

“Do not be afraid”, Matthew 10:24-39 (06/21/20)

There are countless things to learn and experience through giving birth and raising a child. One of them is overcoming fear. **(Slide 1)** Caleb is a child with a lot of fear. He has fear about every transition, so he is always nervous and crying in fear before trying something new. Every time that I see him in fear, I tell him: “Don’t worry, Caleb, father is here.” Caleb has grown up listening to these words from me countless times since he was very young, and is now repeating them to himself in front of a nervous or frightening affair: “Don't worry, Caleb, father is here...” Then, as if making a great decision, he wipes away his tears and wakes up bravely and finds the courage to try it. Whenever I see this lovely child, I cannot help but remember God's heart. Does God want us to overcome our fears through God and in God like this? **(Slide 2)** What would God say to me when I was crying in fear? “Don't worry, Kook Ho, I'm here.” It is written in Psalm 46:1-2a “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear” Indeed, I hope and pray that this will be our sincere confession of faith in our time of need.

(Slide 3) At the time of early Christianity, the most powerful empire was Rome. Rome dominated many peoples and countries near the Mediterranean Sea. The Roman army was very powerful like the US army is today. Strong laws and political systems were essential to maintaining the empire. At that time, all rebels were legally executed by crucifixion, which was the highest capital punishment. And, one of them was Jesus Christ. Christianity preached to the people that Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and resurrected, was the Son of God. At that time, people thought Jesus’ disciples were out-of-their-minds, so they ridiculed them. Christianity was inevitably confronted with the Roman Empire, who crucified Jesus. But the problem was that Christianity did not have a power to fight against the Roman Empire. Thus, many followers of Jesus died as a martyr for their faith. Indeed, at that time, living as a Christian was very scary.

(Slide 4) Today’s gospel lesson, Matthew 10:24-39, was based on the context of this early Christianity. In the preceding text, Matthew 10:16-18, Jesus was very concerned about the hardship that his disciples would face, so he said this: “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before

governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.” Religious powers and political powers persecute those who disagree with them because they want to be absolute by themselves. There are many ways to persecute people who don’t agree with them, such as creating various disadvantages, cajoling, intimidation, and direct physical violence. For each individual, such things must have been terrifying. But in today’s text, Jesus repeatedly says to his disciples “Don't be afraid.”

First, as verse 26 said - “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.” - eventually, the truth will be revealed. One of the reasons why people are afraid and in fear is to be misunderstood and not accepted in the world. Disciples of Jesus were afraid that the Gospel would not be recognized by the world. People of the Old Testament era sincerely believed and expected that the world would change completely when the Messiah comes. However, even though the Messiah came, the world did not change much. Still, the world was mean and evil. Therefore, the Jews claimed that Jesus could not be recognized as the Messiah. However, verse 26 says that what is hidden is eventually revealed. Now the salvation of Jesus Christ through the cross is not fully revealed. It is still hiding. However, this will be clearly revealed in God’s time. Until then, our role is to constantly testify. **(Slide 5)** Martin Luther suffered great frustrations and disappointments many times as the Reformation began. Nevertheless, Luther was sure that the truth would win. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” is one of the best-known hymns, written and composed by Martin Luther. In verse 3, he confessed that “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us.”

Secondly, as verse 28 said- “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” - the world may kill our body, but the world can never kill our soul. The body and soul are distinct but cannot be separated from each other. If the body refers to a life that we can strive for, the soul is a life given only by God. Therefore, the body can be destroyed by the evil powers of the world, but the soul cannot be touched by anyone except God. In verse 4 of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” Martin Luther confessed that “That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours, thru him who with us

sideth. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever.”

(Slide 6) Thirdly, as verse 31 said - “So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”- God cares. Everything is under God’s reign in all the universe. The Bible says that it is possible only with God’s permission for a small sparrow to fall to the ground. God has even counted every single hair on your head. God, who cares about such small things, surely cares about the suffering of his beloved children. In the midst of our suffering, God is sick with us, crying with us, and remembers our pain, and must be comforting and rewarding.

(Slide 7) Then, how can we be free from our concerns and fears? The answer comes from seeing what people are getting into right now. Many people say they watch TV because the moment they start watching TV helps them forget their fears. Some people forget everything while they are exercising. Others have a variety of hobbies. They go shopping, attend art exhibitions, or travel. All is good. However, they are just temporary, not the ultimate method. You can't watch TV 24/7, also you can't only exercise 24/7. Even if you go on a trip and feel refreshed and enjoyed your time, when you come back, you will face an inevitable reality. So, anyone who expects something more stimulating seeks alcohol. Then, in search of a bigger stimulus, they also fall into drugs. They say that there is no fear and no concern for yourself at the moment when you are intoxicated with alcohol and drugs, but in the end, such a method is not desirable because it not only paralyzes our reason, but also destroys our whole life. After all, the best way is “the God experience”. Because God is the creator of our life and is the one who still maintains it and who will complete it at the end. When we find the easiest example of “the God experience” in our daily lives, we can think of a baby in their mother's arms. In the mother’s arms, a baby is completely dependent on her. For a baby, there is nothing to fear in the mother’s arms.

We, as adults, cannot find complete peace anymore in our mother’s arms. But by being held in the arms of the mother of our soul, in other words, through “the God experience”, you can overcome fear and find true peace. The feeling, awareness, will, and faith, which enable us to entrust our future to God without fear is “the God experience”. This “God experience” leads us to keep going forward without fear. The ultimate experience of a baby in their mother’s arms

is rest, “true rest.” The foundation of true rest in the Christian faith means the liberation from sin and death. Those who are freed from sin and death through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ know, understand, and feel what “true rest” is. And they are accepting their life as the journey to the “true rest”, waiting for the moment to enter to the eternal true rest. Today, I would like to remind you what Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not be afraid of those who cannot kill your soul. The truth will be revealed. Until then, God will take care of you.”

(Slide 8) Now our church is planning to come back a new normal “in person worship service”. Many people still express concerns, worries, and oppose the decision of the Church. No one has ever escaped from the fear of Pandemic, a situation that has never been experienced before. However, as Christians, we want to continue our “God experience”, the way we can overcome our fears and find true peace in the best way we can. Of course, coming to church is not the only way to find a God experience. I don’t ask you to be at the church every Sunday, but as the pastor, I strongly recommend you try to listen to the directions Christ gives to you and follow them to consider your situations by faith beyond your seeing. It is the best way for us to live during this difficult time as Christians. If you can center on God and worship with all your heart and soul with joy, it does not matter where and when you worship. I hope you will live your life to testify of the Lord without fear, wherever you are.

(Slide 9) Verses 32-33 said, “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.” The world may oppose teaching of the Bible, hate believers, and persecute them. In many ways, our attempt to center on God alone is hindered. But do not be afraid of anything, because the hidden truth will be revealed, and our faith will be proved right in the end. Also, the world cannot take away our soul since God cares for us. Therefore, let us not fear the world, but fear God. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear.” Praise God. Amen.