

43:1 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

43:3 For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.

43:4 Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life.

43:5 Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west;

[From Today's Sermon.

I would like to extend my best wishes for the New Year. On New Year's Day, there was a major earthquake that caused extensive damage in the Noto area, and on the following day, a major accident occurred at Haneda Airport, in which a large passenger plane caught fire. Many of you must have wondered what kind of year this would be.

As the saying goes, "A moment ahead is darkness," and we cannot know what will happen in a moment. Disasters strike suddenly. There are times when we suddenly find ourselves thrown into a whirlpool of unspeakable difficulties, sinking into anxiety and sorrow, and pierced by a searing, burning pain in our hearts, just as a house is swallowed by a muddy stream and flames are thrown into swirling fire and water.

At such times, we recall today's words.

The Lord who created you says: "Fear not, for I have glorified you; I have called your name, and you have called me. I have called your name, and you are mine."

There is One who continues to call us, "You, you, you. He is the Creator of heaven and earth and all things, the One who created each one of us. He is the One who has ruled over all the world in the past, now, and in the future. He calls us "His children" and offers His substitute Son to protect, love, and save us. He is the one who tells us, "Do not be afraid. We have been redeemed and set free.

Happy New Year everyone!

It was a mild New Year's holiday due to the mild winter.

On New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, as usual, my family returned home, we enjoyed a warm meal together, watched the Kohaku Uta Gassen (singing contest), listened to the New Year's bell ringing, and talked about "Happy New Year" with my family. I wonder how many people prayed for a good new year. Who could have imagined that the happy family reunion, where the adults squinted at their children who were filled with joyful anticipation and beaming with New Year's money, would be torn apart that evening? Who could have imagined that the plane I was boarding would have a major accident on landing at Haneda Airport, that the plane would catch fire, and that I would be sliding off the plane without any luggage? Who could have imagined that I would never see my pet again, who was put in that cage a few hours earlier? Who could have imagined that on New Year's Day, all the usual TV programs would be replaced by disaster reports?

In the year 2024, we are entering the beginning of the year with a piercing event.

Over 120 people have died and over 200 are still missing.

We do not know what will happen in the future, not even a minute or a second ahead of us. That is how we human beings are. What kind of year will this year be like with such things happening from the beginning of the year?

Houses will collapse, people will be swallowed up by water, and fires will ignite and consume them. The fact that such things can happen as a matter of a moment is the greatest fear of all for us.

How are we to live in the midst of such fear, the fear of not knowing what is to come, the fear of the water rising so fast that we cannot breathe, the fear of the water rising so fast that we cannot breathe, the fear of the fire spreading, hunting us down, making our hearts ache and our worries flare up?

At the beginning of the year, we wish to turn to the Word of God in the midst of our suffering, but with quietness of mind.

1 Thus says the LORD who created you, O Jacob. 2 O Israel, the LORD who made you now says: "Fear not, for I have glorified you; I have called your name, and you have called upon Me. I have called your name, and you are mine.

The Lord calls out to His people, "O Jacob, O Israel!

Today, this call of the Lord is spoken not only to the nation of Israel, but to all nations.

Acts 1:8 Only when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel. Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel,

for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Acts 10:10 He was hungry and wanted something to eat. And while the people were preparing the meal, he became dreamy.

10:11 Then the heavens were opened, and he saw a large cloth-like container, with the four corners hanging down, coming down to the earth.

10:12 And in it were all kinds of living creatures, four-footed and crawling things of the earth, and birds of the air.

10:13 And a voice came to him, "Peter! Get up and dust them off and eat them.

10:14 Peter said, "Lord, I cannot do that. I have never eaten anything unclean or unclean.

10:15 Then a voice came to him a second time, "Do not say that what God has cleansed is unclean.

The One who created the world and still governs it today speaks to us, "Fear not, for I am with you.

Do not be afraid, for I have glorified you. I have called your name, and you are mine.

This is God's way of saying, "You, you, you.... How much God loves us, and how He redeems, protects, saves, and loves us through the sacrifice of His beloved and precious Son.

He says, "Fear not, for I have glorified you; I have called your name, and you have called me. I have called on your name, and you are mine."

I have called upon your name, and you are mine. As parents call their children, loving and nurturing them, so God also cares for us, calling us by name and speaking to us. You are mine. You are not a stranger who has nothing to do with me. You belong to me, you belong to my family. You are my own, my family, my beloved child, God says.

2 When you pass through the waters, I am with you. When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee; when thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. When thou passest through fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall fire consume thee.

When God rescued His people from Egypt, He rescued them from the water. And God rescued Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were with Daniel, from the fire.

Daniel 3:14 Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you do not serve my gods and worship the golden image that I have set up?

3:15 If you bow down when you hear the sound of the horn, the transverse flute, the zither, the triangular zither, the tachikin, the wind flute, and other musical instruments, and immediately worship the image that I have set up, then so be it. But if you do not, you will be thrown immediately into the fiery furnace. Which god can save you from my hand?

3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king and said, "Nebuchadnezzar, you need not answer me about this matter.

3:17 For if it should come to that, the God whom we serve will deliver us from the fiery furnace of his fire. He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

3:18 And if not so, know this, O king, that we do not serve your gods. We will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden images you have set up.

3:19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with anger, and turned his face toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and commanded that the furnace should be heated seven times hotter than usual.

3:20 And he called for the mighty men of his army, and bound Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and commanded that they should be thrown into the fiery furnace.

3:21 So these men were bound in their cloaks, underwear, caps, and other garments, and thrown into the fiery furnace.

3:22 And the king's command was so severe, and the furnace so hot, that those who led Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into it were burned to death in the flames.

3:23 And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the fiery furnace, bound together.

3:24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and hastened to rise and said to his ministers, "Did we not bind those three men and throw them into the fire? They answered and said to the king, "Yes, O king, we did.

3:25 The king answered and said, "But I see four men walking through the fire without riddles, and they have not suffered any harm. The fourth is like the Son of God.

3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar approached the entrance of the fiery furnace and said, "Come out, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God," and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.

God will rescue us from the fire and from the water.

3 I am the LORD your God, the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I will give Egypt to be thy propitiation, and Ethiopia and Sheba shall be thy substitutes.

I am the Lord thy God, the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy deliverer."

No matter the sorrow of the Babylonian captivity, no matter how weak and shady a nation we may be, the Lord our God is the Maker of the world, the Ruler and King of the world, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Lord of lords, the Lord of lords, the Lord of kings. He is the ruler of the world, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. There is no nation, no matter how great or how distant, that will not bow to His rule. And He will stand in your stead, as your Redeemer, and save you, says the Bible.

4 You are precious in My sight and highly esteemed, and because I love you, I will give a man in your stead, and a people in the place of your life.

You are precious and highly esteemed in My sight; I love you so much that I will give a man in your stead, and a people in the place of your life. I love you, God tells us. And He gives us His substitute, His Son, Christ Jesus.

5 Fear not, for I am with you. I will send your descendants from the east and gather you from the west.

No matter how far away you are in captivity, no matter how great the difficulty, no matter how great the island exile, exile, captivity, confinement, piercing difficulty and trouble, God speaks to you, "Do not be afraid, I am with you. He speaks to you from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, from far and wide, from the land of the scattered to call you back to the midst of blessings.

How much God loves us and calls out to us, "You," "You," "I am," and reveals His plan of salvation to us. Through the sacrifice of His precious Son, He has freed us from the bonds of sin and brought us back to the presence of God from the remote land of misery, separated from Him by our sins. We thank God for this grace of forgiveness and salvation, and trusting in the empowerment of this God who is with us, we wish to go forward this year, trusting in the God of living love who reigns over our uncertain days, who provides good guidance for us, and who rescues us from the fire and the water.

2 Corinthians 5:17 For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

5:18 But all these things are from God. God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ,

and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

5:19 For God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not imputing to it the guilt of its sins, but has committed to us the gospel of reconciliation.

5:20 For we are Christ's ambassadors, since God makes counsel through us, and we are Christ's ambassadors. 5:20 Therefore receive the reconciliation of God, which we hope for on behalf of Christ, that you may be reconciled to God.

5:21 For God hath made him to be sin for our sins, who knew no sin. 5:21 For God hath made him to be sin for our sins, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for today's worship. We have experienced great sorrow at the beginning of this year. Please save, heal, fill, and comfort the victims. We give thanks to God who calls out to us, "You, you, you, you," and says that we are worthy and precious and that you love us, that you have redeemed us and made us children of God, that you protect us, help us, and love us. Bless our families and the people in our community. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.