

“Absolute Guarantee”

Pentecost Sunday

Isaiah 51:6-10

July 3, 2011

Rev. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

I have a special memory of the Fair Oaks neighborhood. When I was appointed to Centennial United Methodist Church in Sacramento four years ago, I visited Fair Oaks for a summer music festival in the park. One of Centennial members invited me to this special event for free because her husband played the clarinet as a part of orchestra. I was surprised to see chickens (or roosters?) running around the park and residential areas. I thought to myself, Fair Oaks people are blessed with the beautiful location near river and with many trees! Since that time, my wife and I often drove by here to see the river, riding a bike and just coming to the park near the dam. My wife and I even know that there is a Subway Sandwich store around here! I was envious of you, but I never imagined I would have the opportunity to serve you here as a pastor! This church also has a great and vast parking lot for anybody to worship with us! You are blessed in many ways.

I met Susan Peters (UM foundation) as a result of the Centennial Capital campaign this week and also Rev. Larry George at the annual conference a couple weeks ago. They whispered to my ear saying: “You are very lucky to be appointed to this church because the congregation has many very gracious and welcoming people.”

Some of you may still wonder who this guy is? (What is the accent that he has in making his speech? Or where has Pastor Kelly gone?)

I am standing here as your new pastor as of July. Bishop Brown and the cabinet sent me this church to replace Pastor Kelly. As you already know, she anxiously introduces herself to a new congregation, the Davis UMC folks this morning also. To our Methodist pastors, the First Sunday of July is always a new beginning of the year in our ministry. Pastor Kelly and Cynthia, the chair of SPRC, sent me a sermon script from Pentecost Sunday that Kelly preached to you. I deeply appreciate Pastor Kelly for the great introduction she gave about me. At first, when I read through the script, I felt ashamed because she put too many gracious comments in her sermon about me! But I hope that it helped you who understand better who I am and why I am here.

Pastor Kelly used a beautiful metaphor for herself and me as the hawks which were forced to turn their direction by a “rush of a violent wind”. That was the move of the Holy Spirit for our new appointments. I am sure that it was a shock to let her go, especially after her recent renewal leave. It was as perplexing and surprising to me, too! I received a call from my District Superintendent just a week before annual conference. I was planning four summer missions and some other activity plans, but I had to leave all the plans behind me! What a rush wind of the Holy Spirit who brought us a big shift to us all of sudden!

Speaking of Pentecost, we have to remember one important thing about the “strong, rush and violent wind.” That wind was a sign of God for a new and great beginning to God’s people. Pentecost was a special evening for Jesus’ disciples to get caught on the fire of the Holy Spirit and to become ready for a new start. Pentecost was about a great change in God’s plan!

Let me talk about “change”: there are many truths in life. One of them is that we are to be changed whether we want or not. Not only will there be change for us, but everything around us eventually will be changed and gone! Let’s think about changes around or within us. Here’s a photo from my childhood. I wish we could have a projector so that I could show you

this picture, but here is an idea: Here is a very similar baby who resembles my baby picture among us. I want to introduce my baby Jacob to you. He just turned to seven months last week. Look at the baby! That baby became me in just over thirty years! We are all slowly changing and eventually we are moving on. That is what life is about!

What about the Fair Oaks church here? I heard that worship gatherings were held over at our office building many years ago. This building must be a new sanctuary to some people here today. Where will we all worship 30 years from now? Will it be the same or a new place? Everything around us will change either slowly or quickly no matter what we are or what we do. What matters is how we are changed!

At one time in my life, I wanted to be a person who would devote my life to God as a minister. I thought I would be a priest after college, but I became a minister of United Methodist Church through the Cal-Nevada Conference in the United States.

Thankfully, I also married my wife, Youngjae and was blessed with a brand new baby Jacob last year. Who could imagine this change 30 more years after I was a baby like Jacob! In a sense, our life is not everlasting. The truth is that nothing will remain “unchanged”. Nothing in life and on earth remains forever. Even enjoyable pleasures like a couple of nights tent camping at the Yosemite Park are only temporary. Is there anything “everlasting” or “permanent” in our life?

Today’s Scripture reading reminds us of something that is “never changed”, something “permanent and everlasting” in life. Our God that we believe in and who our faith is rooted in is the one who will be forever and never changed in life. People have different understandings about their God and what it means to trust in God regarding your faith and relationship with God. The verse 6-8 calls us a special attention; let us revisit our Scripture: **“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”** God’s salvation that he promised us was given to us not as a short term lease or one time deal. It was an absolute guarantee that whatever happens to you, his love is everlasting.

Last year on Christmas, I bought an I-phone for my wife, because it was her wish for Christmas gift. I bought one for myself also because we had to be in family plan to save money. Three days later, I realized that I had a defect in the phone, so I returned to the Walmart store to replace this phone with a new one. Fortunately, there was a 30 day guarantee to exchange it. We have heard of five or ten year guarantees for buying a new car, but even those are limited time offers, not permanent. We are always eager for “forever”, “everlasting” ones. Our God that we believe in is always with us as an “absolute guarantee” for us.

The book of Isaiah talks about God’s punishment (Northern Israel) to the Israelites and also offers a message of hope through the prophet Isaiah. Before chapter 51, God reminded the Israelites how they turned away from God and reminded them what God had done for them in the years of Exile. People were despaired, felt abandoned and hopeless for many years. They lamented saying, “Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us many days? Restore us to yourself, O God that we may be restored, renew our days as of old...” When I meditated the sorrow of the Israelites, I thought of your saddened hearts saying a goodbye to Pastor Kelly. When I visited the church office two weeks ago, I saw the “welcome back sign” at her old office which indicates your love for your pastor. But the point of Isaiah 51 is not one of sorrow or despair in hopelessness. It is the reminder of God’s promise: “You are my people” and I will never leave you alone. The more powerful message for the Israelites and for us is that God’s deliverance and salvation is “forever” and “everlasting”. This is “never to be ended.” Our joy, gladness, thanksgiving and the voice of song come from this assurance of faith in God. Our God is everlasting God who brings us

abundant joy and gladness.

I asked Bria to put the Fair Oaks church building for a cover graphic. There was a reason for that. I believe that church is God's place which is to be everlasting. Church is a mysterious place caught between secular world and divine world. Some people may say that church is a people's gathering, community or just a spiritual oriented human group, but that is partially true, but not the whole of understanding about God's church. The other half is that church is a sacred/holy place incarnated and commissioned by God.

In this perspective, Fair Oaks church should be a God's incarnated place for the source of God's love and grace for the needed. God's salvation and deliverance will be through the church, and God's promise is everlasting, never to be ended. The church exists for the mission of God for the broken world. Church is not a building but **you, are, the church!** You are called by God to fulfill this special mission. We should be aware what our mission is when God called you individually in your lives. This is what discipleship means. We as people of God are called to experience the grace of God and invited to build Kingdom of God while executing our mission and church mission together. What is our mission statement? "We promote the love of Christ, and nurture spiritual growth." We have a mission to generate more power of love for the broken, wounded world through making discipleship a transformation of the world.

Pastor Kelly has moved to a new church and a new pastor, Pastor Jeong, is here ready to serve you for the mission of God. I know that I won't be here forever, but no matter which pastors are sent here to serve you, there is a common heart, especially between Kelly and me, that is to preach good news to the people who are in need and let the world know that God loves us no matter who we are; you will be welcomed as a precious child of God in Christ whoever you are or were. Even though pastors will come and go sometimes as time goes by, God's church will stay here forever as long as the Spirit actively moves here like a rush of violent wind through you and through this Fair Oaks church! Don't look up for your pastor, but look up with your hearts to the heaven, to Jesus Christ for the mission of God in you and through our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church. Because **YOU ARE THE CHURCH!**

Let us work together and dream together! Let us continue to make our place a holy ground for the Holy Spirit is moving through you and through our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church. We will pray, work and envision together and never stop making this race. Let's carry out God's mission together!