

Sunday Sermon 020424 Isaiah 40:21-31, Mark 1:29-39, 1 Cor. 9:19

### “The Father Will Renew Your Strength”

This is a story I experienced during the last pandemic at Borrego Springs United Methodist Church. In December 2020, to move the Sunday worship service from 8:00 to 10:00, our worship committee wanted to install a “Love One Another” banner on the outside-facing door of the water heater room. But no one had the key to this door, and nobody knew where the key was. We checked the church key storage box several times, but we failed to find it.

One Saturday morning, to set up the overall setting of the worship service, several members of the church gathered on the church lawn. At that time, I came there with the key storage box to try once more to open the door. But the door was already open; others said that Brian had opened it! So, did he have the key to this door because he was a member of the Board of Trustees? No. He just opened the door with the church's master key.

Several of the church leaders, including me, each had a church master key, so why couldn't they open this door? It turns out that even Brian couldn't open this door easily because the lock box was slightly bent out of shape. However, after he tried to open the door several times with that key, he eventually succeeded. In that case, we didn't need another key to open the door. However, we needed patience and passion to open that door.

Just as we keep looking for other keys while having the right one, isn't there a lot of times our religious lives have similar patterns to this happening? We continually strive to find some tricks to obtain capable lives of faith; however, we only need patience to keep simply relying on God's promises.

Let me pose a question in order to build a mature faith. Who is God to you today? We are able to meet God, revealed to us in three different ways, through today's scriptures.

I. The book of Isaiah introduces a God who loves grasshoppers. Yes, I said grasshoppers. Many people raise dogs and cats as pets and love them. Recently I heard that pigs were popular as well. But have you ever raised and loved a grasshopper?

I used to spend a lot of time with grasshoppers when I was little, in Korea, of course. During the summer, I would spend hours chasing the striped-winged grasshopper, which had beautiful, colorful wings.

Locusts, a type of grasshopper, can badly damage crops when in swarms. They are mentioned in the book of Exodus from the Old Testament and in the novel "The Good Earth" by Pearl Buck. In Korea, a swarm of them were living in a nearby rice paddy to eat the rice plants. But I never had any love for them.

But there is someone who loves these grasshoppers. He is neither an entomologist nor a developer of a dietary supplement. He is the God who created the very grasshopper. But the astonishing fact here is that we are like the grasshopper. I do not mean that you look like bug-eyed insects. Rather, let's look at the Scripture.

Isaiah 40:22 says, "The earth was made by the one who sits on his throne above the earth and beyond the sky; the people below look as tiny grasshoppers." Grasshoppers do not grasp the value of their existence. Nor can they advance or change the circumstances of their lives. And they have no choice but to disappear when it gets cold. Couldn't you say that the same thing holds true for us human beings?

God's love for the grasshopper comes completely from His own will. He created grasshoppers in order to love them. Likewise, it was with love that He planted His image in us and made us resemble Him. Therefore, He rejoices in taking care of us with His utmost love and devotion.

Grasshoppers do not have the ability to become children of God by their own might. But we are the blessed creations who received the miraculous gift of becoming God's children by the grace of Jesus Christ. However, the moment we forget and turn our backs on God, our creator, we degenerate into mere grasshoppers.

Therefore, our job now is to long for Him and accept Him as our greatest joy. Doing so, we will rise up on wings like eagles. Do you believe your life is planned and protected by the absolute creator? If so, such faith is a gift and blessing that only those who believe in it possess.

II. The scripture from the gospel of Mark introduces Jesus Christ, who is able to solve all problems in our lives. Today's passage tells us how Jesus drove out many demons, healed many sick people who had all kinds of diseases, and preached the gospel.

Last Sunday's scripture showed us the Jesus who broke down the power of evil. However, this Sunday's scripture highlights the healing ministry of Jesus. All of those sick who believed in Jesus and came to Him were healed by Him.

Nowadays, there are numerous diseases and illnesses that threaten our lives. Although new medical techniques and advances in medicine are developed year after year, there has been no decrease in the number of ailing patients. Moreover, there are diseases that have no cure, and humans are completely at their whim. Truly, medical advances have been incredibly helpful for human health. However, it proves that human capacity can only go so far.

But Scripture reveals to us today that Jesus is the ultimate healer and problem solver. Our lives are in His hands. He knows our pain and the devastation of our diseases. Remember, Jesus craves and enjoys resolving our difficulties and healing our sicknesses.

Of course, this does not mean that believers are invincible. Christians get sick, encounter accidents, and experience unwanted death. However, despite the hardship, these are not reasons to blame or deny the love and power of Jesus. Because He always accompanies us and helps us get victory in the midst of fearful and painful situations. And although it may not always be what we expect, Jesus always provides a solution.

III. The book of 1 Corinthians introduces a Holy Spirit who leads us to obey the Lord. In his letter, the apostle Paul confessed that he made himself a slave to everyone. More so than anyone, wasn't he a free man who had profound knowledge, no family to tie him down, and faithfulness?

However, he had good reason to want to live as a slave. That was in order to win as many people as possible. His life's desire was to save all people by spreading the Good News and making them believe in Jesus. His practical goal was not really to be a slave—who really strives to be a servant? However, to serve others, he was demonstrating and spreading the salvation of Jesus.

We have a heart to believe in Jesus and to become the children of God, but I'm sure no one here signed up to live a life as a slave. However, becoming the child of God and living as the servant of Christ and His people are not separate from each other but are combined as a whole package.

Paul's desire to live this way was both a mission and a gift from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave him inspiration and the power to accept his calling as a slave of the gospel. A slave does not act according to what he or she wants, but only responds to what the master wants. But have you considered the flip side? The master is also the caregiver for the slave.

As such, God, as the master, takes on the total responsibility of His slaves' lives. Our God is such a good and gracious master. Therefore, the moment we give ourselves up to God as His slaves, we experience absolute and incomparable joy. If we do not totally entrust ourselves to God, our joy is limited, and, ironically, we are not really free. I know this logic seems to go against what's normal for our thinking as humans. However, we have to remember that God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus said in Mark, "I have to preach because that is why I came." Thus, Jesus identified our purpose in life—to spread the gospel. Moreover, through the apostle Paul, we see how to achieve that purpose—by becoming slaves. Through the Holy Spirit, we can serve others in order to make them God's saved children.

We are all like travelers who stay on the planet Earth. On the day we finish our picnic here, we have to go on a long journey again to return to our heavenly home. So, everything in this world is to be borrowed for a while just while we live here.

People say that in order to have a pleasant trip, we must have three conditions: First, the load should be light. Second, you need to get along well with your companions. Third, you must have a home to return to.

I want to attach one essential thing to this list. For a pleasant trip, we have to have a capable pilot in charge because he always leads us to a safe and peaceful haven.

This pilot is God, and through his words, he introduced himself to everyone in the world. Now it is up to us to admit his abilities and faithfulness and to enlist him as our pilot. The happiest way for a human being, created in the image of God, is to acknowledge every day the promise of Him who made me and become more like His character. Amen.

**\*\* Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:**

- 1) Through God's plan and love for making you, like a grasshopper, his child, what do you discover about His character?
- 2) In today's Gospel text from Mark, Jesus healed the sick, preached his word, and cast out demons. Listen and obey what and how He instructs you to pray for your family, friends, neighbors, or the world.
- 3) Paul volunteered to be everyone's servant for the gospel. What is the smallest thing you can do as a servant to all in your home and church? After doing it, check the change the Holy Spirit brings to your soul.