

Sunday, August 9, 2026

Sermon for the Morning Service on Memorial Sunday for the Departed

“To Die Is Gain” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Philippians 1:21–24, Matthew 6:19–24

① 【The Secret to Happiness】

This year marks the 81st anniversary of the end of the war. Atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima on August 6 and on Nagasaki on August 9. It was the height of summer. I can only imagine how agonizing it must have been. The peace we enjoy today was made possible by the sacrifices of the many people who lost their lives in the war. When I reflect on this, I realize that we do not live in isolation, but in solidarity with countless others across the ages. And I find myself wondering: Why were they the ones who had to make the sacrifice, and not me? I wonder if I could have endured such suffering. Yet when I look at the world today, I see that humanity has failed to learn from its mistakes, squandering those sacrifices and repeating the folly of war once again. I can't help but wonder if it's all in vain, no matter how much we advocate for peace or try to learn from history. Where, then, should we place our hope as we live our lives? The Letter to the Philippians I read today was written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. We know that he would soon stand trial and be sentenced to death. Yet, despite this, the word “joy” appears as many as 16 times. How was he able to rejoice? I believe the secret to living in this world with hope lies there.

② 【Christ Is Everything】

Paul says, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). For Paul, Christ was his whole life. He writes about this later in the letter: “Because of the surpassing greatness of knowing my Lord Jesus Christ, I now consider everything else a loss. For Christ's sake, I have lost everything, and I consider it all rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). Until then, he had taken pride in the Jewish Law; studying and practicing it had been his whole life. However, after encountering Christ and coming to know Him, he became captivated by Christ's overwhelming splendor. Everything he had done up to that point seemed so trivial and insignificant that he came to believe that having Christ alone was enough. Christ had become his whole life. Moreover, he even says that death is gain. Normally, there is no gain in dying; one loses everything. The reason he calls it gain is that, while in this life he sees Christ only dimly, in the life to come he will be able to be near Christ and see Him clearly with his own eyes and know Him fully.

● There was a famous mathematician and physicist named Pascal. Prompted by his father's injury, he heard Christ's words, “There is only one thing needed” (Luke

10:42), and resolved to renounce all attempts to divide his heart between this world and God. He resolved, “I will live for no other purpose than God, and I will seek nothing other than God.” However, although he understood this intellectually, he could not bring himself to believe in God wholeheartedly. Therefore, the approach he took was this: “The way to bring faith from reason into the heart is to act as if one believes—to take holy water, attend Mass, and recite prayers.” He sought to begin with the outward forms. Then, something miraculous happened. On the night of November 23, 1654, he entered a kind of ecstatic state and experienced God. Pascal recorded this spiritual experience in his diary: “Certain, certain. Joy from the heart. Peace, joy. Joy. Joy. Tears of emotion.” After encountering Christ, he abandoned mathematics and physics to become a theologian.

“But if I am to continue living in the flesh, that means fruitful work for me; and I do not know which to choose. I am torn between the two. On the one hand, I long to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. But on the other hand, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh.” (Philippians 1:21) What a man he was. He is completely different from the people of this world. He longs to die soon and go to be with Christ. Yet he says he is torn between the desire to die and the need to remain in this world, because as long as he lives on earth, he can work for the church. People often say, “I want to die soon,” but that is because they have grown to hate this world—perhaps due to illness and suffering, the hardship of living, or the loneliness of being all alone. Paul is different. It is because he wants to see Christ soon and be with Him.

③ **[This world is not the destination of life]**

“My eager expectation and hope is that I will in no way be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, Christ will be exalted in my life, whether by life or by death.” (Philippians 1:20) For Paul, the purpose of living in this world was to bear witness to Christ and to proclaim Him. Is this true only for Paul? No. This is the mission of all Christians. For this purpose, we were created, born into this world, chosen, and given faith. We were not born into this world to own a home, go on trips, eat delicious food, run a business, or pursue hobbies. These are not our purpose but rather means to an end. A home is for resting the body after preaching; travel is for refreshing ourselves so we can preach again; and delicious meals are for nourishing our bodies so we can pray and preach.

● Pastor Yasuo Enomoto wrote the following:

“In the Christian faith... we must clearly understand the center. If we know the center of a circle, the distance from the center to any point on the circumference is the same. If there are two focal points, it becomes an ellipse. When there is a single center, notions like ‘I alone am far away’ or ‘this problem is troubling’ all become

equidistant. ...Once we know the center, we will no longer feel inferior or superior. If we have two focal points—our faith in Jesus Christ and this world—it becomes like an ellipse, causing us to boast to others about our strengths and belittle ourselves for our weaknesses.”

I think his writing is a little hard to follow, but to put it simply, this is what he means.

If you place “this world” at the center (focal point) of a circle, this world becomes everything, and living for this world becomes the purpose of life. As a result, since those who accumulate the most in this world are happy, people will fight over this world, and wars will never end. If this world is the goal, then a child born with a severe disability or someone who lost their life at a young age in a disaster would be considered unfortunate. And if this world is everything, people will compare themselves to others, developing feelings of superiority or inferiority, and the opinions of others will become everything. However, when you place “Christ” at the center (focal point) of the circle, things begin to look different. Since Christ is the “Kingdom of God” itself, entering the Kingdom of God becomes the purpose of life. This world then becomes a means to reach the Kingdom of God. Disabilities become a means for God’s glory to be revealed; illness, a means to draw closer to God; and misfortune and disasters—all become merely means to reach Christ and enter the Kingdom of God. And since our sole joy lies in being recognized by Christ rather than by people, we no longer worry about the opinions of others. The center of Paul’s life was entirely Christ. This world was not his destination; the Kingdom of God was. That is why he was not afraid even when he lost something in this world. Your life changes completely depending on what you place at its center.

The other day, while reading the YWCA’s quarterly magazine, I thought that while peace activism and peace education are important, I wondered if it was really wise to place so much hope in human beings. This is because I felt that no matter how much people learn, they don’t change, and that peace cannot be achieved by human effort alone. However, if Christ had despaired of humanity, I don’t think He would have been crucified. It would have been much quicker to destroy all of humanity and create a new kind of human being. Yet Christ did not do that. He sacrificed Himself for humanity. Was it not because He believed in humanity? Certainly, humans sin, fail, destroy this world, and are incapable of creating peace. Yet even so, a person united with God can rise above sin, confront evil without fear of death, live like an angel, and create peace. Goodness is our nature, while evil is a habit—and goodness is stronger than evil. If we view everything through the lens of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, we can have hope. Augustine said, “Precisely because these are evil times, let us live well.” Let us begin by creating small acts of peace. Let us not be defeated by evil, but respond with goodness. I want to live in this world with hope.