

Scripture: Philippians 4:1

Title: Stand Firm in the Lord / translated by MinJoon Huh

1.

I have an adjustable desk in my study. Often, when reading a book or preparing a sermon, I used to raise it to its highest height and stand while working. However, this past Friday, the desk seemed to have broken, and I had to sit down to write the sermon. It was unfortunate. Someone once said that the reason humans are human is that their heads are oriented towards the sky. Unlike other animals, humans stand upright on two feet and move about. "Homo Erectus" means upright human, meaning a person who stands up straight and walks. I was deeply moved recently when I saw little Ethan, who has just started walking. My first child started walking around when he was just over 12 months old. I remember capturing the moment he took his first steps on video and cherishing it. The ability to stand and walk on two feet is a unique characteristic of humans, setting them apart from other creatures. Being able to stand is evidence of being alive. Being able to stand is evidence of enduring and persevering. Being able to stand signifies not giving up and having the will to move forward.

There was a Swiss sculptor named Alberto Giacometti. He was active mainly after World War II. After World War II, people in Europe were filled with disappointment towards humanity. They had hoped that society, dominated by reason since the Enlightenment, would progress. However, after experiencing World War I and World War II, the world had become utterly chaotic. It was a time when the expectation of progress in humanity had completely disappeared. During such times, Giacometti primarily created sculptures of standing and walking figures. I've visited a large art museum called the Getty Center in LA, where his works were exhibited. One of them was "Standing Woman." In fact, his most famous work is "Walking Man." The "Walking Man" sculpture depicts a skinny man with no muscles, leaning forward with determination, walking. Though his eyes seem hollow and without focus, he is walking forward. Giacometti wanted to convey a message of hope to people who had lost hope after World War II. Even if hope is not visible and reality remains dark, he wanted to show through his art that we must continue to move forward. Those who are in despair or dead cannot stand or walk. Only those who have hope can stand, shake off despair, and rise to walk towards their goals.

2.

Today's passage is a single verse from Philippians 4:1. Philippi was the first church founded by Paul through his second missionary journey. In Acts 16, we see that Paul intended to go on a missionary journey to Asia, but it was blocked. Then a vision appeared to him, urging him to come to Macedonia for help. He then changed his destination to the region of Philippi. There, he met a woman named Lydia who sold purple cloth, and through her, it seems that the church in Philippi began. However, Philippi also brought great suffering to Paul and his friend Silas. They were thrown into prison for healing a demon-possessed girl in that area. But even in the Philippian prison, Paul and Silas experienced God releasing them through an earthquake while they were praising God.

When Paul wrote a letter to the church in Philippi, he would have remembered the experiences he had there. Paul embarked on his missionary journey according to the will of God. It was a venture begun with a trust in God, but they experienced situations where things didn't go as planned. When things we planned don't go our way, it's easy for us to hesitate. Moreover, even when they had faithfully followed the plans God had revised, Paul and his companions ended up in prison. The feeling of, "Why are difficult things happening when God is with us?" frequently arises in our lives too. But in the midst of such dark situations, Paul and Silas didn't hesitate.

Even though they were bound in chains in the middle of the prison, they rose up and praised God. When God's people rise, God rises too. Based on such experiences, Paul is now advising the church in Philippi not to hesitate in any situation, but to stand firm. The Philippians who had seen Paul being released from the Philippi prison a long time ago would understand what Paul was saying. Surely, among those Philippian believers, there would have been the jailer who had kept watch over Paul and Silas in the prison. Thinking that the earthquake had caused the prison doors to open and allow all prisoners to escape, he attempted to commit suicide. Attempting suicide means giving up on everything. It's choosing to end one's life rather than just sitting and hesitating in despair. But Paul saved his life. He asked them not to hesitate but to rise up with Jesus and live a new life.

3.

Paul, in his final greeting to the brothers and sisters, makes this request: "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends." Paul extends a very affectionate expression of love and longing to the church in Philippi. The word "long for" in Greek is used only once in the Bible in this passage. Paul brings a special word to express his love for them. "Long for" means to affectionately think of and yearn for someone. It's a love expression that includes both thoughts and emotions. The word "joy" is "Kara" in Greek and the word "crown" is "Stefanos". Through such words, Paul expresses how proud and satisfied he is of the church in Philippi. To the beloved and cherished church in Philippi, Paul admonishes them: "Stand firm in the Lord." Stekete En Christo. The verb form is in the Second person Plural. Literally, it means "you all stand firm in Jesus." Looking at the verb Stekeo, you can guess that the English word "Stand" comes from here, right? But this word originally is a military term. In war, you align the ranks, right? In movies, there are many scenes where soldiers with shields and spears align themselves, preparing for war. In war, to align the ranks and stand firm means not to falter in your position. How intense and urgent are the situations in war? Yet, even amidst such dire circumstances, Paul advises not to despair and hesitate but to stand firm. If the ranks are broken, it creates disorder, giving the enemy an opportunity. However, the phrase "in the Lord" modifies the command to "stand firm." If you stand in the Lord, you can overcome all these tensions and endure. It also carries the implication of standing together with brothers and sisters. If brothers and sisters stand shoulder to shoulder, even those without standing strength can gain courage. The church as a community is a community of resistance, fighting against evil and injustice in a dark world. Fighting alone is difficult. There is a Korean proverb, "Even carrying a blank sheet of paper is easier when done together." Even the most difficult tasks become easier when done together.

In fact, in Philippians 3:14, Paul says he is pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called him. He is not in a standing state, but in a running state. Then in Philippians 3:17, he says, "Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters." He hopes that they also become like Paul and run towards the goal. Paul seems to have lowered the expectation. Rather than running, he is saying, "At least stand firm in your place." He means, do not stray from the ranks and stand by brothers and sisters. Face evil and injustice without backing down. Do not be discouraged just because things don't go according to your will and plans. Even if you end up in prison or things get more complicated, don't hesitate. Even if it seems like you're still in the fog and can't see a way out of the tunnel, don't give up. Even if you're not yet sprinting towards the goal the Lord has called you to, at least stand firm. Standing firm in the Lord is a characteristic of those who hope for resurrection. The word "resurrection" comes from the Latin word "surgo - I stand" combined with "re," meaning "again." In Greek, it's "Anastasis," where

"ana" means "again" and "stasis" means "stand." Both "resurrection" and "Anastasis" mean "rising again." Living the resurrection means "standing firmly in the Lord." It is a life that holds onto hope even in despair.

4.

Korea had a Japanese colonial period. Our ancestors had to endure many difficulties under the Japanese empire. Many people despaired. They thought our country was finished. They thought that the dark and difficult times would continue. However, many people hoped for and looked forward to a new day of liberation from the Japanese empire. They didn't just sit back; they rose up and fought. There were people who fought with bombs and guns against Japan, but there were also those who spread hope to people through writing or education. Poets like Yun Dong-ju were representative figures. They didn't give up on regaining the country stolen by Japan and wanted to instill hope in people through literature. One of the representative works of singing hope in these dark times is a poem called "Will Spring Come, Even to Stolen Fields?" by Lee Sang-hwa. The first stanza goes like this:

"Now it's someone else's land - will spring come, even to stolen fields?
With sunlight on my whole body,
Like in a dream, I walk along the narrow rice paddies
where the blue sky and green fields meet."

The poet walks across the stolen fields with trembling legs. He walks through the green barley fields and looks at the blue sky. He is deeply saddened by beautiful fields being stolen by Japan. He walks along the narrow rice paddies to shake off that sadness. It's amazing to see the barley shoots that had been covered in snow growing tall and bright now. Because of the winter that made everything seem dead, the poet had forgotten about spring. But after encountering spring, he rekindles the hope he had forgotten. Just as the warm spring inevitably comes after driving away winter, he imagines that the stolen country will surely one day regain independence. Not to lose that imagination, he walks across the fields, even when they are stolen.

Living the resurrection means standing firmly in the Lord even in the midst of dark realities. It means believing and hoping that even though it's still cold and snowstorms are raging, winter cannot defeat spring. Please don't just sit back and hesitate in despair that has come into your life. Rise up. When you rise up, our Lord will rise up with you. Stand firm in the Lord. Look forward to the spring that will come into your life. The despair that covers your life like snow will melt away with the warm love of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, stand together. When you feel alone, our despair comes with greater weight. Please stand by the side of those sighing in despair. Let's rise together.

5.

Last week was Easter, which also happened to be my youngest son's birthday. Whenever it's his birthday, I inevitably think of resurrection. It's because his birthday marks the day I was able to rise again. A month before my youngest was born, I underwent surgery to remove a tumor. However, it turned out that the tumor was cancerous, and I couldn't help but feel despair. My

wife was about to give birth in a month, and it was a grim situation. Fortunately, the test results showed that my body was healthy. And I received this news around Easter. Easter took on great significance for me as I was overwhelmed with gratitude that God had given me life again. And then I began to ponder whether to go on a mission trip or stay in the country. Then, I heard a radio ad for a movie called "Chariots of Fire." It was a movie I had not seen since I was very young, so I decided to watch it again. The movie starts with runners in white clothes along the beach with the theme song playing. The protagonist of the movie, Eric Liddell, was a missionary in China visiting his home country, England, for a short time. He was a born runner and had been training as a national representative there. He won a gold medal in running at the Paris Olympics and then returned to the mission field and became a martyr there. As I watched the movie, something clicked in my mind. I began to deeply ponder why God had given me life again. It dawned on me that the reason for giving life was for a mission. Philippians 3:14 came to mind. "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." I felt the need to return to the place of mission, and eventually, with my family, we went back to the mission field. The reason we have life is evidence that there is still a mission. Stay in the place of the mission. Stand firm in the Lord. The winter that hunches you down will gradually disappear with spring. The fog that makes you feel suffocated and fearful will disappear with the warm sunshine. Do not be afraid and rise up amidst the bleak reality. Even if the path is not visible, keep moving forward.

Lu Xun was a writer during the Opium War when China was completely devastated. He originally had no intention of writing literature and went to Japan to study medicine. However, he felt that becoming a doctor in the midst of his homeland's destruction was meaningless and returned to his homeland with the idea of awakening the foolish people. In the midst of despair, he says, "Originally, there was no road on the earth. When more people walk, there becomes a road." Japanese poet Takamura Kotaro, influenced by Lu Xun, sings in his poem "The Road" from "Journey of the Road": "There is no road ahead of me. A road is formed behind me." Even in the midst of hopelessness and despair, if you keep walking forward step by step, a road will form behind you. Jesus knew that the path of the cross was the path to save humanity and walked on the path no one had ever walked before. And through those who follow Him, a new path is created. We are walking on the path of those who believe that there is hope in denying themselves and carrying their cross. We believe that at the end of this road, true joy and crown are waiting for us. If you find it hard to walk, it's okay to take a rest for a while. But please, don't just sit back and sink down. If it's difficult, it's okay to lean on your brothers and sisters standing beside you for a moment. Please stand firm in the Lord.