First Sunday after Christmas Day

**“Reason for Hope”**

Psalm 146:1-10 / December 26, 2021

 **1.**

 The year of 2021 is coming to an end, and we are now holding our last worship service of the year. How was this year for you? There may have been joys and pleasures, but for the most part, there is no one who has not been affected by COVID-19. Since last fall, there has been an atmosphere of returning to daily life in various countries declaring ‘With Corona Virus,’ but the whole world is again in an emergency due to the Delta and Omicron variant viruses. So far, more than 280 million people have been officially infected with the coronavirus worldwide, and about 5.4 million have died.

 In the meantime, due to the climate crisis, large wildfires and typhoons frequently occur around the world, and the Arctic glacier continues to melt, causing serious natural disasters. This year too, so many people have died from earthquakes, wildfires, typhoons and tornadoes. Moreover, an increasing number of shootings kill too many innocent people each year across the United States. There are questions that arise as we go through this. “Is there any hope in this world?” “What should we hope for, and where should we find hope in this earth?”

 There is a pastor who serves at a big church. One Sunday, he stood in front of the Communion table to lead the Holy Communion. Beginning with the Great Thanksgiving, he said, “The Lord be with you.” Then, the congregation was supposed to respond saying, “And also with you.” Yet, the microphone didn’t seem to be working. So, he tapped on it and muttered, “Something’s wrong with this microphone.” At that moment, the congregation faintly heard the pastor and habitually responded, “And also with you.” That means something’s wrong with the pastor too.

 What I try to say is, “Something’s wrong with this world.” The world we live in is not going well at all. People are getting hard-hearted. Our society is getting more violent. The world is becoming more unjust. We feel like the light of hope is failing. Henri Nouwen once said, “As I continue my journey in this earth, I find myself losing hope.” I wonder how many people agree with him. Personally, I do agree with him. I feel like it is getting harder and harder to talk about hope these days. Some, or many, of you might feel the same way.

 So, this morning I would like to journey with you to find hope. We need to do this, because hope is one of the most necessary things in our life. Life without hope is like hell. In the ‘Inferno’ of Dante’s <Devine Comedy>, he describes a signpost in front of the entrance of the inferno: “Abandon all hope, you who enter here.” What does that mean? That means that if you do not find hope in your life, you become like you are living in the hell. That is the reason why we never lose hope.

 **2.**

 I remember the day when I went to see a movie, The Ten Commandments, with my church member and friends. As a middle school student, I was totally overwhelmed by such a spectacular film. When Moses (Charlton Heston played the role) held the staff up high and the Red Sea was divided, I felt an inexpressible thrill. When God appeared to Moses in the great flames at Mount Sinai and inscribed the Ten Commandments on a rock, fear and a sense of awe were flowed over me at the same time.

 God called Moses to deliver the Israelites from the bondage of Pharaoh. God changed his heart through a dire judgment at Passover night and let him release the Israelites. After a few days, however, Moses and the Israelites faced a serious problem as they passed through a wilderness. On one hand, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Israelites with a big army. On the other hand, their journey was interrupted by the Red Sea.

 Imagine how they felt when the Israelites arrived at the Red Sea. They found no other way than either being killed by the Egyptian army or dying by drowning in the sea. There was no way out of this dilemma. In despair, the Israelites began to complain to Moses. However, God opened a way for them where there seemed no other way. Nobody could see the way. No one could even imagine that there might be a way before them. Yet, as God intervened in the crisis, a way was opened.

 I think the Korean poem that I like to introduce might help you realize how God helps us when we face a crisis. I think it may be worthwhile to ponder.

**100 meters away from the edge of a cliff … God is pushing me.**

**I assume that he is trying to make me awake.**

**10 meters away ... God is still pushing me to the edge of the cliff.**

**I hope he might stop by now.**

**1 meter away from the edge … I really hope he stops pushing me.**

**But God eventually pushed me down the cliff.**

**At the exact moment I fell, I realized I have wings to fly.**

 The moment we stand on the edge of a cliff is a time of deep despair. At that moment, we cannot have any hope. However, at the very moment we fall from the cliff, we realize we have wings to fly. That is how God transforms our despair into hope.

 **3.**

 When we are struggling with some difficult situations, we usually focus on what is happening to us, not God. What do we do then? Like the Israelites who were standing before the Red Sea, we begin to complain. We question God why such a hardship happens or why it does happen to us. Yet, as Christians who have faith in God, we need to focus on God and see what God does for us. As long as God is on our side, there is no reason for us to fall into despair. If we do not leave Him, God is always on our side. No doubt about it! Henri Nouwen, who said, “As I continue my journey in this earth, I find myself losing hope,” conclude his writing saying this: “Yet I do not lose hope, for I have faith in God.”

 I remember a day when I was freaking out because of my daughter, Sohee, who was one and a half years old. As I returned home from outside, I called to my daughter, “Where are you, Sohee?” I didn’t know how she could climb up the desk in my library, yet the little girl was doing something on my desk. As soon as she heard my voice and saw me coming into the house, Sohee jumped off the desk towards me. There was quite a distance between us. I was standing in the doorway; she was standing on a desk in my library. As I saw her jumping off the desk, I rushed and caught her with my arms. Fortunately, I caught her.

 I didn’t know I could run so fast until then. She helped me, in a ridiculous way, to find one of my hidden talents. Yet, I spanked her and said, “Hey, you little rascal! What if I hadn’t caught you? You never do this again, okay?” At the same time as I scolded her, I heard an inner voice: “Hey, Pastor Kang, do you trust me as much as your daughter trusts you?” “Do you rely on me as much as she relies on you?” My little girl jumped off the desk, because she never doubted if her dad would not help her or care for her. Through my daughter, I learned what absolutely relied on and trusted God.

 **4.**

 My friends, I want us to know that God is the only reason why we never lose hope. It doesn’t matter how difficult or hopeless the situation we face may be. What matters is if we know God is the reason for our hope and put our hope in Him. As if He divided the waters and opened a way through which His people could keep journeying toward the Promised Land, God will let us walk through the dry ground when we have to stand in despair at our own Red Sea.

 There might be a time when we do not understand why we have difficulties in our lives, or why God does not answer when we desperately ask for help. I do not know why, do you? Although I do not have the right answer, I can tell you that God is the reason for our hope no matter what may happen to us. I believe that there must be a reason why God allows us to face the hardship. I also believe that my hope is God alone in any situation.

 In today’s scripture passage, the psalmist confesses:

 **“Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.” (Psalm 146:1-2)**

 Also, he gives us a good advice:

 **“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.” (Vs 3-4)**

 Why does he praise God and tells us not to rely on princes? It is because he puts his hope only on God:

 **“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God!” (vs. 5)**

 Brothers and sisters in Christ, I want us to remember this: God is the only reason for our hope in any situation. If you want to walk on the stormy water, don’t look at the wind and the waves. Look at Jesus. Likewise, if you want to walk through the wilderness of your life and reach the Promised Land, don’t focus on the things that happen to you, whether it may be good or bad. Instead, focus on God who loves you, cares for you, and does only good things for you. Know and confess that your hope is God alone. Amen!