

“Hope Still Carries Our Day”

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 3-17

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Rev. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

I want to begin my sermon sharing these stories that I like: Jeanne Calment, at 120 years and counting, was the oldest living human whose birth date could be authenticated. Once she was asked to describe her vision for the future. She replied, “brief.” I like this next story about a loyal church gentleman as an optimist. He sets up *all* the folding chairs for Wednesday night Bible study on Sunday! Because he is optimistic that the chairs won’t be moved. He also plans carefully to meet his spouse at 8:45 after an 8:00 committee meeting! In addition, his wife loves to take her shoes off during service. But this gentleman has prepared her so that when the minister says in conclusion she puts her shoes right back on! Are you an optimist? (This is a joke! You should laugh!)

I wanted to be sure to leave you with the good words from Mahatma Gandhi. He said, “Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.” Let me ask you a question. Where does this positive come from? We can think about how positive equates to hope. On Thursday evening, while I was preparing for my message, I asked Youngjae a question, “Why were you born?” She wondered why I was curious about this. It seems that she had no clue. Being a pastor’s wife is a hard job! She said, “Well, I don’t know.” In a moment, Even though it was a hard question, Youngjae kindly shared her thought with me. She said that she lives because God has given her life. I believe that each of us has our own life perspective. Doesn’t positive equate to hope? This morning, I want to talk about our attitudes about our faith in life. Why do we trust in hope?

Hope for the future focuses today’s readings. The Old Testament reading assures us, proclaiming that God will save the faithful. And the New Testament reading was a part of the Apostle Paul’s personal letter for a church in Thessalonica. Early Christians, especially the church of Thessalonica were in fear and in crisis over the delay of Jesus’ second coming. Let me give you a brief background of this reading. Apostle Paul started a new church in Thessalonica, which was a busy port city in northern Greece. After Paul left, he sent his young ministry apprentice, Timothy and asked him to work with the

young church and strengthen them in faith. Later, Timothy came back to Paul and gave him his ministry report. There was good news and bad news. The good news was that the church was continuing to grow even in the face of trial and persecution. The bad news was that there was confusion, fear, and anxiety among the congregation on the matter of Jesus' second coming. Some worried over the delay of Jesus Christ's return. Some argued that Jesus already had come. The main concern was fear for the future. Fear or anxiety is not only their concerns, but it is also our concerns today. What are your fears and anxieties today?

In 1843, a Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard wrote a book entitled, "Fear and Tremble". This book describes our human being's fear and anxiety through a story of Abraham. One day, God tested Abraham by calling him to take his only son, Isaac to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on the mountain. God's purpose was not to have Isaac killed. We need to remember this; Abraham had a *choice* to complete the task or to forget it. But he resigned himself to the three and a half day journey and to the loss of his son. "He said nothing to Sarah, his wife, who, after all, could understand him. He split the firewood, he bound Isaac, he lit the fire, he drew the knife." Because he kept everything to himself in hiddenness he "isolated himself as higher than the universal." Kierkegaard envisions two types of people in this book. One lives in *hope*, Abraham, the other lives in *memory*. We as humans have fear and anxieties in ourselves. In a sense, anxiety and fear are natural and essential components of who we are. God's order to kill his loving son, Isaac, is a great example of fear inside us. You may challenge God's intention why was He brutal to Abraham and his family? The three and a half day journey can represent our life journey. Abraham's three and a half day journey is a metaphor of our own fears and anxieties in it. Abraham symbolizes hope because he trusted in God. We want to be like Abraham who lives in hope.

I know that we all have fear and anxiety in our life journey regardless of our status. Psychological dictionary defines anxiety disorder. It reads that anxiety disorder is characterized by excessive, uncontrollable and often irrational worry about everyday things such as health issues, money, death, family, friendship, interpersonal relationship problems. For diagnosis of this disorder, symptoms must last at least six months. We are not surprised that we all worry about these things, too. We can rationally handle our anxieties to some degree, but we all have problems. Our life is full of worries, concerns and anxieties. Unfortunately, we cannot avoid them, but we have to live with them together. What does our Bible teach us and want us to do in the flood of anxieties and fear in life?

The Apostle Paul encourages us to stand firm and to be faithful. In verse 16, he reminds us that God our Father loves us. He is kind and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope. The reason why we live our life in spite of facing storms of anxieties and fears is that we believe God is our hope. Like Abraham, it is our choice whether we walk in faith and make another bold step forward in hope or “get stuck” in memory. Believers put their trust in God and are ready to continue in any circumstances. Life is not easy, why don't you belong to God and walk in hope for the future with Christ Jesus? Hope is another name of God. That hope will carry your day. Amen.