New Year’s Day (2022)

 **“BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD”**

Psalm 46:1-11

Key Verse: 46:10

“He says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.” I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

“Happy New Year!” “Feliz Ano Nuevo!” “Xin Nian Kuai Le!” (Mandarin) “*행복한 새해 되세요!*” (Korean) Probably, the year 2021 was the worst or at least one of the most challenging times for most of you. We wish 2022 to be better for us.

Psalm 46 is a song of praise, composed when the disaster struck the entire nation of Israel, mainly through the invasion of foreign countries, including the Assyrian empire. This psalm reminds us that God our Father can handle things that seem impossible for us to take, assuring that we can have safety and security in God and God alone. At the end of the psalm, the Lord said to his people, *“Be still, and know that I am God….”* I am sure we can learn what spiritual direction we should take as we face new challenges.

According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2022 is the year of the tiger (Pic#1), which is the symbol of strength, bravery, and confidence, like a king. So we call the tiger the king of the animal kingdom. I hope and pray that we may learn to have courage and confidence in God as we face new challenges in 2022.

Look at verses 1-3. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” One of my friends wished me a Happy New Year by sending me a text message saying, *“I hope that your life in 2022 may be filled only with good things.”* I appreciated his good intentions to wish me good luck. However, I know that 2022 will not be filled only with good things. But don’t get me wrong. I hope that many good things may happen to us this new year. But we know that the new year isn’t going to be problem-free. Then what shall we do?

In today’s passage, the psalmist didn’t offer the empty promises that we would not have any trouble if we trusted God. Instead, he said, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” We often pray that we may not have any problems. Yet, God does not necessarily remove risks from us. Instead, he offers ever-present help in our trouble. I particularly like the phrase ***“ever-present help in trouble.”*** God is not indifferent to our problems. He cares for us deeply, and his help is ever-present, even though we may not be aware of it.

Last year, as a body of Christ, we had faced a tough and painful challenge. At first, most of us were shocked and didn’t know what to do. But instead of trying to solve the problem hurriedly and blaming one another, we decided to take refuge in God and sought God’s guidance through silent prayers. Even though we were not perfect in dealing with issues, we could experience God’s timely help and guidance step by step. Praise the Lord!

When we face troubles and challenges in 2022, we should not try to solve them prematurely based on our experience in 2021. Instead, we should again take refuge in God through silent prayers and meditation of God’s words. If God does not solve our problems immediately, we should wait, believing that God will guide us step by step according to his schedule and in the best way beyond our imagination. It reminds us of what Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

 Look at verses 4-7. “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” In these verses, the psalmist expresses his sure hope that God would protect the city of Jerusalem, which was under the immediate threat of the Assyrian empire and the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The psalmist was sure that God would protect the city of God because he firmly believed that Jerusalem was God’s dwelling place. Is it true? Yes and no.

We know that in history, Jerusalem, the city of God, had been destroyed over and over. Although God restored Jerusalem, she didn’t last long. So what happened to God? Why didn’t he protect the city of God? It’s not because God was not able to do it. The fact of the matter is that the destruction of Jerusalem did not shade God’s glory. It’s the opposite. It revealed God’s glory because Jerusalem is not God’s permanent dwelling place. God is omnipresent, not limited in one place. That’s why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman. “Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem… Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit.” (Jn. 4:21-23)

It’s easy for religious people, including us, to rely on their religious convictions rather than God’s will. Sometimes, the opposite of faith is blindly maintaining a religious conviction rather than seeking God’s will.

However, in the following verses, the psalmist illustrates beyond God’s mere protection of the city of Jerusalem. He was more progressive in the following verses. Look at verses 8-9. I want us to read it in the NLT. “Come, see the glorious works of the Lord: See how he brings destruction upon the world. He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.” (8-9; NLT) The psalmist invites us to come and see? Come and see what? Verse 8a states, **“Come, see the glorious works of the Lord.”** So what is **“the glorious works of the Lord”**? Verses 8b states, **“See how he brings destruction upon the world.”**

Having read these verses, I said to myself, *“Oh my, Lord!”* At first glance, I was confused if God would bring another destruction upon the earth. **“See how he brings destruction upon the world”** (NLT) and **“see… the desolations he has brought on the earth.”** (NIV) It seems that God is not different from violent humans.

But when we look more carefully, it’s not that God would bring another destruction upon the earth. Instead, he terminates the destructive cycle of the world. How does God end the destructive cycle of the world? Verse 9 summarizes it. Let’s reread verse 9. “He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.”

World history is the continuation of wars, one war after another. War is terrible, no matter how good cause it may have been. Do you know how many lives were lost in WWI? Around 9 million to 15 million people died in WWI. Do you know how many lives perished in WWII? Approximately 70 to 85 million people perished indirectly or directly due to WWII, nearly 3% of the world population. And there are so many wars going on in the corner of the world today.

We wonder why God does not use his power and authority to prevent these destructive wars. We don’t have a good answer to the question. However, according to the psalmist's description, God, our Father in heaven, is not a violent God at all. Instead, he causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks all weapons and melts them with fire. The prophet Isaiah shares God’s vision of peace by saying that someday, people will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:3-5)

Our God is not violent. Think of Christ Jesus, who is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of who God is (Heb. 1:3). What did he do as the Messiah? Instead of destroying the Roman empire with his mighty power, he let the sinful men crucify him. In his unbearable pain on the cross, he cried out to God, ***“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.”*** Do you see even a hint of violence or revenge in Christ Jesus? No. Jesus was forgiving and full of mercy. He brought peace and God’s kingdom to us through his sacrificial death on the cross. And his kingdom dwells in us now and forever.

In reality, it’s frustrating to witness that nothing in the world has fundamentally changed. The world is still running on the vicious cycle of violence, injustice, and destruction. Yet, despite all these, we can still see and experience God’s kingdom, his wholesome presence, an ever-present help in our troubled life because of what Christ Jesus had done on the cross.

We are heartbroken to see our dear friends and loved ones are sick and suffer in pain. There are many suffering people due to poverty, sickness, injustice, and violence. The list goes on and on. We wonder why these things are still happening. Paul compares it with birth pain. He said in Romans 8:22, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” Paul’s point is that the universe, God’s created world, is pregnant, so it suffers. I realized that we consider ourselves being pregnant. Being pregnant is a painful process for a new and everlasting life. So, we don’t need to despair when we suffer. We have hope of the glorious resurrection! Amen.

Psalm 46 concludes in verse 10 by saying, “Be still, and know that I am God.” What does it mean to be still and know that he is God? It’s an invitation to have deep fellowship with him in our day-to-day life as we go through troubles and challenges in this world. Even though we don’t understand many things, we must remember that God knows us. In fact, we are fully known by him. And God knows what he is doing. So we don’t need to worry or be afraid in any circumstance.

I know it’s not easy to be still when we face troubles. We may fall into doubt and fear. But that’s okay because we are human. But we are to learn to be still and acknowledge God as God. The Lord, our God, invites us to put our trust in him. “Be still, and know that I am God.” As we learn to trust him, we can become like spiritual tigers with our courage and confidence in God. We can almost anticipate that every moment in the new year will be a unique opportunity to know God and ourselves deeper and grow mature. So, we are ready to welcome the new year. **“Be still, and know that I am God! Happy New Year!”**