

Sunday, June 16, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

「Love has no fear」 Pastor Takaaki Inoue

1 John 4:16~21, John 15:12~19

① 【God first loved us】

Today we will learn from the Epistle of John. This John is often referred to as the "Apostle of Love." This is because in his letters the famous phrase "God is love" (1 John 4:16) and God's expression of love appears. No one had ever described God in this way. That is why they are called "Apostles of Love." I think the most important passage in the letter I read today is verse 19, "We love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19). I didn't read it today, but a similar expression appears in verse 10. "It was not that we loved God, but that He loved us so much that He sent His Son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. It's not that you loved Christ, but that Christ loved you first. That's where your story begins. That's where our love for our neighbor comes from. The reason why this passage is important is that we often forget that God's love comes first. What happens when we forget is that the weight is placed on human love and human karma, and gradually our faith becomes legal, and love for our neighbor comes to be done by human power. John wrote, "We know and believe in God's love for us" (1 John 4:16), and "He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (Ibid. 4:16).

●A long time ago, when I was a child, I played a game called "taking a position." Draw a line on the ground, and within this line is your base, so it is safe, but if you lose to Janken, your base will be taken and your base will decrease. In the same way, it is important to stay in this divine position. God's dominion is the dominion of God's love, and it is not to go out of the dominion of that love.

In other words, we never doubt God's love for us. It's about thinking that if God loves you, you'll be okay and safe. If you believe in God in this way, He will abide in you. The reason why God does not abide in a person if he does not believe is because believing means accepting. Not believing means not accepting the other person, so God can't let them in. John is saying that he believes in God's love and accepts that love.

Verse 17 says, "Love is fulfilled in us, so that we can be sure of the Day of Judgment." "Love is made complete among us" is "Love is made complete among us" in English. It means, "Love is perfecting in me, love is filling in me." It means that because we believe in God's love, we are not afraid of judgment. That's why the following famous quote comes out. "There is no fear in love, and perfect love shuts out fear." (Ibid. 4:18)

● When you were younger, try to remember the joy and heartbeat you felt when someone told you they liked you. How joyful our hearts were when we knew the love of the other person. A long time ago, I saw an NHK documentary video called the Russian Orthodox Millennium. In it, the monk spoke of Christ as if he were his lover, with his cheeks bright red and very happy. "We are always thinking of Christ, just as a lover is always thinking of the other, and we want to be like Him. Even if you can't be, you'll be recognized for trying to be."

So when I say "love has no fear," I am not referring to your love, but to the love of Christ. It means that those who know the love of Christ will have no fear. Never doubt Christ's love for you. It's about thinking that if you are loved by Christ, you'll be okay and safe.

② [I was ordained to become a Christian]

In the Gospels, John uses the word "election" to say that God's work comes first. "You did not choose me, but I chose you. For I have appointed you that ye may go forth and bear fruit, and that your fruit may remain, and that whatever you ask of the Father in my name may be given." (John 15:16)

Again, it is written that the beginning of faith is not on us, but on God's side. The reason why we became Christians is because Christ chose and appointed me. It doesn't matter if I'm good or not, if I'm a truth-seeker, if I'm capable. Christ first saw me and chose me for some reason. The word "appointment" comes up. In English, it is "appointed". It means "to decree, to designate, to appoint, heaven commands." God has appointed us to be Christians, and we have been ordained to be Christians. It's about how I respond to Christ's election, appointment, and calling. For some, it will be "annoying" or "I have other things to do." It must have been the same for those who came to the wedding party without formal clothes. If, while walking down the street, he was suddenly stopped and offered a dress and ordered to go to the prince's wedding feast, he would have had his convenience. That's why I was angry and didn't wear my clothes. He will say. "What! I'm busy, so why do I have to do that?" But on the contrary, the poor and humble will answer: "What! How can someone like me do such a fine job? What a waste." Mr./Ms., which line comes out of your mouth? Since the Jews were the former, the election was transferred to other peoples. Therefore Peter says: "Brethren, strive more to make sure that you are called and chosen" (II Peter 1:10).

③ [Christ is the only thing we can be proud of]

● Last week, I went to visit the headquarters of Tenrikyo. Even though it is only 180 years old, the building is huge, magnificent, and has 3,000 tatami mats

alone. I was impressed by the Mr./Ms. of the believers who gathered there, and how well they served. They say "hinokishin" and clean the hallway of the main shrine with a rag to a shine. Both young and old people prayed fervently and sang and sweated. In addition, 160 accommodation facilities are built around the main shrine so that you can stay when you return to the main shrine from Tenrikyo churches all over Japan. For example, the members of a church in Aomori have to build two facilities, one in Aomori and the other in Tenri City. It's a huge contribution. In a word, I thought Tenrikyo was a big deal. I felt the helplessness of Christians in comparison. As Paul says, Christians are sick, poor, and troubled. Also, I think that the spirit of serving others is weak because it is full of discussions. As Gandhi said, "Christianity is good, but Christians are bad."

Jesus told his disciples, "You have tribulations in the world, but be of good courage. I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

If we have any victories, it is not because we have achieved anything in this life, not because we have left something behind, not because we have solved the problems of society or lived a good life. It is the work of justice and the work of love that we humans do. Rather, it's like we've already won because Christ loves us. I always thought that was the only way. Our God is changing. Because He chose and loved those who were truly helpless and equal to nothing. It is Christ who should be proud, and we have nothing to boast about. "He that boasteth shall boast of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). The weaker we are, the more we see the greatness of Christ's love. Let us rejoice in Christ, who loved us first. And I would like to pray that I will be able to live like him as much as possible.