

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2025
SERMON "FAITH OVER FEAR"
SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 41:1-10
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Isaiah 41:1-10

- 1** "Be silent before me, you islands!
Let the nations renew their strength!
Let them come forward and speak;
let us meet together at the place of judgment.
- 2** "Who has stirred up one from the east,
calling him in righteousness to his service^[a]?
He hands nations over to him
and subdues kings before him.
He turns them to dust with his sword,
to windblown chaff with his bow.
- 3** He pursues them and moves on unscathed,
by a path his feet have not traveled before.
- 4** Who has done this and carried it through,
calling forth the generations from the beginning?
I, the Lord—with the first of them
and with the last—I am he."
- 5** The islands have seen it and fear;
the ends of the earth tremble.
They approach and come forward;
- 6** they help each other
and say to their companions, "Be strong!"
- 7** The metalworker encourages the goldsmith,
and the one who smooths with the hammer
spurs on the one who strikes the anvil.
One says of the welding, "It is good."
The other nails down the idol so it will not topple.
- 8** "But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
you descendants of Abraham my friend,

9 I took you from the ends of the earth,
from its farthest corners I called you.
I said, 'You are my servant';
I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

10 So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Sermon: Faith over Fear

Last week, I provided a lighthearted message of hope and joy for the exciting things happening in the church. Although I acknowledged the anxiety many of us are feeling about the government, I specifically avoided talking about the worldly affairs happening around us for a few reasons. Most importantly, I needed to take time to pray on how to address the situation faithfully. I also greatly appreciate that this is a church where many political ideologies are welcome, because we know our common purpose is Jesus and His Kingdom, not the fleeting kingdoms of our world.

The day before the election, I delivered a sermon called "God's Kingdom is Greater than Rome." In that message, I talked about how Jesus told us to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's"—a call to prioritize God's calling for us over human political affairs because we know that God is greater than any human government. I talked about how the work we're doing to make disciples, heal the broken, and free the captive in His name is more powerful than anything political power can accomplish.

I do, however, acknowledge that the news coming out of our government is eliciting strong reactions. While we Christians are meant to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's," the Bible repeatedly addresses that God sees our anxiety and fears about the very real issues of our context, and He comforts us, assuring us that He is with us through it all. God's Kingdom is greater than Caesar's, but we do live in Caesar's world, and God doesn't discount the anxiety we sometimes feel about that.

Here in Isaiah, and in many other places in Scripture, God encourages us to have faith in Him over fear of our worldly context. Isaiah 41:10 says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." This is easier said than done, though, because while we can't physically see God, we can certainly see the troubling things in front of us—like the political situations on the news. Sometimes, it also feels like Caesar's work threatens to upend the work of the Lord that we're trying to accomplish—like uplifting the poor, encouraging the widow, and welcoming the foreigner. So the question is: How do we live into faith over fear with integrity?

For Isaiah's audience, many chose to give into fear. At the time of Isaiah's writing, Israel had been exiled by Babylon for several years and God's faithful people were starting to fracture under the weight of hopelessness and fear. In chapter 41, Isaiah is encouraging

his people to stay faithful to God through this trial while also admonishing those who chose to buckle under the pressure of their occupying force and convert to the idolatrous religions of the ruling Babylonians.

Like Isaiah's people, I think perhaps many of us feel the urge to react in panic when ruling political authorities pressure and cast fear over our sense of safety. I know I have felt that fear before. There have been a couple of instances in my career where the work of Caesar felt like it was threatening to upend the work I was doing in service to the Lord that resulted in panic and hopelessness.

In 2013, I was working on building refugee schools for Syrian children in Jordan. That summer, the Al-Assad regime of Syria chose to chlorine gas civilians in Damascus—a war crime designated by the United Nations. I remember the intense disappointment that the Syrians around me felt when the Obama administration chose to turn a blind eye to that crime, which Assad repeated several more times before fleeing office just two months ago. The fear and panic were real in that situation. There was an initial feeling that nothing we did to empower the Syrian children in those schools would matter if their dictatorship was going to be allowed to mass murder them with no accountability anyway. Caesar's grip felt very real in that moment.

Yet, we carried on. We built the schools, taught the children, and connected them with the services they needed despite the looming threat. And now, a decade later, Assad's power has finally broken, but the work we did to uplift those children lasted well beyond his reign of terror.

Fast forward to 2016. I was working in a federally funded refugee office shortly before Donald Trump was elected. The first action his administration took regarding immigration was to suspend the office's funding and eliminate 90% of their clients from service eligibility. Overnight, the work they had been doing—welcoming and integrating refugees, helping families rebuild their lives—came to a halt. Fear set in quickly. Would they ever be able to continue? Would these families be left stranded? Would all of their efforts be in vain?

Yet, once again, we moved forward in faith that God would guide us despite the obstacles. That office continued processing clients and using community-based tools to support them even when the federal funding disappeared. And within a few weeks, the so-called "ban" had lifted, and operations resumed almost entirely as before. The fear had felt overwhelming in the moment, but it was temporary. The work of the Lord endured beyond the shifting tides of human politics.

In both of these circumstances, it felt like Caesar's commands were stopping us from doing the work of God—welcoming the foreigner, freeing the captives, encouraging the poor. But in both cases, we moved forward with the work anyway. And in both cases, God's work prevailed over whatever whims the government had. The immigration ban eventually ended. The Assad dictatorship eventually toppled. In the final chapters of Isaiah, the Babylonian Empire eventually fell to Cyrus the Great, who restored the

Kingdom of Israel for Isaiah's people. Human governments rise and fall, but the work of God endures.

Sometimes God's victory doesn't happen instantly, or even within our lifetimes – but knowing His presence is leading us toward the Kingdom in His time gives us the courage to persevere. We may not always see the full picture, but we trust that He is at work, weaving His redemptive plan through the chaos of our world. When we choose faith over fear, we align ourselves with His eternal purpose, knowing that no earthly power can ultimately stand against the will of God.

Faith over fear is not just a comforting phrase we repeat while still feeling consumed by anxiety. It is a deep, steady trust that guides our choices, shaping how we respond to the uncertainties of life. Isaiah 41 reminds us that God carries his faithful servants through any circumstance and we have to trust that He will do it again, and again, and again. This is not a call to ignore fear or pretend it doesn't exist, but rather an assurance that God's presence and promises are greater than the forces that threaten to shake us.

Faith does not mean we are never afraid—it means we do not let fear decide how we live. Instead of reacting to fear with desperation, retaliation, or despair, faith calls us to move forward with the conviction that God is still at work. Even when the world seems unstable, even when those in power make decisions that seem to threaten the very work of justice and mercy, God's Kingdom is not shaken. The rulers of this world may rise and fall, but the mission of God—welcoming the stranger, lifting up the poor, standing with the oppressed—remains.

When we trust in God's steady hand, we make decisions not out of fear or panic, but out of faithfulness. We recognize that while earthly leaders may try to tighten their grip, they do not control the future of God's Kingdom. We are invited to be part of that Kingdom's unfolding story, not by grasping for control ourselves, but by walking forward in faith, knowing that God's justice, love, and redemption are always advancing—no matter what may come in politics or power. The faithful of Isaiah's audience didn't buckle under the pressure to react to the powers that be, and neither should we.

My friends, no matter what administration is in power or what they're doing, keep listening to God and have faith. Whatever ministry the gifts of the Spirit calls you into, keep doing it. Whatever encouragement you are providing the vulnerable among us, keep doing it. Whatever wisdom you offer that helps comfort and enlighten those around you, keep doing it. If the work you do comes from God, then nothing any government can do can stop you, because there's nothing any government can do to stop Him.

So today, I encourage you: whatever fear you carry, whatever uncertainty troubles your heart, know this—God is with you. Do not be dismayed. Keep moving forward in faith. Keep doing the work of the Lord. Because in the end, no matter what human rulers decree, the will of God will always prevail.

Amen.