

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
November 27, 2016

Hope by the Word

Psalm 130

130:1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

130:2 O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

130:3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

130:4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

130:5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

130:6 my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

130:7 O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.

130:8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

1. Hope for Sufferings

Last week, November 22nd, 2016, there was an earthquake again in Fukushima offing. It was not unbelievably huge, but brought on a tsunami that attacked the coast; it was enough to remind us of the disaster 5 years ago.

In Fukushima prefecture, there was a candle lighting event in March 2016, for the memorial ceremony of the victims of The Great East Japan Earthquake, that also represent prayers for the recovery and appreciation for the support from many places. This event was called “Candle Night ~Light of Hope~.” Hope, it is needed when you

are in pain. What if Fukushima did not experience the disaster? – People may not have written the word, “hope” on their mind even with lighting up the candles. Hope is what you need exactly when you suffer from something, since people cannot be perseverant against difficulties and overcome the situation without hope.

Today’s verse begin with the phrase, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!” “Out of the depths,” it implies the difficulties and sufferings that we may encounter in our life. People who experienced the Great Earthquake were surely precipitated out the depths. Some people found hope and try to reach out the total recovery, but others are still not saved from the darkness and are without a light of hope.

One boy who escaped from Fukushima and moved to Yokohama, and he was harassed in his new elementary school. He still cannot go out even though he is already in middle school. His diary was opened in November 15th this year; and it has the phrases below.

“Three boys ordered me to bring some money.”

“I was so frustrated and mortified but they might attack me again if I resist. I was afraid of the situation so much.”

“I was angry when they said I have compensation from the nation, but also frustrated I cannot do anything against them.”

“I was kicked, punched, and my bag was thrown around. I was even pushed downstairs. I cannot see when it’s over. It was very scary.”

“I was a virus. I was polluted by radioactive stuffs. It was very cruel. People from Fukushima should be attacked, I think. I cannot resist.”

“I talked a lot about the harassment, but no one in school trusted me.”

Now, he also wrote this.

“I kept thinking it would be better for me to die, but I saw many people died because of the earthquake. It’s hard, but I decided to live.”

Many children commit suicide because of harassment, this boy, however, still make great efforts to live against the difficulties. People lost their life because of the earthquake and the accident of the nuclear power-generating plants, moved to other places, and still suffered in the depths. I cannot describe my pain when I think of the children. I pray for them, like the boy who said he decided to live; may their hearts be totally comforted and could they live with strength.

We often encounter various troubles and difficulties in our life. We have different reasons, but everybody might have troubles over their jobs and family. It might be the economy, sickness, relationships, or death of loved ones. People would experience those things. They know the depths, and suffered to discover hope. People who found hope might have been perseverant and overcome the hard situations.

2. Hope through Prayer

When I think “out of depths”, I recall an accident. It was the accident in the San Jose mine in Chile on August 5th 2010. There was a huge cave in, and 33 workers were confined in the cave, which was located 700 meters under. Literally, they were confined in “depths”. People despaired the life of 33 workers; however, their families did not give up their hopes. The families asked the staff for further investigation and rescue, and their enthusiasm moved the government. The government used their national budget to establish the rescue team, and found and contacted the survivors 17 days after the accident.

When the rescue team contacted the survivors at the first time, their

answer was very calm. In this circumstance, we might expect the answer like screaming “HELP ME!!”. The reason was that the survivors believed the rescue and they had well regulated life under the leader. They did not know when the rescue come, and it was easy to loose their sanity or become chaotic. But they believed that they would be rescued soon and tried to get ready for it.

The survivors were rescued on October 12th. It means they were still confined in the cave for 40 days after the rescue team contacted them. I am assuming that this requires patience. It is no wonder that they screamed “why don’t they come soon!!” and complained and got frustrated. However, they were waiting calmly. This patience was supported by “hope”.

And, they received this “hope” through prayer. The majority of the workers were believers. They did not believe “we will be rescued for sure” without reasons but they knew that God is the one who listen to their prayer. The reason of the hope is God. Therefore, they could pray in such hopeless situation for human eyes.

Even the believers, they sometime loose the words of prayer when they are thrown into the trouble suddenly. A pastor who lost his son at a traffic accident said “I am a pastor and always tell people “pray”, however, I could not pray for a while”. It is very possible. The believers might loose the words of prayer but they never loose the heart of prayer. Nonetheless, they never loose the one who listen to the prayer. When you do not know what to pray, you still can call on the one who listen to the prayer. If you say “God”, “Lord”, “Father”, “Jesus”, this is excellent prayer. “Lord, I... call you” According to this word, God gives us the heart of prayer and listen to our prayers. If we

can recognize God and the Lord who hears our prayer and call Him “You”, there is a prayer.

In the depths and in the deep darkness, there are many people who are suffering to find the light of hope. However, even if you are in such a situation and keep praying, you must be able to find “hope”. It is because God himself is our hope. The prayer reaches God even it is in out of depths and any deep darkness.

3. Hope by the Word

Bible continues in verse 5, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope”. As it says, “in his word I hope”, we affirm our hope with God’s word. The Candle of Hope of Advent is also called the Candle of Prophecy, because our hope of lamplight continues to burn with the promise of God’s word. God gives us his word and promise, so that we don’t lose our hope.

Bible says when humans were created by God, everything was perfect and in the complete happiness. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did not know the word “hope” because everything they hoped for was already there. But when humans committed sins and were kicked out from the Garden of Eden, they needed hope, the hope that humans can return to God again and live in His blessings.

This hope does not come from the human side but is always promised by God. He did not prepare salvation in response to humans’ request but He himself promised salvation and acted on humans to hope for. He prepared everything needed for our salvation and made it so simple that only thing we need to do was to receive it.

The word of promise of salvation has been given immediately after

humans committed sins. In Genesis 3:15, it says “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”, but this is a prophecy that Jesus Christ who is born as the “offspring of woman” will be crucified by sins and evil power, but will defeat them through the cross and resurrection.

Starting with this prophecy, the Bible contains at least 50 major prophecies on the birth of Jesus Christ, His works, the cross and resurrection, ascension and second coming. God also gave us numerous words of promise and encouraged us who believe in Him. God always gives us his word so that we don't lose our hope or stay in despair. When we trust in His words, we will never lose our hope.

In January 1915, the Antarctic expedition ship “Endurance” was locked in the ice. All the crew members were able to escape to the Elephant Island by lifeboat, but it was an uninhabited island. It was off from the routine route and there was almost no chance to be rescued. In April, Captain Ernest Henry Shackleton and five crews left for the South Georgia Island looking for help. Those stayed on the Elephant Island believed the word of Captain Shackleton assuring them of help, and waited for him. Finally in August, they saw the rescue ship with Captain Shackleton on board.

As the crew members believed in the word of Captain Shackleton and held hope, we have hope with God's word even in the worst possible circumstances. In our life, we experience as if we are locked up in underground or ice; for example, we are not welcomed even if we are sincere and do our best, or things never turn to be better even if we make every effort. During the difficult time, hope, which

originates from the trust in God and His word, continues to support us.

When we light the Candle of Hope on Advent, let's think about the hope that God gives to us through Jesus Christ. Let's proclaim to our Lord, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope".

(Prayer)

Dear Heavenly Father, we often become disappointed when we face difficulties, we often become desperate when we are in pain, but even in these conditions, you keep the light of hope for us. Please help us to find hope through our prayers and hold it tight with your Word. Please guide us so that we, who have received the light of hope, will become the light of hope for this dark world. We pray through Jesus Christ, our hope, Amen.