park on "Finding your Strength and Gift." You will hear from Rev. Jung on "biblical image" of leadership. You will hear from me and Rev. Jung about leadership virtues. You will hear from each other a story of different President of the United States who overcame his troubles and became a President. Through all these, I hope you keep your hearts wide open and let God walk in and plant a seed of hope and courage.

In our wrap up session on Sunday afternoon, each of us will have a chance to talk about our decision and plan, the way we are going to serve God. So I hope we all become new persons with new identities, and with new visions when we leave here. No matter where you may sleep, in the park or in your car, I hope you will be ready to get up and walk not as a homeless client but as a proud leader and servant of God. We, the pastors of the Nest Mission are looking forward to working with you for another year. May God bless us throughout this retreat.

Amen.

27. **Awake lest not fall into temptation**

Scripture Text: Matt. 26: 41; I Cor. 10: 13.

Introduction

There may be no one among us who has not experienced temptation of some kind. Most of us also have an experience of giving in to temptation. Therefore, today I chose two Bible texts. Let us read them together:

Matt. 26: 41: *Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

I Cor. 10: 13: *No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

From these texts, our theme is "stay awake, lest we fall into temptation."

My first point is reflection on the Scripture text: After sharing his last supper with disciples, Jesus wanted to pray because he knew his time was coming. Jesus needed to pray to God at this critical moment. So he took the disciples with him. When they arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told them " *Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death.* Knowing the most painful death lies before him, he was agitated and grieved. Going a little further, he threw himself on the ground and prayed. He asked God to pass this trial but not what he wanted but what God willed. He returned to his companions three times and, every time, he found them sleeping. They have proved unable to fulfill Jesus' request to keep watch with him in an hour of crisis. Jesus said, *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*"

According to Commentator Geddert, to watch (*keep awake*) means to identify with Jesus, remain loyal to him, follow his instructions, and follow him even on the road to the cross. In Gethsemane, the disciples were supposed to show loyalty by standing or kneeling with Jesus and submitting to God's will with Jesus during his time of distress, agitation, and grief. They were to gain spiritual strength to overpower weak flesh. If the disciples were loyal, they would keep their eyes wide open, seeing beyond suffering and death to the coming of God's reign. But the disciples slept through the crisis. They fell into trial by giving in to the weakness of the flesh. Their eyes have been heavy; they saw nothing beyond enemies and swords and danger. Despite their self-confident promises that they would never desert Jesus, they fled.

Commentator Williamson claims that the disciples and Jesus in Gethsemane offer readers two types for responding to the tests of life. In one response, the weakness of the flesh dominates and the outcome is the abandonment of Jesus. In other, commitment to the will of God dominates. The immediate consequence is arrest and crucifixion, but the final outcome was resurrection. Jesus knows that our mind wants to do something good, but our flesh is weak and falls into temptation.

My second point is: Are you being tested when you plan to do something positive and constructive? Yes, almost everyone experiences such tests. Would you share your experience in giving in to the devil's wish? Does the devil tell you not to go to Bible study and have some worldly fun, or not to go to Friday service for fun of drinking? That is what exactly happens to some members. So they miss the Bible study or Friday service and dinner. Some of our friends fall into temptation to drink harmful substance instead of eating healing dinner. Have you been captive of long term temptation? Examples? Is alcohol addiction a good example? Some people cannot resist stealing and fall into temptation. Or do you never give in? If not, how was it possible? Share your experience.

Matt. 6:13, Jesus taught us to pray, "Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil." If we can't do it alone, God will help us. Every day we must say this prayer not to give into the devil's wish.

My third point is getting encouragement from Paul's statement in In I Cor. 10: 13, St. Paul says, "*God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*" What is he saying here? Yes, he is saying that there is no test we cannot endure and we have God-given strength to subdue it. God wouldn't allow us to be tested beyond our ability. However, on the other hand, Paul told his readers not to feel exempt from trials because it is common lot for all humans. In fact, those who are most engaged in the way of God seem to experience most intensely the opposition of evil. If Jesus struggled, who is exempt? No one! On one hand, this statement may come as a shock to those who have felt that they had an exemption from problems because they are in special relationship with God. On the other hand, to people who are going through difficult times this passage is a source of assurance that they are not alone.

Again, Paul's statement means that God would set some limit on what He would allow to happen to us: God "*will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.*" God knows us, our strength and our weaknesses. This doesn't mean though that we will never be overcome by evil or that our failure will not be the result of having more than we can handle.

Paul assures us that "*with the temptation [He] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*" (v. 13). We ask God for help and God will give it to us.

Scholars would say, a real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. Temptation is an indication of strength, not of weakness. We are not tempted to do what we cannot do but what is within our power. The greater the strength, the greater the temptation.

The author of the Book of Hebrew would say in Heb 2:13, "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." All this means that there is no temptation that we cannot overcome.

Because God is with us and will help us to overcome the test *if* we allow God to help us.

Do you have any experience you had overcome temptation with help from God? Let us stay wide awake. Let us not allow the devil to overcome us.

Let us all push the devil away. God says, we can do it. Jesus says, we can do it.

St. Paul says, we can do it. If you believe you can do it, you can do it. Put down all your devils on the paper. We will destroy all your devils by burning them.

If you believe you can destroy your devils, All God's people say, AMEN, AMEN."

28. Exodus: Healing

Scripture text: Ex. 2: 23-25; 3: 7-10

I chose today's Scripture text from Ex. 2: 23-25; 3: 7-10

Let us read it together:

Ex. 3: 7 Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..... ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt....

This scripture text is telling us four things; 1) Israel was suffering and cried out to God. 2) God heard them. 3) God chose a partner to work with Israel. 4) God, Moses and Israel team succeeded Exodus. Let us review each of those:

First point: Israel was suffering In Egypt. How was happened?

To make a long story short, when Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob, was kidnapped and sold to Egypt by his jealous step brothers. Through all kinds of hardship, hard and faithful work, and steadfast trust in God, he gained trust of the King Pharaoh and rose to power next to Pharaoh. He brought his parents and other 11 brothers and their families, 66 people, to Egypt. Through 430 years in Egypt, Israelite's number grew to six hundred thousand. A new king rose up who didn't know Joseph and feared of Israelite's growth. The new Egyptian king began to abuse and oppress the Israelites to prevent their further growth. This was known as Egyptian bondage or slavery. For Israel this meant harsh labor, abuse, violence, and hardship with no rights to worship God; no rights to keep a child if it was a boy. The purpose of killing boys was to prevent from growing of Israelite's population in Egypt. Israel people were unwanted homeless in Egypt. So the Israelites groaned and moaned and cried out for help.

My second point is God heard their cry:

Their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their cry. God said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry. Indeed, I know their sufferings. My point is that the heart of God aches when God's people aches. The heart of God felt the pain and groaning of Israelites.

My third point is: God responds in several ways.

Upon hearing Israel's suffering God got anxious and busy. God was taking an action by coming down. In those days people believed God was moving around physically. We can understand God's coming down as God's intimate response to God's people. God wanted to get them out of there and bring them to a good and broad land flowing with milk and honey. God's response was like a mother's response to a suffering child.

His next action was to find found a partner, who was Moses. God needed someone physically to go to Pharaoh and to lead Israel's liberation movement. So God partnered with Moses for this mission of Israel's Exodus. God always looks for a partner on earth to work with. Moses was the one who intervened on behalf of God and Israelites. God was behind Moses guiding him on what to do next and how to do it.

My fourth point is God, Moses and Israel team succeeded Exodus.

I use the word "team". I am a firm believer in "partnership with each other and with God to achieve something. Although I believe God's almighty power can perform any miracle I also believe in God's intention to include and involve us in most events happening to us. In this case God did not want to

do it alone without Moses' cooperation. Moses could not do it without the Israelites' cooperation. All three parties had to stick together, cooperate with each other and support one another. But God was the leader and director throughout. Had God liberated Israelites miraculously without any effort on the part of Moses and Israelites they wouldn't appreciate the liberation experience as much as they did. The Bible reports that the Israelites talk about this exodus experience intentionally all the time throughout generations. That experience became their ground to understand other poor suffering people and help them.

Through a long and hard process with Pharaoh, finally God, Moses and Israelites team succeeded in achieving Israelites' exodus. Exodus for Israel people meant "leaving, come out of, overcome and liberation from the Egyptian bondage, which meant ending their slavery and their homelessness.

Some scholars would explain the Exodus event as a healing and restoration to healthy existence. The situation of bondage in which Israel found itself was one of disorder and pathology, not a true state of human existence. This God as "healer" is the one who liberates, redeems, ransoms, restores to the true intention of creation. The true intention of God's creation is to restore persons, communities, and ultimately the whole of creation to their rightful status of health.

My last point is applying Israel's exodus experience to our own situation today.

Are we in bondage and slavery in anyway?" Can you name some of your bondage? Can you also name our modern day bondage? Yes, the poor are under the "Egyptian bondage" of "poverty and unemployment." Too many people are under the bondage of homelessness and substance abuse. Many people are under the bondage of emotional hang ups- such as anger, hatred, grief that poisons your body and mind and, are damaging your health. If you are enslaved too long by these destructive emotions, it is called "mental illness." Once you are enslaved by these Egyptian bondages, it is hard to get out of it. You know it! Often times we are sucked into such bondages and can't get us out of them.

Yes, the rich are under "Egyptian bondage" of "greed." Once you are enslaved by the "greed" it is hard to get free from it. We are under many different forms of addiction and bondages.

Are you experiencing your exodus? Do you want to experience an exodus?

Do you have Moses? God partners with many Moses for your exodus. God always responds through people. God works with people in the world to bring exodus to God's suffering people. Who is your Moses? Name her or him. If God chose a Moses for you, are you working with your Moses? God wouldn't do it alone. God uses Moses. Moses wouldn't do it alone. Moses needs you. God, your Moses and you all work together to achieve your exodus. We are all God's partners to experience our exodus. Are you in and with God to bring your desired exodus?

My conclusion is that God in Jesus wants to bring exodus for all of us. Jesus came to help the poor to experience exodus from poverty. He came to help the captives to experience exodus from jails and prisons. He came to help those in bondage to experience exodus from the oppression. He came to help women to experience exodus from all forms of discriminations. Jesus came to help the sick to experience exodus from their disease. Jesus came to help the hopeless to experience exodus from their despair. Jesus came to help the angry to experience exodus from their hatred of self and others. Jesus came to help the weak to experience exodus from powerlessness. Jesus came to help all of you to experience exodus from homelessness. Jesus came to help all of us to experience exodus from our bondage of sins. If you determine to work with your Moses to experience your exodus, all God's people say, Amen.

29. Inborn desire for God

I John 4:7-8 B

beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Romans 7:14-15, 17

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. ¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh.

INTRODUCTION

We used the book, "Addiction and Grace" written by Dr. May, a psychiatrist for our retreat. It is so good that we the pastors decided to use that book in preparing our sermon so that we can share it with you too.

He was not biased at all in presenting the addiction issue by including all forms of addiction such as alcohol, drug, work, power, success stress, honor, sense of responsibility, coffee, cigarettes, chocolate, and many others. He invited everyone to recognize their own addiction to something. Dr. May was inclusive of other religious teachings also. While he was inclusive, he started the book by mentioning human desire for God and ends it with God's grace. Because we all, have learned something new by building more knowledge and insight to our own addiction; by discovering God's endless self-giving grace on us we all had a transforming experience, Our sermons will relate to "addiction issues."

1. My first Bible text comes from I John 4:7-8. Who wants to read it for us? We all know love. There is no one here who doesn't love someone. We didn't go to school to learn how to love. We never went through any training to learn how to love. Even someone who had never gone to school is able to love. We can call it our inborn desire or ability to love. Since God is the original source of love, we are born of God. Everyone regardless of your faith in God, you are born of God.

I shall give some examples: Some people who have no religion seek God for help in their crisis. Some pray to sun, moon, stars, trees, rocks or to their ancestors' spirits to ask help. Regardless of how we seek the power we believe that power can bless us and heal us because it is humanity's inborn desire for God although they don't call them "God." This yearning is the essence of the human spirit;

Therefore, St. Paul says that *everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

Dr. May would say that it is "a longing for love" regardless of how we describe it. It is a hunger to love, to be loved, and to move closer to the Source of love.

Whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure. It gives us meaning. God creates us out of love. Our desire for God draws us to that perfect love. But some of us have repressed this desire, burying it beneath so many other interests that we are completely unaware of it. Or we may experience it in different ways - as a longing for wholeness, completion, or fulfillment.

Modern theology describes this desire as God-given. We are born with it. In an outpouring of love, God creates us and plants the seeds of this desire within us. Then, throughout our lives, God nourishes this desire. This means that we are created for God and to seek God.

2. Here let me bring in our second text: ¹⁵*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* What he is saying is what is exactly said by Dr. May, who said that along the way something gets in the way. That longing repeatedly disappears from our awareness. Our desires are captured, and we give ourselves over to things that we really do not want. Dr. May blames two forces are responsible for this: repression and addiction. We frequently repress our desire for love because love often hurts us. You may fall in love with someone. But that person abandons you and you are left with pain. And you don't want to love anyone again because you don't want that pain again. Therefore, often we repress our desire to love to minimize this suffering.

Anyone experience this? We also repress our desire for God to avoid pain. We try to keep our focus on safer things. Psychology calls this *displacement*. It makes us attach to substances that make us do things we really do not want to do. These objects of attachment become preoccupations and obsessions; they rule our lives.

3. According to Dr. May, addictions are not limited to substances. Like myself, people are addicted to work, performance, responsibility, helping others, and an almost endless list of other behaviors. All people are addicts, but addiction to alcohol and drugs are more tragic than other kinds of addictions. Addiction is a *state* of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a persons' will and desire. Addiction makes us being attached, nailed, to specific behaviors, objects, or people. Whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of our soul. Addiction is like a psychic malignancy, sucking our life energy into specific obsessions and compulsion, less energy for other people.

4. According to Dr. May, spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The object of our addictions becomes our false god. They are what we worship, what we attend to, where we give our time and energy. Addiction, then, robs our desire for God. So St. Paul is frustrated that he does what he doesn't want to do. I ended up naming it "*sin that dwells within me. I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.*" According to Dr. May, Sin is not just ignorance or moral straying, but a kind of bondage or slavery. Theologically, sin is what turns us away from love - away from love for ourselves, away from love for one another, and away from love for God.

5. St. Paul wants to be free from this sin. Dr. May says that *Detachment* can awaken our spirit and show us where God is. Detachment uncovers our basic desire for God and sets it free. This freedom of desire makes us able to love, and love is the goal of the spiritual life.

6. Dr. May further claims that God created us by love, out of love, in love, and for love. It is both our birthright and our authentic destiny to participate fully in this creative loving. God's love wants us to have free will. We are intended to make free choices. Spiritually, our freedom allows us to choose as we wish for or against God, life, and love. This God's love is not enslaving; it is eternally present, yet endlessly open. It seems that free will is given to us so that we may choose freely, without coercion or manipulation, to love God in return, and to love one another. This is the deepest desire of our hearts. But our freedom is not complete. Working against it is the powerful force of addiction which erodes our freedom.

7. You and I can easily identify with the words of the Apostle Paul. I know how much you want to stop abuse of substances and restore your health and normal life. But you and I know we do what we don't want to do. Do you agree with this? We give into the addiction of all forms. I hear several friends are saying that they want to be clean and sober. But they show that they cannot do it alone.

As our conclusion let me summarize that all human beings have an inborn desire for God because God created us out of love, for love, in love, and to love. This fact was proved by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He came to love, live to love and died to love. He is the incarnate of God's love. He showed us exactly what the God's love looks like. And therefore, we are not hopeless. We can do it. We can terminate our addiction in God's love and grace.

Amen.

30. **What did you sow and reap?** – Year-end sermon

Scripture text:

Job 4:8: As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

Prov. 22: 8: Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail.

Gal. 6: 7-8: you reap whatever you sow. ⁸ If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

Gal. 6: 9: So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

Ps. 126: 5: May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome everyone. The year of 2011 is almost gone. What was the best thing happened to you this year? Anyone would like to share? What was the worst thing happened to you this year? Anyone would like to share?

1. LET US READ THE BIBLE VERSES

My sermon theme is what did you sow and what did you reap? A friend of Job in Job 4: 8, and the author of the Proverb 22, and St. Paul in Gal. 6, all three people say, "*We reap what we sow*" If you have sown corn, you will reap corn. If you have sown apple, you will reap apple. Do you all agree with that?

Our life is a business of plowing and sowing. Whatever we do, means we have been sowing something. We reap the fruits from what we have sown. That is an absolute and scary truth. We plow and sow through our thoughts, our talk and our action. Therefore, whatever we do all means plowing and sowing. We get to reap exactly what we had sown. If we sow goodness, we will reap goodness. If we sow justice, we will reap justice. If we sow love, we will reap love, if we sow friendliness, we will reap friendliness. If we sow mercy, we will reap mercy. What we have sown in youth we will reap in our old age. What was sown by their parents, will be reaped by their children. What we have sown in this world will be reaped in our life after.

2. St. Paul said so well in Galatians 6: 9, "If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh. Last week-end, at the Christmas gifts of motel rooms, people who sowed drinking and smoking in the room reaped eviction. People who sow alcohol and drug will reap the loss of jobs and families. People who sow stealing will reap incarceration.

3. St. Paul also said in Galatians 6: 9, "If you sow to the Spirit you will reap eternal life from the Spirit." People who have sown faithfulness to Bible class reaped knowledge in God's words and God's love. People who have sown steadfastness to this Friday service, reaped fellowship with God and with one another. People who faithfully sing every Friday will reap healing in God's love.

You will also reap salvation. All the services and good deeds can be sowing to the Spirit. If we sow thanksgiving and will reap the same. Our donors and volunteers sow their love and services and they shall reap blessings.

4. Our concluding question is what shall we do? Answers come from Galatians 6:9 and Psalms 126:5. Let us read them in unison: *So let us NOT grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.* It is difficult and takes time and effort to sow good things. Some of you might have to sow sobriety in tears, patience, and perseverance and even in emotional and physical pain. Paul says you will reap ALL at the harvest time. Psalmist says, those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. Although it is difficult to sow but you will reap good rewards.

Our friend, Jeff is in alcohol treatment. It is a difficult process of keeping all the rules and restrictions for 6 months. What will be his good crops? He will reap a new personality and new life.Let us now all close our eyes for a moment. Think of what you have sown this year and what you have reaped. What do you determine to sow next year? What do you dream to reap next year?

31. The Holy Ground

Scripture text: Exodus 3: 1-5; I Cor. 3:16-17

I chose Scripture text from Exodus 3: 1-5. Let us read together Exodus 3: 1-5.

Exodus 3: 1-5; Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ⁵Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'

My Sermon theme is "Holy Ground"

The Bible verse we read is the story of Moses who received a call out of burning bush. It is a very well-known story in the Bible. I think we need to know Moses' story to understand our story today.

Moses' story:

In Egypt, the Hebrews multiplied and became very strong. King Herod began to oppress the Hebrews by forcing them to do cruel labor. In Egypt, Pharaoh was afraid that the Hebrews would gain power thinking, someday, when enemy invades Egypt, the Hebrews might join them and overthrow all Egyptians. So King Herod commanded his people to throw every boy that is born to the Hebrews into the Nile river (Ex. 1: 20b, 22). At that time, Moses happened to be born. His mother hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she put her baby in a papyrus basket and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. She found the basket, opened it, and found the baby in it crying. So she took pity on him. She took him as her son. She named him Moses (Ex. 2: 3, 5-6, 10). Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace, in the home of Hebrew's enemy. Isn't that ironic!

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When Pharaoh heard about it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian (Exodus 2: 11-12, 15). Moses suffered forty years of separation from his people and family. But the years have passed. He has settled down to a shepherd's life in Midian, after being married to Jethro's daughter, the priest. Moses is now eighty years of age.

Moses was walking along an old familiar path with his sheep. He saw a bush that seemed to be on fire. He watched it, expecting it to crumble into gray ashes. But to his amazement, it continued to burn. God called Moses, "Moses. And Moses answered, "Here I am." And God told Moses to take his shoes off, *for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*' Now, let's all repeat saying, "*Take your shoes off because it is holy ground.*" One more time, "*Take your shoes off because it is holy ground.*"

The fire in the bush associates with God's presence. The burning bush symbolizes God's presence. *The angel of the Lord* appeared. God and the Angel are identical and interchangeable. The Angel of the Lord is a visible appearance of God.

What can we learn from this story? When we are in God's presence, the ground whereon we stand is always holy. That's why Moses was told to take shoes off. This means that when you come in to this church, the ground you are standing or sitting on is HOLY, because God is present here with us. Therefore, we must take shoes off. When God tells us to take our shoes off, what do we do? Yes, we must take our shoes off because this place we are sitting is the Holy Ground. Your feet might be

dirty and smell but let's all take our shoes off. Everyone takes shoes off. Did everyone take your shoes off? How do you feel after taking shoes off? Yes, bad smell?

Shoes means "uncleanness." They walked on dusty and dirty streets all day. They carry our dirty feet. Dirty shoes represent dirty bags we have been carrying on our back, on our head, and in our hearts.

What are your dirty shoes represent for you? Let us call out. Dirty shoes represent our dirty thinking, dirty resentment and dirty anger, dirty hatred, filthy hearts poisoned and polluted by alcohol and drugs, dirty behaviors, dirty habits, dirty life style, all dirty sickness and all forms of dirty sins.

Taking dirty shoes off means that we lay down all of our dirty bags, behaviors, habits, life style; we change, we give up all of dirty bags: We change, we transform to new persons; we renew our relationship with ourselves, with God, with others and with the world. This is the process we become holy. After taking dirty shoes off, what happened to Moses? God gave him a mission to carry out, which was being sent to Pharaoh in Egypt. He was commissioned to the killer's land to rescue Hebrew people. After we take our shoes off, we will be sent out to the dead city.

It also means our repentance for all our sins. If you don't take your shoes off, if you don't lay down that garbage, there is no room for God's spirit to come in and dwell. In Lev. 11: 44, God said, "Sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy." We must be holy so that God will reside in us. Because God resides in us, we must be clean and holy. I Cor. 3:16-17 says we are God's temple where God wants to reside. So our hearts must be clean and holy too. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Greek word for *dwelt* literally means to "pitch a tent." By pitching His tent in our midst, God becomes present with us, identifies Himself with us; and the reality is that God is here in our midst.

Through Christ, God comes to pitch His tent" among us. God pitches tent in our hearts and among us right here. That is the reason why we must take shoes off. We must lay down our dirty baggage. So we may dwell in God's tent with our God and our Lord Jesus. And we all shall be God's people.

32. **Permanent Home/Memorial Service**

Scripture Text: John 14: 2-3

INTRODUCTION

Everyone is welcome to the memorial service for Rich Ward. Rich Ward used to come to our dinner and sat in your midst. He used to wear dark color jacket and sat in the back seat. He was very quiet, a loner but he was very gentle, friendly and harmless man. He stayed at the Andy's Motel from Feb 8, 2010 - November 15, 2012. 2 1/2 years.

Two weeks ago he passed away in his sleep at age 62. I put his testimony on the front page since I couldn't get his photo. His testimony explains quite well how much a room meant to him. I titled my message "Permanent Housing" from John 14: 1-3. Let us all read John 14: 2-3 together:

²In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also

Those of you who experience homelessness know exactly what the permanent housing means. In these days, many people find it almost impossible to get permanent housing unless you have a steady job and income. It is equally hard to get low income housing. Not everyone is qualified for it either. Even when you are qualified for it, you have to wait 5-10 years because there is not enough low income housing. Therefore, many people easily fall into homelessness.

As you all know, homelessness is so hard that it shortens a person's life span. Two years ago, his toes were almost amputated in a cold wet weather. So, we placed him in a motel room. Life at motel was not real permanent home. But for him, it was. He liked it so much and so comfortable that he didn't want to leave that space even briefly.

John's text is a very comforting statement for people who have no homes and for all those who lived difficult life.

Jesus said, he goes ahead of us to prepare our permanent home. Rich is now welcomed into God's permanent home. He doesn't have to exhaust his social security for rent. It is free permanently. It is a permanent home for him. There he wouldn't experience any more homelessness. That doesn't mean we all must die to get to that permanent home. I would say that most of us are homeless physically, or emotionally or spiritually. Even if our physical permanent housing is not found yet, we can find emotional and spiritual permanent home. When you don't let yourself wasting away in an anxiety, fear, and anger, you can still find peace in _____ mind, then it is emotionally permanent home. I am not saying you must satisfy with your homelessness. You know that you and I are not satisfied with your homelessness. But we still can thank God for our life and find peace even in that circumstances because if we allow our anger and despair to abuse ourselves, we damage our body and soul all together.

We can also find spiritually permanent home by coming closer to God and residing in God and with God, and keep on doing that which pleases God. I am not saying you must thank God for being homeless. I am saying that even in whatever circumstances we are in, we can find spiritually permanent home while we are on earth.

Today I would like to offer condolence to his family members, relatives and friends who are grieving for the loss of Rich, because we all know that he is in God's permanent home where there is no more homelessness.

Now I would like to invite family members and friends who want to share memories of him. We have him on our DVD too. Let us view it briefly.

Let us pray to commit his spirit into the hands of God. Let us bow our heads:

Creator God, before whom generations rise and pass away. We praise you for all your servants, who, having lived this life in faith, now live eternally with you.

Especially we thank you for your servant Rich Ward for the gift of his life, for all in him that was good, kind, and rich although his life was painful.

We thank you that his death is past and pain ended, and that he is now entered the joy you have prepared for him. Into your loving hands, O God of love, we commend his spirit. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, into the glorious company of the saints. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now let us end by singing "God be with you till we meet again."