

Message (April 19, 2020)

Reverend Michito Kasagawa

(trans. Satoshi Miyawaki)

Title: I AM WITH YOU

Text: Isaiah 41: 8-13

8 “But you, Israel, my servant,
 Jacob, whom I have chosen,
 you descendants of Abraham my friend,
9 I took you from the ends of the earth,
 from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, ‘You are my servant’;
 I have chosen you and have not rejected you.
10 So do not fear, for I am with you;
 do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
 I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

11 “All who rage against you
 will surely be ashamed and disgraced;
those who oppose you
 will be as nothing and perish.
12 Though you search for your enemies,
 you will not find them.
Those who wage war against you
 will be as nothing at all.
13 For I am the Lord your God
 who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
 I will help you.

(New International Version (NIV))

■Introduction

On March 4, 1933, in his inaugural speech, then American President Franklin Roosevelt said, “There is only one thing we should be afraid of: FEAR.” The world was in the midst of Great Depression at that time, and the whole situation was being directed toward the Second World War. “There is only thing we should be afraid of: Fear.” We feel sharply how the feeling of fear may affect us. We witnessed Panic Buying. Mutual Isolation of Nations: now it is made extremely difficult to go abroad. And we hear from the news about Discrimination and Harassment Caused by the Novel Corona Virus. When people fear, they often end up going to the extreme, cutting relationships, or being filled with anger or stress to hurt neighbors. On the other hand, while fear may bring about the panic about the possibility of losing something, it may also help us to rediscover the value of what used to be taken for granted. Now we are worshipping through internet, and now feel acutely that gathering together in our worship hall to praise the Lord together with loud voices is not actually to be taken for granted but rather to be taken with gratitude. If we trust in God, when we experience fear we are drawn into looking up to God. What is He speaking to us in such time as this?

■DO NOT FEAR

10 Do not fear, for I am with you;
 do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

Now God is speaking to us through His Word. Faith or belief is the ability to listen to what God is speaking. Let's listen to and accept the message from God through the Prophet Isaiah. I will show three points.

1. Unchanging Calling of God (vv. 8-9)

8 "But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,
9 I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, 'You are my servant';
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

Isaiah 41: 8-9

Isaiah declared this word of God to the people of Judah who lived in great anxiety. This kingdom, smaller than even the half of Shikoku Island was bound between two empires of Assyria and Egypt, and was about to be extinct. Kingdom of Israel in the north was destroyed by Assyria in 772 BCE, and as a result 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel disappeared from the history. In the midst of their great fear of being extinguished from the earth, God spoke to them through Isaiah, telling them about what they really were for Him: they were the descendant of Abraham; they were specially chosen and gathered so that they might become the source of blessing to

many nations. They betrayed God again and again – yes, they had weak faith in Him, yet God never gave up on the people of Israel, as it is written:

"...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

Romans 11:29

Isaiah prophesied the eventual birth of Messiah the Savior – indeed Jesus was born as a Jew, 700 years later just as prophesied. His calling never changes. Each one of us is actually called and chosen by God Himself. It may be you who have chosen by yourself to watch this worship service through internet, but from God's own perspective, each one of us have been led, chosen, and as a result we are here to listen to the Word of God. We have already been chosen since when our life is gifted. And He is the one who takes away our life on this earth. By his initiative we are led to encounter this true God the Bible testifies: thus we come to know our Savior Jesus Christ and believe in Him. Christian may add up to only 1 percent of the whole population of Japan, but we are never here without His election.

"...he (God) predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" Ephesians 1:5

God's election has His purpose, meaning, and blessing. We can trust Him to accomplish His good works that He started in the life

of each one of us.¹ Let's remember: God's election, His calling never changes.

2. God is with you (v. 10)

That was when I was in Grade 2, when my parents are into the early stage of church planting. Pastor's house was used as a place of worship, and around 30 people gathered at the hall as large as 60 square meters. One day, during a service, a church member asked me to lend him my Bible. I passed him the Bible my parents bought for me when I was in Grade 1, how surprising, he began to write with his pencil something on my Bible! When he returned my Bible I found on the Isaiah 41:10: "41:10 is Uncle XXX's favorite passage". Ten years after this, I underlined on the same passage with red pencil as my most important passage. This is one of the most favored Word of God, most memorable passage. I wonder how many people have been encouraged, energized and comforted by this passage. We experience fear in the midst of our life. We are often overwhelmed – weakened, disappointed, and bewildered. But God tells us: "I am with you" "as I am your God". This is a very important message that Bible tells us again and again. This "with" is translated from original Hebrew preposition "im", meaning "wrapping", "being together", "fellow group" "sharing the suffering" and so on. It does not only mean to be there, but also means to share something together as the member of the same community. God is with us – this can also be translated as "Immanuel" – another name of Jesus Himself.

Jesus is the "GOD WITH US", and he himself dared to come to this earth. He was born as one of the Jews, lived together with his family and his disciples, telling the Good News, loved people, healed the sick. In order to solve the problem of Sin, the dividing wall between God and us, he died on the cross, and was raised on the third day. By his death on the cross instead of us brought us redemption, and our relationship with God was restored. That's how we now live together with Him. Latter part of verse 10 says: "I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." There is no better news on this earth! Our life is safeguarded by the right hand of God, and Holy Spirit of the Living God dwells in each believer and strengthen us from within.

3. God is ready to help you (vv. 11-13)

Our final point is that God is ready to help you. Verse 11 actually begins with the word "look!". What shall we see? We are called to see the real situation we are facing, as well as the future ahead. People of Israel at the time of Isaiah's prophesy would not like to see straight at their real situation – as it was indeed terrifying. But God promised in verse 11 and 12 His perfect protection for the Kingdom of Judah. It is true that in 701 BCE, Jerusalem, the capital city of the kingdom of Judah was surrounded by Assyrian army, but by His mysterious work the city was protected, and Assyria was eventually thoroughly defeated.

For I am the Lord your God
who takes hold of your right hand

¹ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*,

Tyndale, 2001.

and says to you, Do not fear;

I will help you.

Isaiah 41:13

How does He help us? It tells: “(He) takes hold of your right hand”. “Right hand” symbolizes every deed for us to live. For some it is work, for others it may be house chore or elderly care, or study. Sometimes we are at a loss what to do, or discouraged and disappointed. We are often surrounded by fear. But God helps those who trust in Him, just as the word of prophesy by Isaiah. He takes hold of our right hand and strengthens us. So in whatever situation, we do what we are called to do. What we need is to be with God who stays together with us – and in trust in Him to strive forward. A Psalmist sang as follows:

Yet I am always with you;

you hold me by my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel,

and afterward you will take me into glory.

Psalm 73: 23-24

■LIKE A FATHER

I took notice of this picture in one of the news articles from the United States.



Alyssa Burks/Facebook

This is a picture of Jared Burks, a doctor in Arkansas, US, and his son Zeke. Jared works at the forefront of medical mission for those infected with Novel Coronavirus. Because of the risk of infection, he lives away from his family. When he finds some free time in the hectic schedule he visits his family, but he cannot hug his son Zeke. His situation is never easy, but he is a great encouragement and hope for Zeke. Even over the glass window he feels his father is together with him – and he is looking forward to seeing his father directly. Alyssa, his wife says: “Count your blessings. That’s what’s getting us through this!”

God our Father tells us: don’t fear! I am with you! He is ready to help us. Let’s remember that his calling never changes, and that he is together with us, takes hold of our right hand, and helps us. I pray that the protection and guidance from our God is with each one of us for this week.