



Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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*Date:* 2006

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## God who is with us.

Today's Scripture texts:

### **Isaiah 43, 1-2**

But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze

### **Isaiah 41, 10**

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

I left Korea and arrived in Canada in October, 1998.

When my family and I lived in Korea, my wife SangHee believed in God and was a regular church attender. I, however, did not believe in God, nor did I go to church. Rather, I spent lots of time in Buddhist meditation.

I did, however, think that those who prayed to God and read the Bible had some type of power.

When I have first visited the Korean language worship service here at Charleswood Mennonite Church, pastor Hun Lee was here together with several theology students from CMBC.

They welcomed our family with a home made card on which were written the words of today's Scripture texts.

Upon reading the words that were written I was not encouraged, but rather, began to worry. At that time, I was not someone who believed in Jesus. However, there was a spiritual power in those words, a sense that God was showing us the path in front of us.

Although I was not a believer, nor a part of the church, it seemed that God was looking at our family and saying that we were His. "Do not be afraid, even when you pass through the water and the fire." However, as I looked at this new land and new life, I was not comforted but rather filled with more worry and anxiety.

And the reality was that I did worry and many unexpected and difficult things happened to me and my family.

However, after receiving that card I continued to think about the words that were written there. As difficult things happened in our life, I began to think: Are we passing through water? Or, is this what it means to pass through the fire? As I reflected on these words from God, I began to look for God since He had promised to be with my family as he said. And I began to believe in God and to realize God's plan for my family. And I gradually have changed into being a Christian. There are many people here who are helping me to get to know God.

Let me begin today's sermon

Months ago, I read news that was hard to believe. Ebay, the famous internet auction site, was selling some gum that had been chewed by Britney Spears and the price for that piece of gum was up to 14,000 dollars.

Around 2 years ago, in Korea, Du-Hwan JEON, a former Korean president, held a garage sale. He was a military dictator when he ruled 20 years ago. Many citizens were killed by the army under his control and therefore there are many people who do not like him. At the garage sale, many used items were for sale and many people bought things at prices much higher than were estimated. For example, his set of golf clubs sold for 30 times higher than the estimated price.

One has to ask questions. Why did people pay such a high price to buy things from someone that so many people do not like? Do they think they can get better scores using his golf clubs?

No, the reason is that the previous owner of the golf clubs was a former president of Korea. Therefore, many people were interested in the sale and paid high prices for the items.

Another way of saying this is that things can simply increase in value if we realize who owns them.

God, who created everything including earth and sky looks at us and says, "You are mine."

Let's look at verse 1 of today's text again: "But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

To fully understand this text more, let's examine what was happening at the time the words were given. Judah had been destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC.

The people of the Israel who thought they were God's chosen people were taken to another country as slaves.

I cannot imagine how fearful the people of Israel must have been as they saw the walls of the city be destroyed, their temple burned, and the prospect of going to a distant gentile land as exiles. When would they be able to return to mother land? It is at this point that God speaks to them and says, "Do not afraid."

How can we apply this word to us who live in the 21st century?

Obviously, we have not been taken as slaves to Babylon.

We are able to live freely, can experience whatever we want, enjoy technological advances, and so on.

We are free to go anywhere and see anything.

We are free, but in another sense, we are also slaves.

We have become prejudiced in the way we see things.

So we only see what we observe, but we do not see things through the vision God has given us. We have become enslaved in lust, enslaved in ambition, slaves to our wounded hearts, and slaves to hate. We are imprisoned by the past, and imprisoned by anxiety and fear.

Compared to the past, we are very blessed as modern people. However, through pain and fear and anxiety, we fenced ourselves in even though we think we are safe, we have become enslaved in the world.

And today, God speaks to us – the exiled and enslaved – and says "Do not be afraid."

The first reason to not be afraid is found in Isaiah 43 verse 1. God has created us and formed us.

But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Although at that time God was speaking to the people of Israel, descendents of Jacob, we now, through Jesus Christ, have become the people of God to whom He speaks.

Why does God tell us not to be afraid when we are in the midst of an environment that can only cause fear and trembling?

It is because God made us and created us.

To say it in another way, the very fact that I exist in this place is because created me and put me here.

If we look in Scripture we see that God simply didn't manufacture a product.

We were formed in God's image, a masterpiece of His creation.

Goods that are mass produced goods are intended to be bought and sold, treated as commodities in a competitive market.

The consumer enters this market searching for low cost items with reasonable quality while the manufacturers seek to cut their prices and increase their competitive edge. This is the world of manufacturing and commerce.

But the art of creation is not like this. In creation, the soul of the Creator is expressed in the created work. The creation reflects the spiritual world of the Creator. Therefore, there is no product in this world that compares to the work of the Creator.

In the same way, neither you nor I are like the products of this world, which are intended to be bought and sold. There is no one else like me in this world. You and I have been created in God's noble image.

In the same way that a created object is given value by its Creator, my value is determined by the one who created me. Those who consider their lives as simply a cheap commodity will live lives as though they were a cheap, mass produced product. Day and night, they will live their lives in comparison with one another, constantly evaluating and competing with one another, living in pain all the while.

Those who think as dogs will live a dog's life. However, those who think that they are noble creations will live honorable lives. We live according to the values that we have.

Why then do we oppose the intent of the creation order and live as simple animals?

I believe it is because we do not know the value of our own existence. Those who know the value of their own being have no need to compare themselves with others. Many of the fears that we live with are simply the product of us evaluating ourselves in comparison with others. Because of comparisons, inferiority complexes emerge resulting in even more fearful living.

Thus, those who accept their innate value are not afraid and have no need to be afraid.

There is a second reason why God tells us in this text not to be afraid.

We are not to be afraid because God has redeemed us. He says:  
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

The meaning of redeemed is to buy back and to save. As we see in Isaiah 43:3, God has demonstrated this in the past when he brought His people Israel out of Egypt.

Redemption by God is neither an automatic nor an easy accomplishment. As we all know, Christ hung on the cross and shed His blood in order to redeem us.

Blood is life. The blood that was shed by Jesus on the cross has become the blessing that we have received. Blessing has come from bleeding, from the blood Jesus shed on our behalf.

Jesus gave His life in order that we might be redeemed. Therefore we are freed from the law of sin and death, and the power of sin and death does not cause us to be afraid.

There is a third reason that emerges from today's text on why we are not to be afraid.

We do not need to be afraid because God has called us by name and made us his own.

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

Why does God say to all of us, "You are mine?" It is because He has made all of us. And it is because although we were lost, He has redeemed us through the blood of Jesus.

And in today's text is added the expression that "I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

The fact that God has called us by name gives special meaning to God's saving action in our lives, not choosing one of us from a mass of people but calling each of us, one by one, to become something special in him.

As we look through the stories of Scripture, we frequently find that God called people by their name, even from the very first man. "Adam, Adam, where are you?" And God called Samuel, Zacheus, Nathaniel, etc. And after calling them, He met with them. Saul too was called while on the Damascus road. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

In a similar way, today's text reminds us that God is calling to each of us. This is the third reason why we are not to be afraid..

The fourth reason not to be afraid is that the Almighty God is with us.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze (Isaiah 43:2)

Although we are called by God and are His it appears that there will be suffering for us in this world.

Verse 2 talks about passing through water and through flames, a direct description of what Israel must have been suffering at that time. It could also refer to the fiery test of faith that Daniel and his 3 friends endured in the furnace.

Our modern experience is also one of suffering and difficulty where it may feel like the waters are too deep or the flames too hot.

However, the important parts of this text are neither the water nor the fire. The important thing is that even though we experience these difficulties, God is with us in the midst of them.

How were the people of Israel able to flee through the waters when the Egyptian army was chasing them? God caused a large wind to blow and the 2 walls of water were formed and the Israelites passed between them.

When Daniel and his 3 friends were in the fiery furnace, not a hair on their head was burned. Why was that? It was because God was there with them? It was clear that another person had joined them in the furnace. I wonder how much King Nebuchadnezzar was surprised to see that.

In the same way, God is with us during our most difficult struggles. The people of God believe that He is with them, and as they depend on Him they will overcome obstacles and draw closer to God.

When a golf balls were first made, they had smooth surfaces. However later, when it was discovered that a smooth golf ball will not travel as far as one with a rough surface, they were produced with a rough, textured surface.

In the same way, people with a smooth and level life will not develop to the same level of maturity unless they pass through experiences which are rough and difficult.

In order to strengthen us, God will at times allow difficulties and burdens to come into our lives. When this occurs, let us not be disappointed but in faith remember that to look to God who is with us.

Even when our eyes do not see God, He is with us by our side. And He is there to give us the faith and strength in order to overcome our difficulties.

There was a middle-aged couple in the US and the wife was to have eye surgery. Unfortunately, the surgery was not successful and she became blind. Thereafter, the husband escorted his wife to and from her place of work every day. One day, the husband said to his wife, "It's too far for me to take you to your work every day, you'll have to do it yourself."

The wife was understandably very sad to hear this and almost felt betrayed by her husband.

However, she resolved that she had to continue with living her life and the following day began to go to work by herself. She unfolded her white cane and took the bus to work. At times she fell and was saddened to the point of crying, yet she continued learning how to get around by herself.

After about 2 years, her bus driver told her, "Madam, you are very fortunate, because every day your husband rides the same bus with you and watches over you to ensure that you get to your place of work safely." Hearing this, the wife began to cry.

Without his wife knowing, the husband had been taking care of her. In a similar way, God is caring for us even when we cannot see Him. Even now, God is with us and His eyes are always on us.

Psalm 46:1-3 says:

God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

**Maybe you are feeling you are facing the Red Sea with an army of Egyptians ready to attack. Or perhaps you are in a fiery furnace. If so, do not worry.**

This water and fire is only designed to make us stronger persons and they are difficulties that God has allowed into our lives.

Therefore, faced with difficulties do not turn to the right or to the left but focus your eyes on God who is with us. He will sustain you. The issue is not whether the difficulty is big or small, but whether God is sustaining us.

In Psalm 56:3, David confessed, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you."

Fear is not something that comes from God. However too many people become lost in fear. Take a moment to consider what it means to live in this world. There are more fears in this world than I realize. Fear of failure, fear of death, fear of the future, and many more.

However, even though there are big and little fears in our life, with faith in God who is with us we are more than able to overcome these fears. This is because the Almighty God is with us.

Let's continue on to the final verses in today's Scripture text, Isaiah 41:10.

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

With these words God promises to hold us in hands.

In this text, the right hand is a symbol of his authority, power and strength.

However, God's righteous right hand is described here as one that strengthens our own hands, He adds His strength to ours.

God adds His strength to my strength,  
His talents to my talents,  
His authority to mine,  
In the same way power with power, and grace with grace.

If one were to meditate more on these words, additional meanings would emerge. What might some of these be?

One meaning is that we can be easily tempted to think that (since God is with us), that we have no need to develop new skills and abilities.

To say "I believe" means neither to have the pride that one can do things by oneself nor does it mean to not try things for fear of failing.

Rely on God and make your requests known to him. Wholly trust in Him.  
We are encouraged to follow God according to his unfailing strength and love.  
Therefore, we should now live lives that demonstrate that we belong to Him. In other words, our lives are to bring glory to God.

Isaiah 43:7 says "Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made..."

It is exactly as Isaiah says. God called us by name because He created us for a purpose. Do you when we as humans are most happy? It is precisely when we live for the purpose for which we were created.

Beloved brothers and sisters, we belong to God. We are His.

He made us and yet became last but through the blood of Jesus we have been bought back. Can you imagine how much God values us and loves us?

Believe in God who is faithful. Believe in His promises.

Although we were slaves and exiles in the world we have been freed through the truth in Jesus and according to this truth, we have been freed from fear. In this freedom, there is happiness and joy for us to live our lives, praising God together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In closing, let me share the following.

When we talk of mission I don't think it's correct to think of mission happening in some distant mission field. When I first came to Charleswood Mennonite Church I was a non-Christian and through you I became a Christian.

In other words, one can say that mission is not only going but mission is also coming. God led me to this church and is transforming me and it is my hope and prayer that continue in this beautiful ministry through His grace.

Let us pray.

Dear God Our Father,

We pray that each person here would be free from fear, protected and sustained by your mighty right hand. We also pray for those who do not see you, that their eyes may be opened, that those who are enslaved may be set free, and we appeal to you O God, that they may become your people too.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus, who continues to be with us. Amen.